

# **Education as a Tool for Empowerment with Reference to Teachers' Cognition: An Overview**

**MICHAEL DAVIES RANI\*<sup>1</sup> AND SHERWIN M. SUNGOH<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar and <sup>2</sup>Professor

Department of Education, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong (Meghalaya) India

## **ABSTRACT**

Education is the cornerstone of societal progress, shaping the minds of the future generation and driving the development of a nation. Education is a powerful tool for empowerment because it provides individuals with knowledge, skills, and confidence to improve their lives and contribute to their communities. Here's how education can serve as an empowering force: (1) Knowledge and Skills, (2) Critical Thinking, (3) Economic Opportunities, (4) Social Mobility, (5) Health and Well-being, (6) Social and Civic Engagement, (7) Empowerment Through Self-Efficacy, (8) Networking and Support, (9) Cultural Awareness and Inclusion. For education to be truly empowering, it needs to be accessible, equitable, and relevant to the needs of the individuals and communities it serves. Additionally, fostering a supportive environment that encourages lifelong learning is crucial for on-going empowerment. This paper focuses on the Cognition of teachers which refers to their mental activity including thinking, remembering, learning and using language. When a cognitive approach to learning and teaching is applied, the focus is on the understanding of information and concepts. If one is able to understand the connections between concepts, break down information and rebuild with logical connections, then one's retention of material and understanding will increase. Teachers' cognition refers to how teachers think, understand, and make decisions about their teaching practices and can indeed be a powerful tool for empowerment. Empowering teachers through their own cognitive awareness ultimately enhances their effectiveness and contributes to a more positive and impactful educational experience for students.

**Keywords:** Education, Empowerment, Teacher's Cognition, Teacher Decision-making, Experience, Four basic skills

## **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of education is still an interesting theme to discuss all the time to this day. Scientists and education practitioners constantly discuss educational issues, especially education during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is perceived variously. Some put technology first and others reject the use of technology with various arguments. What is even more tragic is that every time there is an education issue, teachers are targeted and become topics of by making teachers the determinants of educational success. The teacher as the person who is seen as most responsible for the success or failure of education. Therefore the quality of teachers should be improved constantly. To improve the quality of teachers,

it can be done through teacher empowerment. This means that the quality of education is influenced by teacher empowerment because with this empowerment teachers are able to improvise in improving the quality of themselves as teachers. As stated by Manaf, "The quality of education is influenced, among others, by teacher empowerment" (Manaf, 2016) in Widodo and Sriyono, 2020: 8). Teacher empowerment provides opportunities for teachers to participate in the processes of implementing education in schools to support school progress. Murray said, that "Empowerment makes teachers able to engage, share, and influence which ultimately has a positive impact on their lives" (Murray, 2010) in Widodo and Sriyono, 2020: 8).

Teacher Empowerment provides an opportunity for

teachers to express their creative ideas and successful experiences so that they become input in making decisions to improve the quality of education and school progress. If teachers participate in decision-making processes, it will have an impact on increasing responsibility and a sense of belonging to the implementation of education in schools. This is in line with the concept of empowerment proposed by MacAndrew et al. (2012) that, “Empowerment is a process of managers helping employees acquire and utilize the skills needed to make decisions that impact themselves and their work” (MacAndrew in Yunus, Sukarno, and Rosyadi, 2021: 491). Teacher empowerment is a process in which the leader (principal) helps teachers to acquire and use their abilities (new knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that have an impact on their own lives and their work as teachers.

Teacher empowerment is a strategic step to improve teacher competence and professionalism. With the empowerment of teachers, they have the opportunity to try to find new steps according to their respective talents and interests. Teachers should be given the freedom to speak up, choose and determine creative and innovative alternative activities that contribute to improving the quality of teachers. Therefore, in order to empower teachers, strategic steps are needed so that the implementation of teacher empowerment can run smoothly and achieve educational goals and school progress.

### **Definition of Teacher Empowerment:**

The term empowerment is defined differently by different experts. The difference in definitions is influenced by several factors, such as reading literature, field experience, and thoughts according to individual capacities. The definitions of empowerment vary in that each expert as well as practitioner puts forward a different definition of empowerment from each other. Rappaport (1984) says that, “That it is easy to define in its absence-alienation, powerless, helplessness but difficult to define positively because it “takes on a different form in different people and contexts” (Rappaport, 1984: 2) in Zimmerman, 1990: 169). Rappaport asserts that empowerment is easy to pronounce, but difficult to define positively because it has various forms according to the context of the empowerment itself. Zimmerman went on to assert that, “Empowerment at all levels of analysis can have different intensities can change over time. It is

not an absolute threshold that once reached can be labeled as empowered” (Zimmerman, 1990: 170). The definition of empowerment can change from time to time according to the contextual setting and social changes that occur. Zimmerman defines empowerment as follows, “Empowerment embodies an interaction between individuals and environments that is culturally and contextually defined” (Zimmerman, 1990: 170). This definition is very broad where empowerment is the interaction between individuals and their environment. Also, Bertelsen and Holland argue, “Empowerment is defined as a group’s or individual’s capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland, 2006: 10). Empowerment is the ability of a group or individual to make effective choices, and implementing those choices becomes concrete action and brings about the results of school change and improvement. Based on the definition of empowerment above, the author provides a definition of teacher empowerment as a process in which teachers gain free authority to voice their aspirations or ideas and obtain academics in the process of making school decisions related to the interests of teachers to improve their competence and professionalism and contribute effectively to solving educational problems (learning) so as to improve the quality of education both locally and nationally which in turn contributes to the progress of the school. According to Bleumers et al. (2012) that, “At a micro level, teacher empowerment can be conceptualized as providing teachers with the privilege to exercise professional reasoning with the daily curriculum and teaching subjects. On a higher level, it is conceptualized as the administration’s investment in teachers by giving them the opportunity and freedom to be involved in the regulation of school objectives and policies” (Bleumers et al., 2012) in Ahrari et al., 2021: 3). Bleumer’s statement emphasized that teacher empowerment is to give teachers more freedom of authority to increase their capacity in accordance with their competencies and also the involvement of teachers in determining policies, especially in curriculum preparation and school development so that teachers are able to implement curriculum and school development programs freely for the betterment of the school.

### **Cognition:**

Cognition refers to mental activity including thinking,

remembering, learning and using language. When a cognitive approach to learning and teaching is applied, the focus is on the understanding of information and concepts. If one is able to understand the connections between concepts, break down information and rebuild with logical connections, then one's retention of material and understanding will increase. When students are aware of these mental actions, monitor them and control our learning processes it is called metacognition.

Other psychological approaches focus on different components of human activity. Behaviourist's focus on the examination and analysis of objectively observable and quantifiable behavioural events. Those who favour the humanistic approach focus on the individual in relation to their own environment. Human welfare, values, and dignity are major components of this theory.

### Teachers' Cognition:

According to [Schulz \(2001:244\)](#) teacher cognition research is concerned with understanding what teachers think, know and believe. Its primary concern, therefore, lies with the unobservable dimension of teaching - teachers' mental lives.

### Teacher cognition:

Teacher cognition in the present study will refer to intellectual functions such as (i) Teachers Knowledge, (ii) Teacher Decision-making, (iii) Experience, (iv) Four basic skills, (v) Senses for acquiring knowledge and understanding of teaching the Language. However Teachers' cognition is not restricted to only these definitions, this definition is based on the ongoing thesis that the researcher is conducting.

If one is able to understand the connections between concepts, break down information and rebuild with logical connections, then one's retention of material and understanding will increase. Teachers' cognition refers to how teachers think, understand, and make decisions about their teaching practices and can indeed be a powerful tool for empowerment.

1. **Reflective Practice:** When teachers engage in reflective thinking, they can better understand their teaching methods and their impact on students. This self-awareness allows them to adapt and improve their practices, leading to more effective teaching and a greater sense of agency.
2. **Professional Growth:** Teachers who are

cognizant of their own learning and growth can more effectively pursue professional development opportunities. Understanding their strengths and areas for improvement helps them choose the right training or resources, ultimately enhancing their skills and confidence.

3. **Student Empowerment:** Teachers who reflect on their cognition and adapt their practices can create more inclusive and engaging learning environments. By understanding diverse student needs and preferences, they can tailor their approaches to better support and empower their students.
4. **Innovative Practices:** A deep understanding of their own teaching processes can inspire teachers to experiment with new methods and technologies. This innovation can lead to more dynamic and responsive teaching, which can benefit both teachers and students
5. **Collaborative Learning:** When teachers share their cognitive insights with colleagues, it fosters a collaborative learning environment. This exchange of ideas can lead to collective problem-solving and the development of best practices, benefiting the entire educational community.

### Contributing to Teacher Empowerment:

Teacher empowerment means investing teachers with the right to participate in determining school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach ([Bolin, 1989](#)). When teachers are engaged in the reform process, they need freedom and control over their own work. This makes them feel empowered, motivates them to work harder, and enhances their commitment to their learners.

- Recognizing the contribution teachers can make in reforming pedagogy to improve the learning outcomes, the NEP 2020 gives Teachers autonomy in selecting appropriate pedagogy and encourages them to also ensure socio-emotional learning of their students, which is a critical aspect of holistic development.
- Innovative teaching methods adopted by teachers to improve the learning outcomes will be recognized, documented, and shared widely as recommended practices.
- Close collaboration is recommended among schools within a School Complex as it will reduce

teacher isolation experienced by teachers working in smaller schools and create vibrant teacher communities that work collaboratively sharing their best teaching practices.

To help schools and school complexes evolve into vibrant, caring, and inclusive communities of teachers, students, parents, and principals, the School management has been directed to ensure adequate and safe infrastructure, basic amenities and hygiene, computing devices, internet, libraries, and sports and recreational resources to all teachers and students.

### Conclusion:

Education can be a powerful tool for empowerment because it provides individuals with knowledge, skills, and confidence to improve their lives and contribute to their communities. Here's how education can serve as an empowering force:

1. **Knowledge and Skills:** Education equips people with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue various opportunities. This includes literacy and numeracy skills, as well as specialized knowledge in areas like science, technology, arts, and humanities.
2. **Critical Thinking:** Through education, individuals learn to think critically and analyze information, which helps them make informed decisions and understand their rights and responsibilities.
3. **Economic Opportunities:** Access to education often leads to better job prospects and economic stability. It opens doors to various careers and entrepreneurship opportunities, which can improve financial independence and quality of life.
4. **Social Mobility:** Education can be a significant factor in breaking the cycle of poverty. By providing the tools needed to advance in society, it helps individuals and families achieve social mobility.
5. **Health and Well-being:** Educated individuals are more likely to make informed health choices, understand the importance of nutrition, and access healthcare resources effectively. This leads to improved overall well-being.
6. **Social and Civic Engagement:** Education fosters civic responsibility and encourages active participation in community and political life. It

helps individuals understand social issues and advocate for change.

7. **Empowerment Through Self-Efficacy:** Education can build self-confidence and self-efficacy, empowering individuals to take charge of their lives and pursue their goals with determination.
8. **Networking and Support:** Educational institutions often provide a network of support through mentors, peers, and alumni. These connections can offer guidance, resources, and opportunities for collaboration.
9. **Cultural Awareness and Inclusion:** Education promotes understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

For education to be truly empowering, it needs to be accessible, equitable, and relevant to the needs of the individuals and communities it serves. Additionally, fostering a supportive environment that encourages lifelong learning is crucial for ongoing empowerment.

## REFERENCES

- Bailey, K. M. (1996). The best laid plans: teachers' in class decisions to depart from their lesson plans. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (eds.), *Voices From the Language Classroom* (pp. 15–40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bartels, N. (1999). How teachers use their knowledge of English. In H. Trappes-Lomax & I. McGrath (eds.), *Theory in Language Teacher Education* (pp. 46–56). London: Prentice Hall.
- Bartels, N. V. (2006). *The Construct of Cognition in Language Teacher Education and Development*, Philadelphia, USA.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36 (2). pp. 81-109.
- Breen, M. P. (1991). Understanding the language teacher. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M. Sharwood Smith & M. Swain (eds.), *Foreign/Second Language Pedagogy Research* (pp. 213–33). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Breen, M. P., B. Hird, M. Milton, R. Oliver & A. Thwaite (2001). Making sense of language teaching: teachers' principles and classroom practices. *Applied Linguistics*, 22 (4), 470–501.
- Burns, A. (1996). Starting all over again: From teaching adults to teaching beginners. In D. Freeman & J. C. Richards

- (eds.), *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* (pp. 154"77). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foss, D. H. & R. C. Kleinsasser (1996). Preservice elementary teachers' views of pedagogical and mathematical content knowledge, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 12 (4), 429"42.
- Gatbonton, E. (1999). Investigating experienced ESL teachers' pedagogical knowledge. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83 (1), 35"50.
- Golombek, P. R. (1998). A study of language teachers' personal practical knowledge. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32 (3), 447"64.
- Gilakjani, A. et al. (2017) *Teachers' Beliefs in English Language Teaching and Learning: A Review of the Literature*, Department of Linguistics, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.
- Hanushek, E. A. et al. (2019) *Do Smarter Teachers Make Smarter Students?*
- Johnson, K. E. (1992a). Learning to teach: instructional actions and decisions of preservice ESL teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26 (3), 507"35.
- Macalister, J. (2012) *Pre-service Teacher Cognition and Vocabulary Teaching*.
- Lam, Y. (2000). Technophilia vs. technophobia: A preliminary look at why second-language teachers do or do not use technology in their classrooms. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56 (3), 390"420.
- Margaret, E. (2006). *Language Learning Experience as a Contributor to ESOL Teacher Cognition*. *TESL-EJ*, v10 n1
- Metashir, Z. (2017). *Teacher Cognition*, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. University of Al-Qadissiya College of Education Department of English.
- Nunan, D. (1992). The teacher as decision-maker. In J. Flowerdew, M. Brock & S. Hsia (eds.), *Perspectives on Second Language Teacher Education* (pp. 135"65). Hong Kong: City Polytechnic
- Nordlund, M. (2017). *Student Teacher Cognition: Beliefs About Foreign Language Learning And Teaching*. *Encuentro* 26, 2017, ISSN 1989-0796, pp. 22-37.
- Öztürk, G & Gürbüz, N. (2017). *Re-defining language teacher cognition through a data-driven model: The case of three EFL teachers*.
- Parvaresh, Parvaneh (2017) *Teacher cognition and classroom practice in the context of curricular reform*. Retrieved From: <http://bbktheses.da.ulcc.ac.uk/314/>
- Richards, J. C. (1996). Teachers' maxims in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30 (2), 281"96.
- Richards, J. C. (1998a). Teacher beliefs and decision making. In J. C. Richards (ed.), *Beyond Training* (pp. 65"85). Cambridge: CUP.
- Richards, J. C. (1998b). What's the use of lesson plans? In J. C. Richards (ed.), *Beyond Training* (pp. 103"21). Cambridge: CUP.
- Richards, J. C., B. Li & A. Tang (1998). Exploring pedagogical reasoning skills. In J. C. Richards (ed.), *Beyond Training* (pp. 86"102). Cambridge: CUP.
- Smith, D. B. (1996). Teacher decision making in the adult ESL classroom. In D. Freeman & J. C. Richards (eds.), *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* (pp. 197"216). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sun, D. (2010). *Developing 'My Way' in Chinese Language Teaching Qualitative case studies of teachers' personal practical knowledge*, Victoria University of Wellington.
- Tsvetkova, M. (2017). *The cognitive approach as a challenge in foreign language teaching*, Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen.
- Ulichny, P. (1996). What's in a methodology? In D. Freeman & J. C. Richards (eds.), *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* (pp. 178"96). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Vijayarathan, K. (2017). *Teacher cognition of grade 8 teachers on teaching speaking in English as a foreign language in The Faroe Islands and its impact on teachers' pedagogical praxis: seven case studies*.
- Woods, D. (1991). Teachers' interpretations of second language teaching curricula. *RELJ Journal*, 22, 1"19.
- Woods, D. (1996). *Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wong, C & Marlys, M. (2012). *The Role of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching: An Exploration of Second Language Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Practices*.

\*\*\*\*\*