TEACHERS' SENSE OF EFFICACY AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENTS' OUTCOMES

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of teachers' sense of efficacy and their responsibility for students' outcomes. The participants for this investigation were 60 teachers. The research data were gathered by applying the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale and Teacher Responsibility for Student Achievement Scale. The results indicated a positive relationship between teacher efficacy and teacher responsibility for student academic achievement. The results of this study highlight the importance of the teachers' sense of efficacy beliefs and their predictor role on teachers' responsibility for student outcomes.

Key words: student outcomes, teacher efficacy, teacher responsibility

Introduction

There is growing recognition that teacher efficacy is related to many meaningful educational issues such as teachers' classroom management and instructional behaviour, as well as student outcomes. Teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's judgement of his or her competence and ability to bring about meaningful and significant educational outcomes for all students (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy 1998). Findings suggest that teachers with a high sense of efficacy are more enthusiastic about teaching (Guskey 1984; Woolfolk 2001), less likely to interact negatively with students (Soodak and Podell 1993) and tend to be more enthusiastic for getting positive student outcomes (Ashton 1984).

As in any other profession, teachers are expected to assume responsibility for their activity. Teacher responsibility has been associated with teachers' classroom behaviours (Rose &

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Medway, 1981b), and positive change in student learning and achievement (Guskey, 1984; Lee & Loeb, 2000).

According to Guskey (1988), teachers who adopt positive beliefs of efficacy in their profession assume responsibility for both students' academic success and failure, those teachers with low levels of beliefs of efficacy attribute students' failure to external factors. While teachers take responsibility for success, they attribute failure to other factors (Guskey, 1981)

The well-known concept of locus of control (Rotter, 1966) can explain teachers' assuming responsibility only for students' academic success and not for their failure. Teacher responsibility, operationalized as internal locus of control, has been positively linked to teacher efficacy beliefs (Guskey, 1982, 1988), taking responsibility for students' success, classroom behaviour, planning teaching (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1981).

Lauermann's and Karabenick's definition of responsibility (2011, p. 135) suggests that "it reflects a sense of internal obligation and commitment to produce or prevent designated outcomes or that these outcomes should have been produced or prevented". The sense of responsibility is important for social relationships in formal contexts, such as feeling responsible to fulfil professional obligations, as well as in such informal contexts as feeling responsible to provide help.

But, while teachers are taking responsibility for students' success, they may not hold themselves responsible for students' failure, so teachers take responsibility for success, but they attribute failure to other factors (Guskey, 1981, 1987). The belief that one is able to do something does not necessarily imply that one feels personally responsible to actually do it or that one should have done it. It is entirely possible for teachers with comparable levels of internal control beliefs and sense of efficacy to assign different degrees of personal responsibility for an outcome or to consider others more responsible. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between controllable causality and responsibility (Weiner, 1985). These aspects are important for distinguishing responsibility from other conceptually similar constructs (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013) such as teacher efficacy ("I can" vs. "I should") and locus of control ("something happened because of me" vs. "something should have happened because of me").

Clearly there are many complex factors involved in teacher assuming responsibility for students' outcomes. It is not unreasonable to assume that there is a relationship between these factors. One goal of this study is to find out to what extend the teachers' sense of efficacy and teacher responsibility for student outcomes are correlated. Another goal is to show that teachers assume

more responsibility for students' academic success than for their failure. Building on this hypothesis, this study seeks to show that teachers with a better sense of efficacy take more responsibility for the students' outcomes.

Methodology

Participants

The study comprised 60 Chemistry teachers that work at different schools in the counties of Iaşi and Neamţ, attending a teacher development courses. Of these participants, 48 were females and 12 males. In terms of age, 5 teachers were under 30, 20 were between 31 and 40 years of age and 35 teachers were over 41. Of these 60 teachers, 11 had a teaching experience ranging from 0 to 10 years, 19 from 11 to 20 years, and 39 had a teaching experience of 21 years and more.

Materials

The data were collected using four scales: Teachers' sense of efficacy scale, Teachers' responsibility for student achievement scale, Socio-communicative orientation scale and Tromso Social Intelligence Scale.

Teacher sense of efficacy scale

The scale was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and it measures the teachers' perceived efficacy in classroom, defined as trust in one's own capacity of organizing and executing the necessary actions in order to get desired outcomes. Beliefs about one's own personal efficacy influence goal oriented behaviours. The scale includes a total of 24 items, 8 items are included in each of the three dimensions, namely, student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. In the current study, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was .82, for the student engagement dimension .69, for the instructional strategies dimension.86, and for the classroom management dimension .81.

Teachers' responsibility for student achievement scale

The scale was developed by Guskey (1981). The scale includes two sub-dimensions, namely, responsibility for success (R+) and responsibility for failure (R-). The scale includes 30 items, 15 items for each sub-dimension. For the dimension responsibility for success the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was .68 and for the dimension responsibility for failure it was .80. The scale measures teachers' responsibility for student outcomes. Guskey asserted that positive and negative performance outcomes represent separate dimensions, not opposite ends of a single

continuum, and that these dimensions operate independently in their influence on the perceptions of efficacy (Guskey, 1987).

Results

Teachers' responsibility for student outcomes

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare teachers' responsibility for students' success and teachers' responsibility for students' failure conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for teachers' responsibility for students' success (M= 958.73, SD=140.52) and teachers' responsibility for students' failure (M= 684.58, SD=189.89) conditions t(59)=8.500, p=0.000. These results suggest that teachers do not take equal responsibility for the students' outcomes. Specifically, our results suggest that teachers' responsibility for students' success is greater than teachers' responsibility for students' failure.

Teachers' sense of efficacy and their responsibility for student outcomes

A Pearson r correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy (student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management dimensions) and teachers' responsibility for student outcomes (success and failure dimensions).

There was a correlation between the two variables: student engagement and teachers' responsibility for students' success [r = 0.42, n=60, p <0.01]. Overall, there was a strong, positive correlation between student engagement and teachers' responsibility for students' success. A greater student engagement was correlated with a greater teachers' responsibility for students' success.

There was a correlation between the two variables: instructional strategies and teachers' responsibility for students' success [r = 0.32, n=60, p <0.05]. Overall, there was a positive correlation between student engagement and teachers' responsibility for students' success. Better use of instructional strategies were correlated with a greater teachers' responsibility for students' success.

There was a correlation between the two variables: classroom management and teachers' responsibility for students' success [r = 0.37, n=60, p <0.01]. Overall, there was a strong, positive correlation between classroom management and teachers' responsibility for students' success. A better classroom management was correlated with a greater teachers' responsibility for students' success.

There was no correlation between the variables: teachers' sense of efficacy (student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management dimensions) and teachers' responsibility for students' failure.

Discussion

The conclusions of this study foster a better understanding of teachers' efficacy beliefs and outcome responsibility. In general, teachers assumed greater responsibility for positive results than for negative results, that is, they were more confident in their ability to influence positive outcomes than to prevent negative ones, according to Lauermann's and Karabenick's definition of responsibility (2011) provided at the beginning of this paper. This relationship, as stressed by Guskey (1981, 1988), tends to support the claim that there is a low level relationship between responsibility for success and responsibility for failure, and that these are indeed two different dimensions, not opposite ends of a single continuum. Consequently, teachers may tend to provide other reasons for student failure without assuming responsibility, which is consistent with the attribution theory (Weiner, 1985). By accepting responsibility for student learning, teachers demonstrate behaviours aimed at increasing student learning.

It results from our data that only responsibility for students' success correlates with all the three dimensions of teachers' sense of efficacy (student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management). So, teacher responsibility for student outcomes can be interpreted from the teacher efficacy perspective. As stated in other studies (Lee & Loeb, 2000), the teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy play an important role in the teachers' responsibly for students' learning.

The correlation between responsibility and self-efficacy demonstrated in the present study has important implications for teachers because it suggests that the teachers' confidence in their ability to produce designated outcomes does not necessarily imply a sense of responsibility for those outcomes. According to Silverman (2010), teachers may choose not to engage in behaviours for which they do not feel responsible, even if they feel efficacious. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between controllable causality and responsibility.

Limitations

The present research relies on responses only from Chemistry teachers. Because some characteristics may differ, for example there might be differences between elementary and secondary teachers or there might be differences according to the teachers' academic area, the results should be confirmed using a more general teacher population. A larger sample with more diversity would have benefited our results.

Implications

A deeper understanding of the aspects influencing teacher responsibility is important. How could a greater understanding of teachers' efficacy beliefs contribute to fostering greater responsibility for students' outcomes? Based on these results, further studies should investigate the lack of responsibility for the students' academic failure and the factors correlated with the teachers' responsibility for students' failure. The main challenges for future research on teacher responsibility remains the analysis of mechanisms through which teacher responsibility affects both student and teacher outcomes.

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