

# On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher Burnout, and Teacher Autonomy

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## Abstract

In order to be autonomous, teachers should enjoy teaching and be satisfied with their teaching. Teacher autonomy, therefore, may be related to teacher burnout and job satisfaction. The present study investigated the relationship between job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and teacher autonomy. Two hundred and seven language teachers at language institutes in Karaj and Tehran were given three questionnaires to complete. Convenience sampling was used to select language teachers in this study, and IBM SPSS (version 22) was used to analyze the data. Three non-parametric statistical tests were used to analyze the collected data. According to the findings of this study, job satisfaction had a weak negative relationship with teacher burnout, and teacher autonomy correlated negatively with job satisfaction. Moreover, no relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher burnout was found. Although the findings should be interpreted with care because of sample size, the paper ends with implications for language teachers and policy makers.

**Keywords:** Job Satisfaction, Teacher Burnout, and Teacher Autonomy

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## **1. Introduction**

Teaching is of great importance, because not only does it pave the way for language learners to succeed in achieving their educational and professional goals, but it also molds language learners' future in target-language-speaking communities by introducing them to a new culture and cultivating their social attitudes. Dealing with communities is a sensitive issue, and in order to do this delicate task, language teachers need adequate reassurance in terms of their professional and personal side (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014).

Considering the prominent role language teachers play in the field of language teaching, several scholars (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Chan, 2004) have studied teachers' feelings and emotions. Borg et al. (1991) reported that dissatisfaction was caused by poor working conditions. Michaelowa (2002) also argued that one type of emotional state is "job satisfaction", and it is a staple issue. Locke (1976) referred to job satisfaction as a nice, positive, inner state which originates from one's high opinion of his/her own experience or job. Locke's definition appears to be the most frequently used and generally accepted description, characterizing the necessary component needed to depict what is meant by the general view of job satisfaction (Miller, Mire, & Kim, 2009).

The conceptual area of job satisfaction is broad, because it includes all the characteristics of the job itself and the work environment, which teachers find either rewarding and satisfying, or frustrating and unsatisfying (Snipes, Oswald, LaTour & Armenakis, 2005). Developing positive perceptions for their profession by teachers will help them perform their jobs in a more effective and enthusiastic manner. A teacher should have job satisfaction to succeed in his/her profession and thus to produce high quality education. Michaelowa (2002) stressed that a teacher's level of job satisfaction is important for three

### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

reasons. First of all, job satisfaction affects students' improvement and teaching quality. Second, teachers' job satisfaction is an essential factor in teaching. Finally, job satisfaction is vital for self-actualization of teachers, psychological health, and life quality.

As a concept related to teachers' emotions, stress has been known as a prevalent problem in different educational settings (Chan, 2004). This amount of stress, when felt incessant, leads to "burnout". Farber (1991) characterized burnout as a "work-related syndrome that stems from an individual's perception of a significant discrepancy between effort (input) and reward (output)" (p. 24). The concept was further made popular in social sciences in the writings of Maslach (1976), an American social psychologist, who defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). Based on the pioneering work of Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1976), Maslach and Jackson (1981) introduced the most widely accepted idea of burnout and interpreted it as a psychological syndrome that has three dimensions: *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization*, and *reduced personal accomplishment*. Regarding emotional exhaustion, the exhausted teacher's emotional resources are expended because too much energy has been consumed for a long time. Considering depersonalization, exhausted teachers feel powerless and helpless. Also, particular cognitive abilities such as attention may be detached and become more rigid. The third stage of burnout, namely, the reduced sense of personal accomplishment, leads to less job-related commitment, impaired performance, and turnover (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) affirmed that the causes of stress may include lack of support from the school leadership, conflicts in cooperating with colleagues, increased workload, students with behavioral problems,

problem in the parent–teacher relationship, and lack of “autonomy”, which draws our attention to another major point of the present study- teacher autonomy (Chan, Wan & Kuok, 2014; Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Platsidou, 2010).

Teacher autonomy is an ability, or a skill by which teachers can develop their own teaching condition freely without any limitation (Javadi, 2014). Though many scholars still consider its meaning complicated, the first definition on teacher autonomy was given by Little (1995) as the “teachers’ capacity to engage in self-directed teaching” (p.176). Later, Smith (2000) defined teacher autonomy as “the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others” (p.89). Autonomy in teaching has been defined as the given freedom to teachers to decide and select their own teaching methodologies, design their own tasks, and evaluate the outcome.

Kumaravadivelu (2001) noted that teacher autonomy comprises teachers’ competence and confidence to make them develop and apply a theory of their own, which works best in a particular educational context. Teacher autonomy is a crucial factor in teaching because of some distinctive features. The abilities of students, their needs, interests as well as their skills and talents are all different. The environment of any given class is different from that of another. Therefore, it is the teacher who is aware of the classroom reality, and he/she can arrive at the most rational and the best decisions regarding pupils (European Trade Union Committee for Education, 2008). Teacher autonomy is a right given to the teachers to decide and take responsibilities about selecting, or designing materials and strategies for their classrooms and to evaluate the outcomes and cooperate in finding solutions for the teaching problems in schools (Akbarpour-Tehrani & Wan Mansor, 2012). A glance at the literature reveals

### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

some of the factors for this issue such as many boundaries and restrictions set up by schools to follow the syllabus, large number of students in each class, prearranged exams and time limitation, which altogether leave little or no space for language teachers to design and apply their own tasks (Akbarpour-Tehrani & Wan Mansor, 2012; Ling, 2007; Yu-hong & Ting, 2012).

The problems teachers experience in their teaching careers may have a negative effect on their performance. An autonomous teacher may feel more motivated when he/she can feel free to choose his/her own teaching materials, which gives him/her the required pleasure and satisfaction in his/her career. Moreover, the satisfaction the teacher gains from his/her job seems to lead him/her to work more efficiently, and, therefore, suffer less from extreme tiredness and burnout. Creating and enhancing awareness of such feelings and emotions and the relationships between them can be helpful in professional development of English Language Teachers (ELTs) and provide authorities with necessary information to yield practical plans in order to improve the present situation of Iranian EFL teachers. The present study aims to fill this gap, examining the possible relationships between job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and teacher autonomy.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1. Job Satisfaction**

One of the earliest definitions of job satisfaction was given by Smith, Kendall, and Hullin (1969) who referred to it as “feelings or affective responses to facets of the situation” (p.6). Moreover, Lawler (1973) and later Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2004) claimed that teacher job satisfaction is a teacher’s emotional bond with his or her teaching function and is also a role of recognized association between one’s expectation of teaching and one’s

perception of what it is offering a teacher. On the whole, Morse (1953) considered the power of an individual's "desires, or his/her level of aspiration in a particular area" a major factor in job satisfaction (p. 28). Those who have the greatest desires or deepest yearnings are least satisfied with their job if the environment fails to ease satisfaction of their needs. Locke (1976), whose definition has been frequently used by other researchers (Ho & Au, 2006; Kafetsios & Loumakou 2007; Ma & MacMillan, 1999; Platsidou 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Wu & Watkins, 1996), claimed that job satisfaction is the delightful emotional condition which stems from the gauge of one's job. A more recent version of this definition was given by Judge, Thoresen, Bono, and Patton (2001) and also Chiu (2010) who defined job satisfaction as the sense of achievement given by daily work activities.

Researchers are of the opinion that job satisfaction embraces both affective and cognitive constituents (Brief, 1998; Ilies & Judge, 2002; Locke, 1976; Reizer, 2014). While one's feeling of the job is a reflection of the affective aspect, the cognitive aspect indicates one's thoughts and judgments towards the job (Reizer, 2014).

Gius (2013) examined the relationship between district-level merit pay system and teacher job satisfaction using a sample of public school teachers. Gius concluded that teachers who work in districts that use a merit pay system are no less satisfied with their jobs than are other teachers. Although the effect of merit pay on overall job satisfaction was not statistically significant, teachers in merit pay districts were less enthusiastic, did not think teaching was important, and were more likely to leave for better pay. However, in examining a sample of teachers who worked only in merit pay districts, it was found that teachers who received merit pay were generally more satisfied overall with their jobs than were teachers who did not receive merit pay.

### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

Recently, Chan, Wan and Kuok (2014) evaluated the relationships between burnout and demographic and work characteristics, burnout and turnover intention, and burnout and job satisfaction administering quantitative surveys to 391 employees. Findings revealed that burnout contributes to turnover intention significantly, and it negatively affects job satisfaction.

## **2.2. Burnout**

Among many occupational categories, there is greater likelihood for teachers to go through work-related anxiety, which can lead to burnout syndrome, one of the most frequent repercussions of chronic anxiety at work (Bermejo-Toroa, Prieto-Ursúaa & Hernández, 2015). Burnout has been defined by many researchers. An early definition was given by Freudenberger (1980) who identified burnout as a “state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward” (p. 13). Similarly, Pines and Aronson (1981), Kyriacou (1987), and Koustelios and Tsigilis (2005) referred to burnout as an exhaustion of body, mind, and feelings, which is because of involvement in emotionally tough situations for a long time.

Burnout has been unanimously divided into three conceptually distinct, but empirically related, components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Maslach, 1999; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Platsidou, 2010). ‘Emotional exhaustion’ is pertinent to the overexertion of one’s emotional resources and is extremely worn out by intense contact with pupils, parents and coworkers. Teachers experiencing emotional exhaustion believe that they have given everything they can; teaching has taken all their energy and concentration, and eventually left them without

any resources (Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2015; Maslach, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 2009; Platsidou, 2010). Emotional exhaustion may lead to 'depersonalization' which is a negative, impersonal feeling accompanied by cynicism towards recipients, i.e., students. It contributes to teachers treating their students callously, losing their sense of authority, and even reacting negatively towards parents and the school community (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Maslach et al., 2001; Platsidou, 2010). This results in 'reduced personal accomplishment' which implies a feeling of incompetence and negativity towards teachers' potential in relation to teaching. It occurs when teachers have a negative self-evaluation and are not happy with their profession (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach et al., 2001; Platsidou, 2010). Burnout derives from initial appearance of emotional exhaustion resulting in depersonalization, and, as these two escalate, personal achievement diminishes (Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2014; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Akbari and Tavassoli (2011) investigated the relationships among English language teachers' sense of efficacy, burnout, teaching style, and emotional intelligence among 264 Iranian English language teachers. They noted significant but not high correlations among some of the components of teacher efficacy, burnout, teaching style, and emotional intelligence.

In their study, Mahmoodi and Ghaslani (2013) examined the relationship among teachers' burnout, emotional intelligence, and reflectivity using a sample of 125 Iranian EFL teachers in Kurdistan and Hamedan with help of Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey, Teacher Reflectivity Questionnaire and Bar-OnEQ-IScale. They found that emotional intelligence and reflectivity negatively correlated with burnout, and they could both predict the level of burnout. There were also significant differences in



### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

teachers' level of emotional intelligence with respect to their teaching experience.

Recently, Javadi (2014) examined the relationship between feeling of burnout and teacher autonomy, as a professional development construct, among 143 EFL teachers in different private language teaching institutes in Iran. Data were collected using Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) and Teaching Autonomy Scale developed by Pines and Hall (1993). Correlation analysis indicated that teacher autonomy was significantly and inversely related to their feeling of burnout. The Stepwise multiple regression also showed that the components of burnout, i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, were significant predictors of teacher autonomy.

Additionally, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) examined the relationship among teacher self-efficacy, teacher autonomy, engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout. They used Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, the Teacher Autonomy Scale, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, the Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Skaalvik and Skaalvik found that teacher autonomy and self-efficacy were predictors of burnout.

### **2.3. Teacher Autonomy**

Little (1995) was of the opinion that teachers' success lies with autonomy, because they feel largely responsible for their teaching. In other words, successful teachers are mainly autonomous teachers. McGrath (2000) gave a more comprehensive explanation of teacher autonomy by voicing its two distinct dimensions: (a) “. . . teacher autonomy as a self-directed professional development” (b) “. . . teacher autonomy as freedom of control by others” (pp. 101-102). He distinguished these two dimensions, affirming that the former is

more concerned with the psychological perspective, whereas the latter is more of a political thing. Subsequently, Aoki (2002) characterized teacher autonomy as “. . . the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one’s own teaching” (p.111) although she herself regarded this definition as burdensome because of its limited scope.

Unlike the previous researchers who mostly focused on teachers in defining teacher autonomy, Smith (2003, 2006) and Smith and Erdoğan (2008) shifted the emphasis using the term teacher/learner autonomy. These researchers claimed that teacher/learner autonomy is the capability of developing proper skills, expertise and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, while collaborating with others. Huang (2005) highlighted three words, namely, willingness, capacity, and freedom and defined teacher autonomy as “. . . teachers’ willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning” (p. 206). The primary focus of this definition is on individuality; on the other hand, Jimenez Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2007) underscored the social aspect of teacher autonomy. From their point of view, an autonomous person is able to appear as an independent soul with social responsibility and critical awareness in/beyond educational contexts and to see education as (inter)personal control and social change.

Varatharaj, Abdullah, and Ismail (2015) investigated the perception of school teachers about teacher autonomy and its effect on their assessment practices. Data for this study were obtained from 471 randomly selected trained teachers from all Malaysian Cluster Schools. The findings revealed that autonomous teachers have positive assessment practices in the teaching and learning process.

Subsequently, in a 3-year case study of four novice EFL teachers in China, Xu (2015) studied the effect of collaborative lesson preparation on the

### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

development of teacher autonomy and the joint effect of collaboration and autonomy on teachers' professional development. Data analysis of 48 individual interviews, 47 journal entries, and 26 classroom observation sessions showed (1) collaboration takes two forms: the product-oriented collaboration dedicated to producing a complete set of teaching resources as a visible product, and the problem-based collaboration featuring discussions on certain teaching issues, which does not provide concrete help in physical forms but inspires insights and facilitates exchange of teaching experience; and (2) the two types of collaborative lesson preparation have different effects on the development of novice teachers' autonomy which is mediated by the level of teacher anxiety provoked by the circumstances of collaboration.

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

Teachers around the world experience numerous problems in their jobs because of inadequate wage, mismanagement, organizational environment, etc. (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). The problems experienced by teachers have a negative impact on their performance, efficiency and stress levels. There seems to be insufficient awareness of problems such as job satisfaction and teacher burnout on the part of educational policymakers, who have failed to notice the possible correlation between these variables.

An autonomous teacher feels more motivated when he/she is at liberty to choose his own teaching strategies, which gives him/her the required pleasure and satisfaction in his/her career. Moreover, the satisfaction the teacher gains from his/her job seems to lead him/her to work more efficiently and also suffer less from extreme tiredness and burnout.

Creating and enhancing awareness of such feelings and emotions and the relationships among them can be helpful in professional development of ELT

teachers and provide authorities with necessary information to yield practical plans in order to improve the present situation of ELT teachers. Thus, the following research questions were raised:

1. Is there a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher burnout?
2. Is there a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher autonomy?
3. Is there a significant relationship between teacher burnout and teacher autonomy?

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Participants**

Two hundred and seven Iranian male and female language teachers at language institutes in Karaj and Tehran initially participated in this study, but four language teachers were left out of the study because they had not completed the questionnaires thoroughly. The participants were divided into five age ranges. They varied in their teaching experiences, ranging from one year to 40 years. The majority of the participants did not have the experience of living in an English-speaking country. Most of the participants were BA and MA holders. The majority of participants spoke Persian as their mother tongue, and most of them were graduates in English Language Teaching. Table 1 shows demographic information of language teachers in the present study.

*On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

**Table 1. Demographic Information of Language Teachers**

Mother tongue	Field of study		Degree		Teaching experience		Age range		Gender		
	N		N		N		N		N		
Farsi	167	EL	25	AD	9	1-10	161	20-30	106	Male	82
Turkish	4	ELT	83	BA	92	10-20	35	31-40	75	female	121
Kurdish	2	ET	37	MA	95	20-40	7	41-over	22		
English	9	L	5	PhD	7						
Other	21	Other	53								

**Note.** EL=English Literature, ELT=English Language Teaching, ET=English Translation, L=Linguistics, AD=Associate degree, BA= Bachelor of Arts, MA=Master of Arts, PhD=Doctor of Philosophy

## 4.2. Instruments

### 4.2.1. Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)

Minnesota Job Satisfaction questionnaire (MSQ), developed by Weiss, Dawis, England and Lofquist (1977), was used to assess language teachers' job satisfaction. This questionnaire consists of 20 items; it is a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from not satisfied (1), to extremely satisfied (5). Cronbach's alpha for MSQ in this study turned out to be .92.

### Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996), was employed in order to assess teacher burnout. The inventory is a 22-item, 7-point Likert-scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). The items ask for the frequency of occurrence of every statement (e.g., I feel used up at the end of the workday). Cronbach's alpha for MBI in this study turned out to be .76.

### ***Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire (TAQ)***

TAQ was borrowed from Pearson and Hall (1993). It was used to determine the degree of teacher autonomy and includes 18 items. TAQ is a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (definitely true) to 4 (definitely false). Cronbach's alpha of .8 for TAQ was reported in Pearson and Moomaw's study (2005). However, Cronbach's alpha for TAQ in this study turned out to be .58.

### **4.3. Sampling Procedures**

Convenience sampling (Dornyei, 2007) was used to select the participants. The following procedures were used to collect the data for this study. First, the questionnaires were administered to language teachers at some language institutes in Karaj and Tehran. Those language teachers who had enough free time completed the questionnaires and submitted them, but those who were hard pressed for time agreed to complete and return them one week later. Second, some other language teachers received the questionnaires via e-mail attachments, and they were asked to complete them and e-mail back the completed questionnaires one week later. Finally, two social networks, Facebook and Telegram, were used to notify the social network users of the purpose of the study. Those language teachers who were members of these social networks volunteered to participate in this study, so the questionnaires were sent to them via e-mail attachments, and they were asked to fill them out and e-mail them back after one week.

### **4.4. Research Design and Data Analysis**

In this study, a descriptive research design was used. Data were collected quantitatively through three separate questionnaires and analyzed using IBM

### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

SPSS (version 22). Three non-parametric statistical tests-Spearman rho correlations- were used to examine the relationships between job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and teacher autonomy.

## 5. Results

The first research question of the present research is concerned with whether there is any significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher burnout. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficient.

**Table 2. Relationship between Language Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Teacher Burnout**

		TJS	TB
TJS	Correlation Coefficient	1.00	-.152*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.031
	N	203	203

\*.  $p < .05$

As Table 2 shows, there is a weak, negative correlation between teacher job satisfaction and teacher burnout ( $\rho = -.152$ ,  $n = 203$ ,  $p < .031$ ,  $R^2 = .02$ ) with a very small effect size. Therefore, the first null hypothesis of the present study is rejected, implying that the less satisfied with their job the teachers are, the more burned out they will be and vice versa.

The second research question was aimed at establishing whether there is any significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher autonomy. The results are given in Table 3.

**Table 3. Relationship between Language Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Teacher Autonomy**

		TTA	TJS
TTA	Correlation Coefficient	1.00	-.155*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.028
	N	203	203

\*.  $p < .05$

According to Table 3, there is a weak, negative correlation between teacher job satisfaction and teacher autonomy ( $r_{ho}=-.155$ ,  $n=203$ ,  $p<.028$ ,  $R^2=.02$ ) with a very small effect size. Therefore, the second null hypothesis of the present study is also rejected, suggesting that the more autonomous the teachers are, the less satisfied with their job they will be and vice versa.

The final research question asked whether there is any significant relationship between teacher burnout and teacher autonomy. Table 4 shows the results.

**Table 4. Relationship between Language Teachers' Burnout and Teacher Autonomy**

	TB	TTA
TB	1.00	-.011*
Correlation Coefficient		
Sig. (2-tailed)		.871
N	203	203

\*.  $p > .05$

Based on the results shown in Table 4, there is no statistically significant relationship between teacher burnout and teacher autonomy ( $r_{ho}=-.011$ ,  $n=203$ ,  $p=.871$ ). Therefore, the last null hypothesis of the study is confirmed, suggesting that teacher burnout and teacher autonomy are not related to each other.

## 6. Discussion

The first finding was confirmed by Chan, Wan and Kuok (2014) who acknowledged the point that burnout leads to turnover intention largely, and it negatively influences job satisfaction. The outcome of the present research has been also endorsed by Schermuly, Schermuly, and Meyer (2011) who found a negative relationship between emotional burnout and job satisfaction. However, the first finding of this study is not in line with some other previous



### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

findings. In Platsidou and Agaliotis' (2008) study, no significant correlations were obtained for the burnout dimensions and satisfaction with pay and with work conditions.

The second finding of the present study does not support that of Pearson and Moomaw (2005) who maintained that there was low positive relationship between curriculum autonomy and job satisfaction. Koustelios, Karabatzaki, and Kousteliou's (2004) research also showed that teacher autonomy correlated positively with aspects of job satisfaction. The finding of the present study diverges from that of Federici (2013) who confirmed that teacher autonomy was positively related to job satisfaction.

The negative relationship between job satisfaction and teacher autonomy in the present study could be attributed to some factors. Iranian teachers have not had much exposure to autonomous learning throughout their education, and, according to Cakir and Balcikanli (2012) and Little (1995), when they are given the opportunity to promote autonomy in their profession, they might face difficulties. Besides, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) proposed that autonomy puts teachers with high and low mastery expectations in quite different situations. For teachers with low mastery expectations, autonomy may provide an opportunity to avoid challenges and to hide self-perceived deficits and shortcomings. This is a self-protective strategy that may increase job satisfaction and decrease emotional exhaustion in the short run. However, avoiding challenges may also act as a barrier to personal learning and development, which is probably conducive to low job satisfaction. In the long run, autonomy may, therefore, not be beneficial for learning and development for teachers with low mastery expectations.

The third finding of this study is at odds with Javadi's (2014), since according to her study, the elements of burnout were significant predictors of

teacher autonomy. Additionally, this result goes against that of Fernet, Guay, Senécal, and Austin (2012) who reported that as teachers' perceptions of classroom overloaded and students' annoying behavior changed, this negatively caused changes in autonomous motivation, which in turn negatively predicted changes in emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) highlighted this contrast in their research. Based on their analysis, both teacher autonomy and self-efficacy were independent predictors of engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, in Schermuly, Schermuly, and Meyer's (2011) study the direct relationship between empowerment (autonomy) and emotional exhaustion did not reach statistical significance.

A possible explanation for no relationship between teacher burnout and teacher autonomy is that burnout takes plenty of time to develop (Friesen, Prokop, & Sarros, 1988) and since 96 participants (almost a half) of the present research were teachers with 1 to 5 years of teaching experience, they might not have had a clear understanding of the concept of burnout or even experienced it. Additionally, burnout is a characteristic of the teachers' current teaching environment (Egyed & Short, 2006) and how much freedom a teacher is given may not relate to the environment a teacher is currently working in.

## **7. Conclusion and Implications**

Spearman's rank correlation showed that job satisfaction had a weak, negative relationship with teacher burnout. Teachers interact with students and deal with their emotions, which makes their job very sensitive, because they might hurt students' feelings, or get hurt themselves. For one thing, troublesome students make their teachers exasperated with their teaching, leaving them worn-out and devastated. When this occurs, teachers lose their energy and

### *On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

concentration as if they have run out of steam for teaching (Maslach et al., 2009; Platsidou, 2010). As a result, they begin mistreating their students, feel that they are not sufficiently qualified, and think negatively towards their job (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach et al., 2001; Platsidou, 2010). However, when teachers feel content with their job, they treat the students well, put enthusiasm and effort in teaching, and appreciate their job, which contributes to feeling less burned out.

According to another finding of the study, job satisfaction correlates negatively with teacher autonomy. In other words, teachers grow more dissatisfied when they are given freedom to decide for themselves (Cakir & Balcikanli, 2012; Pearson & Hall, 1993). Iranian teachers are not given much freedom in their careers, and they are accustomed to be told what to do passively without any objection, which could lead to a sense of confusion and uncertainty that autonomous teachers experience when they are given the freedom to select their own teaching methods, course books, and scoring procedures. Besides, autonomy to make choices brings responsibility. Teachers shouldering this responsibility might be more dissatisfied than those who are provided with pre-determined books to teach and assessment methods to adopt. Teachers dependent on school authorities have a narrower scope of goals, and it is quite easy for them to achieve what they want. Having their career expectations fulfilled, less autonomous teachers gain a sense of pleasure.

The final finding was that there is not a negative relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher burnout. Several factors influence burnout, including contextual factors, teachers' demographic features, and their characteristics among which autonomy does not seem to have a place. Burnout can also arise from disappointment (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Pines, 1993), a

feeling which autonomous and non-autonomous teachers may not necessarily experience equally.

Teachers may benefit from the results of the present study. The findings inform them of the key role their emotions and feelings may play, how they interact with each other, and the extent to which these emotions affect their performance. This knowledge helps teachers apply appropriate procedures and strategies in order to minimize their feeling of burnout and maximize the sense of satisfaction they get from their job.

Besides, the results of the study might be beneficial to policy makers and authorities as they are notified of the significance of teacher autonomy, job satisfaction, and teacher burnout. Therefore, they are required to regard these concepts as aims of teacher training courses and provide teachers with the desired independence and satisfaction.

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***On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...***

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*On the Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Teacher...*

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