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Understanding University Teacher Autonomy as a Mainspring of Reforming Higher Education

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Continuing the efforts to define and describe teacher autonomy as an essential factor of teacher professionalism and self-development, this study expands the understanding of perceived university teacher autonomy through investigating the content of this complex personality attribute in a context of today's transformation of Russian higher education. Taking into account self-determination theory, competency-based approach, theory of a rational performance and the Tuning approach to university teacher professional activity, this paper proposes an integrated definition of perceived university teacher autonomy as teacher generic competency ensured by a dynamic complex of teacher personality attributes and work-related competencies. The content of perceived university teacher autonomy is represented in a conceptual model. This study shows perceived university teacher autonomy potential as a mainspring of enhancing teacher professional self-development, teacher performance and job satisfaction, as well as his effective coping with different types of teaching-related stressors in a context of Russian higher education reform.

Keywords: higher education, university teacher, personal autonomy, perceived autonomy, self-determination, intrinsic motivation, professional self-development, locus of control, goal setting, decision making, making choices, mindfulness.

Introduction

In Russia today, major transformations and innovations are having an effect on higher education. This trend has led to an increasingly significant role for university teachers to play within their educational institutions and has called for their innovative contributions to the effective, progressive development of the education system of the country. New expectations for university teachers' performance and accountability make teachers face new challenges and develop new knowledge and skills. The work of teaching in high school comprises today a plenty of activities that include teaching, learning new information and skills, keeping abreast of technological innovations, dealing with students, parents, and the community.

All these factors have given rise to growing concerns about teachers' well-being and increasing attention to perceived teacher autonomy, which has been actively investigated in the USA and in Europe (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1994, 1995; Voller, 1997; Benson, 2000; Smith, 2000; Aoki 2002 et al.) and is becoming one of important

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educational issues in Russia, especially in the field of foreign language education (Tambovkina, 2000; Koryakovtseva, 2001; Nosacheva, 2010 et al.). Over the last decade, several researchers have emphasized that the notion of teacher autonomy is a necessary and complementary part of the learner autonomy concept (Little, 1995; Smith, 2000; Benson, 2000; Aoki, 2002). Autonomy has also been identified as necessary for a teacher's sense of professionalism (Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Hanson, 2003; Little, 2002; Pearson and Moomaw, 2006).

With all the efforts to emphasize this relatively new concept, the question of what particular work-related competences and personality attributes are required for teachers to be autonomous remains open.

This problem compels us to focus on solving several issues reflected in the following organization of the study: the next section contains a literature review of the construct of teacher autonomy. It is followed by the discussion of research methodology applied in this study. Then, the content of the phenomenon is discussed and represented in a conceptual model. And finally, results and their interpretations are discussed.

Conceptions of teacher autonomy

The phenomenon of teacher autonomy takes its rise in the philosophical conceptions of "freedom" and "autonomy" as well as in the psychological concept of personal autonomy. A review of definitions of personal autonomy reveals both diversity and commonality. It is often described as a state of relative independence, based on the person's being self-directing and self-governing (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Bernard Berofsky associates personal autonomy with positive freedom. He sees the latter as a set of personal traits which are essential or highly useful to the satisfaction of a wide range of activities and decisions, both short- and long-term. According

to B. Berofsky, autonomy encompasses relevant knowledge, including self-knowledge, and a variety of intellectual and physical competencies. Among intellectual competencies, he indicates capacities for memory, perception, calculation, reasoning, information processing, and the elimination of irrational and inconsistent belief sets (Berofsky, 1995). This view reflects on A.S. Arseniev's idea about "freedom for", which is more positive in respect of personal development and self-actualization than freedom "from" (Arseniev, 1999). G. Dworkin assumes autonomy to be a global property referring to a person as a whole, not to particular acts (Dworkin, 1988). Thus, personal autonomy is meant as a trait that individuals can exhibit relative to any aspects of their lives (Dworkin, 1988).

In general autonomy theory has been explored across domains as varied as health care (Davis, et al., 1987; Grandjean et al., 1986; Williams & Deci, 1996; Kutner, 1984), education (Assor et al., 2005; Kuznetsova, 2009; Vallerand et al., 1993), and business (Herzberg, 1966; Sarata, 1984, et al.). Thus, Herzberg saw autonomy as the condition in which employees experience personal responsibility for work outcomes (Herzberg, 1966). Sarata considered autonomy as the freedom an individual has to decide how and when to undertake a work activity (Sarata, 1984).

While personal autonomy was found to be important in many works, it was rarely examined in relation to teachers and teaching. A review of the foreign education-related literature reveals that teacher professional autonomy is not strictly defined and may be presented in a variety of forms. Teacher autonomy is often defined as "control one's own work environment" (Pearson and Hall, 1993 : 173),"freedom to make certain decisions" (Short, 1994: 490-491), teachers' capacity to engage in self-directed teaching, including detachment, critical reflection,

decision-making and independent action (Little, 1995; Tort-Moloney, 1997); the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching (Aoki, 2002) or teachers' autonomy as learners (Smith, 2000, Savage, 2001). Friedman's paper suggests that teacher autonomy involves "encouraging and strengthening the power of teachers" (Friedman, 1999 : 60). Following this approach, Pearson & Moomaw believe that autonomy in teaching implies teachers' freedom to make professional choice (i.e., to decide appropriate activity for their students or choose their own teaching style) as well as freedom to participate in decision-making (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This corresponds to W. Littlewood's perception of an autonomous person as one who has an independent capacity to make and carry out choices which govern his or her actions. According to W. Littlewood, "this capacity depends on two main components: ability and willingness…" (Littlewood, 1997 : 428).

Some researchers regarded teacher autonomy as teacher's work in isolation (Willner, 1990, et al.). However, this viewpoint was disputed in the more current research (Gabanska, 1995; Littlewood, 1999; Smith, 2000 et al.), indicating that autonomy implies interaction. Indeed, this point of view in its essence complies with the opinion expressed by A.G. Asmolov who pointed out that qualities of a human being that characterize one as the system element "open" only in the conditions of interactions within this system (Asmolov, 1986).

In Russia, having been viewed for a long time as a negative thing associated with individualism, the concept of personal autonomy was often replaced by some other terms, as, for example, independence and freedom. Thus, discussing the issues connected with person's independence from external factors, Russian researchers often use the concept of "freedom" /

"personality freedom" (Ball, 1997, et al.). In the context of teaching they emphasize "pedagogical freedom" as an important part of civil democratic development" (Kuznetsova, 2009 : 109).

Nowadays, the problem of personal autonomy seems to attract more attention of Russian researchers (Dergacheva, 2005; Kalitiyevskaya, Leontiev, 2004; Koryakovtseva, 2001; Kravchenko, 2008; Leontiev, 2006; Makarova, 2000 et al.). Studying the psychological aspect of autonomy, O.E. Dergacheva proves in her work that there is a correlation between personal autonomy level and such personality attributes as locus of control, self-empowerment, and risk taking (Dergacheva, 2005 :118), and this idea seems to be indicative of the competency-based approach potential. Investigating the educational context, L.N. Makarova believes autonomy to be teachers' personality trait, which allows them "to determine the frameworks for creating their own character and style subject to their own domestic rules and resisting to external destabilizing pressure" (Makarova, 2000 : 14). N.Y. Tambovkina explains teacher autonomy as "ability to think and act in one's profession independently from foreign will, circumstances, one's own fears; to make one's own choice and important decisions through creating one's own goals and working out individual strategies for meeting these goals' objectives" (Tambovkina, 2000 : 63). This approach reflects the ideas of Russian researchers which consider responsibility and mindfulness to be key elements of teacher autonomy (Leontiev, 2006; Nosacheva, 2009; Tambovkina 2000 et al.).

Recent Russian works on teacher autonomy, though few in number, investigate the phenomenon in a large context of teacher personal development. For instance, N.F. Koryakovtseva views teacher autonomy as "a requirement for effective personal development and self-actualization in a broad sociocultural context" (Koryakovtseva,

2001: 12). G.P. Sharapkina considers autonomy to be "the basis for professional socialization" and states that "its development is one of the top targets of teacher training process" (Sharapkina, 2004: 148).

Generally, most of the existing definitions made by foreign and Russian researchers point to one common aspect, which stresses that teacher autonomy requires being self-governed and is based on the recognition of greater power and freedom to the teachers in their professional activities and capacity for self-directed professional development.

In this research teacher autonomy is defined in terms suggested by Kamii (Kamii & Housman, 2000) who has referred to the fact that autonomy is an ability, not a right to be self-governing. On this basis we use in the presented paper the term "perceived teacher autonomy" which seems to prevent confusion between "provided" and "perceived" autonomy and correspond to the Myers & McCaulley's definition of perception as "all the ways of becoming aware of things, people, happenings, or ideas" (Myers & McCaulley, 1985: 1). Following the above mentioned Arseniev's idea about two types of freedom, we consider perceived teacher autonomy as "freedom for" which implies social interaction, personal development and self-actualization.

This approach, firstly, allows us to consider perceived teacher autonomy as a complex of teacher professional competencies and personality attributes which make his/her teaching autonomous. Secondly, it makes us broaden understanding of teacher autonomy through considering it as an important factor promoting teacher personal and professional development and preventing teacher attrition.

Research methodology

The investigation of perceived teacher autonomy content required a more detailed study of R. Ryan & E. Deci's **self-determination theory**, in which self-determination is considered as feeling and realization of freedom in person's choice of behaviour and existence in the world independently from external environment and inner-personal processes effects (Ryan, Deci, 2006). The results of theoretical and applied research conducted within the framework of Self-determination theory (SDT) of R. Ryan & E. Deci demonstrate the benefits of developing personality traits for the improvement of people' life, the enhancement of their psychological well-being and the prevention of burnout syndrome (Ryan, Deci, 2006). Generally personality traits are considered as permanent, socially important psychological attributes, relations and actions, which allow the person to behave as a responsible actor. Personal autonomy seems to be one of these personal traits which are now attracting attention of educational researchers both in Russia and abroad. In the frameworks of this theory perceived teacher autonomy can be described as teacher personality attribute ensuring teacher self-determination as realizing of autonomous behaviour. According to Self-determination theory, the need for autonomy is the central need of an individual and is a need to have a choice and act with self-determination; it is the universal need to feel like an agent or an initiator; it is linked to one's purpose in life and to one's actions as they are in agreement with one's integrated "I". Satisfaction of this need is an important condition, which determines psychological well-being, optimal functioning and healthy development of a personality; frustration of this need, on the other hand, leads to the decrease of psychological well-being and the degradation of activity (Ryan, Deci, 2006).

Ryan & Connell (1989) have demonstrated that different types of behavioural regulation can be located on a continuum of perceived autonomy, which they associated with perceived

locus of causality (PLOC) (Ryan & Connell, 1989), and suggested five types of perceived motivations: external, introjected, identified, integrated and intrinsic. The latter, intrinsic motivation, defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence, is considered by the authors to be autonomous because it satisfies personally relevant goals and services the innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures or reward. Besides, intrinsic motivation is associated with increased engagement and persistence in tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 56). A person with autonomous motivation is thus an agent that pursues its own agenda for reasoning and behaviour in accordance with its intrinsic motivation.

Enlarging these outcomes and extrapolating them into the context of teaching, Pearson and Moomaw define teacher autonomy as "a common link that appears when examining teacher motivation, job satisfaction, burnout, professionalism, and empowerment" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The authors believe that intrinsic factors of teacher autonomy include "desire to assist students to accomplish goals, desire to make a difference in society and sense of achievement when students learn" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005 : 39).

Consequently, we can regard the complex of the above mentioned teacher desires and sense of professional achievement as **intrinsic motivation to professional achievement.**

Taking into account that in the context of modern higher education in Russia being autonomous often requires teacher's mastering new skills and competences to deal with new challengers, an autonomous teacher should also be a lifelong learner (Gavrilyuk, 2010). On

this basis, motivation to autonomy in teaching should involve not only intrinsic motivation to professional achievement, but **intrinsic motivation to teacher personal development.**

Drawing on Kunda's work on motivation in psychology (Kunda, 1990), we assume that autonomy in teaching is ensured by intrinsic motivations to professional achievement and personal development, which can lead to the generation and adoption of teacher professional and personal development goals and affect the outcome of the reasoning or behavioural task intended to satisfy those goals.

Meanwhile, Taylor identified five personality characteristics associated with need for achievement including high levels of self confidence, the ability to set clear and challenging goals, an understanding of risk taking, a strong internal locus of control, and problem solving ability (Taylor, 1985).On this basis, teacher intrinsic motivations to professional achievement and personal development seem to underlie a better performance in teaching. Indeed, this idea has been proved in a number of studies considering the more autonomous motivations as related to positive outcomes and the more controlled motivations as associated with negative outcomes across domains as varied as health care, education, politics, etc. (Assor et al., 2005; Ryan and Connell, 1989; Vallerand et al., 1993; Williams & Deci, 1996).

Considering perceived autonomy as teacher's ability, not a right to be self-governing makes appropriate studying this phenomenon in the framework of **competency-based approach**.

The latter is known to represent a research-supported approach based on the primary goal of defining the critical behaviours needed for effective and superior individual and organizational performance. Competencies are often associated in up-to-date pedagogical literature with different types of skills or abilities, ensuring professional

behaviours. Thus, the Bologna process documents define competencies at the level of higher education institutions as a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Being presented in the context of competencies for adults working as professionals in the training and performance sector as evaluators, instructional designers, instructors, and training managers, competencies are regarded by The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI) as statements of behavior which often reflect attitudes, but are not personality traits or beliefs. Generally, IBSTPI defines a competency as "an integrated set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enables one to effectively perform the activities of a given occupation or function to the standards expected in employment" (Richey et al., 2001).

This paper adopted the above-mentioned definition made by IBSTPI as the operational definition which seems to be broad and reflect the context of our research. Such approach means that competencies does not represent but do underlie behaviours. As Gronczi et al. pointed out, comparing competence and performance, "competencies were defined as combinations of attributes that underlie successful performance" (Gonczi et al., 1993). The authors stated also that "performance is what directly observable, whereas competence is not directly observable, rather it is inferred from performance" (Gonczi et al., 1993).

Such approach means that perceived teacher autonomy, representing an underlying enduring personality characteristic and determined by a teacher's motivations, intents, attitude and values, is not easy to be observed and measured, though it can be measured through observation and measuring of a set of teacher's behaviours. Perceived teacher autonomy can, thus, be regarded as teacher's ability to work autonomously across many workplace situations.

In other words, this generic characteristic can predict a teacher's behavior in different work-related situations (i.e., autonomous teacher sets challenging goals, he / she is ready to take calculated risks, is able to make free choices, to take sound decisions despite uncertainties, to create his / her own teaching style subject to his / her own domestic rules, to resist to external destabilizing pressure, etc).

It appeared that the idea of regarding perceived teacher autonomy as a competency is relevant to **the Tuning approach,** which has been developed by TUNING Educational Structures in Europe to (re-)designing, develop, implement, evaluate and enhance quality of higher education institutions programmes. According to the Tuning approach, ability to work autonomously represents one of generic (transferable) competencies, necessary to all the professionals. In the context of the Tuning approach, distinguishing three types of generic competencies (instrumental, interpersonal and systemic), perceived teacher autonomy can be regarded as one of systemic ones, as it is reported to represent a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge and requires prior acquisition of both other types.

The idea of enhancing quality of performance in higher education, central in the Tuning approach, is also relevant to the **theory of a rational performance** (Tareva, 2001), which characterizes the individual as a free and responsible agent, who is intrinsically mastery oriented (being a student) or intrinsically motivated to professional achievement (being a teacher). Meanwhile, the above mentioned qualities are similar to those that describe an individual that is autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000). From a theoretical standpoint, it would seem that an individual having a rational activity style will be more autonomous, and a more autonomous individual will have a rational activity style. Taking into account that rationality underlies a better performance, we can assume

that autonomy will also improve the quality of action.

Generally, the theories and approaches, discussed above, seem to be perspective in the context of our research because they allow us to investigate perceived teacher autonomy with respect to university teacher professional activity through defining a set of teaching-related autonomous behaviours that impact job performance, can be measured against established standards, and can be improved through training and development.

Teacher personality attributes and work-related competencies ensuring perceived teacher autonomy

It is reported that autonomy involves **increased engagement and persistence in tasks or goal commitment** defined as one's **determination to reach a goal** (Lau, 2012, Locke & Latham, 1990). As D. Little et al. (Little et al., 2002) assume, the development of teacher autonomy entails a process of internalization or **personal agency** also defined as the sense of **personal empowerment / psychological empowerment / self-empowerment,** which implies self-belief, trust, and self-leadership and involves both knowing one's goals and having what it takes to achieve them. The term "empowerment" is often reported as an individual's belief in his/her ability to exercise choice. Meanwhile, the capacity of the person to **make choice** proceeding from the information received from the environment and from the processes occuring inside of the person entails the concept of **will** which is closely connected in the psychological literature with the concept of self-determination (Deci, 1980 : 6; Gabanska, 1995).

Most definitions of empowerment focus on issues of gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one's life. Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment as a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues which are of concern to them.

Extrapolating these ideas into the context of teaching, we can assume that university teacher personal empowerment is the expansion of his freedom of choice and action in the university educational area; it involves increasing teacher's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect his teaching practice. Exercising real professional choice, the person generates great efforts which are accompanied by feelings of vitality and energy. Accordingly, perceiving his engagement in various teaching tasks as interesting and meaningful, autonomously-motivated teacher experiences less exhaustion, feels more competent and gains increased control over his work. We believe, however, that as the sense of personal empowerment doesn't mean that a teacher has to always be right. It means a teacher is inwardly prepared to face whatever professional context serves up. Being self-empowered, teachers know their professional goals and can use their own judgment in achieving them. In other words, self-empowered teachers know they have an active and important role in the educational process, and this quality allows them to reduce the number of the stressors they have to cope with and contributes to job satisfaction.

This approach reflects the psychological aspect of personal empowerment, which has been regarded as an individual's cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, competence, and goal internalization. From this point of view, personal empowerment is considered as a multi-faceted construct reflecting the different dimensions of being psychologically enabled, and is conceived of as a positive integrate of perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment, which is

rooted firmly in a social action framework that includes community change, capacity building, and collectivity (Oladipo, 2009: 121). Analysis of psychological works on self-empowerment/personal agency allowed us to argue that self-empowerment/personal agency makes people more open, questioning, actively looking for solutions and developing their self-esteem (self-confidence) and self-efficacy (great trust in one's own abilities). That's why self-empowerment/personal agency is also considered one of the requisites for personal growth and success, better psychological well-being (Oladipo, 2009).

Campion et al. define personal empowerment as the employees' **ability to make decisions** and **to accept responsibility** for the outcome of those decisions (Campion et al., 1993). However, the processes are reported to be directly related to personal autonomy (Ryan, Deci, 1985) and to teacher autonomy in particular (LaCoe, 2008). Meanwhile, lack of participation in decision-making is reported to be linked to depersonalization and considered as a significant predictor of burnout syndrome (Lasalvia & Tansella, 2011: 279). Indeed, when teachers perceived that they lack of participate in decision making, they would feel that they are in condition which is uncontrollable, so they feel helplessness and feel uncertainly of their teaching practice. In order to cope with the situation, teachers will depersonalize their relationships with colleagues and students.

In the context of up-to-date social and economic changes and Russian educational system ambiguity, marked by novelty, complexity, insolubility and lack of structure, teacher's capacity to decision making extends its meaning through transformation into "decision making under ambiguity", which implies **the ambiguity tolerance** (tolerance for ambiguity).

Referring to an individual's ability to accept ambiguity, lack of structure, complexity,

insolubility, etc., or to "a person's ability to function rationally and calmly in a situation in which interpretation of all stimuli is not clear" (Chappelle & Roberts, 1986: 30), the ambiguity tolerance is reported to be linked to risk taking because those who can tolerate ambiguity are more likely to take risks (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995).

This approach makes the ambiguity tolerance extremely important for modern teachers who need experiencing positive emotions even in stressful, ambiguous, problematic situations through transforming them into the challenges for self-development. Teachers who are tolerant of ambiguity seem to be more willing to take risks and open to change. Accordingly, they can perceive and accept new information without frustration and without appeals to authority even though this information involves many unknown elements. As we can see, being tolerant of ambiguity makes the agent to be more autonomous. On this basis, we consider the ambiguity tolerance to be one of the crucial components ensuring teacher professional autonomy.

The ambiguity tolerance is also regarded as an important issue in personal development and is considered to be correlated with **creativity** and (Kirton, 2004). Meanwhile, creativity involves the ability to create one's own ways of proceeding (constructivism), the latter being reported to be one of the important attributes of personal autonomy (Gabanska, 1995).

The internal locus of control (or inner-directedness) is another personality trait that is expected to be related to goal commitment, job attitudes and, subsequently, one of the important features of an autonomous person (Stajkovic, Luthans, 1998). Dormann, et al. believe that locus of control represents a belief in oneself relative to one's environment (Dormann, et al., 2006). In recent research on management theory locus of control is represented as the degree to

which people believe that their actions influence what happens to them (Williams, 2007). Thus, individuals with high internal locus of control (internals) believe that what happens to them, good or bad, is largely a result of their choices and actions. As for individuals with high external locus of control (externals), they believe that what happens to them is caused by external forces outside of their control. Internals are reported to have a strong belief that outcomes such as rewards are under their control (Spector, 1988), to be able to adopt proactive, problem-solving means to change the environment, and they are more likely to engage in goal-directed activities (Hoffman et. al., 2003). Studies also suggest that locus of control is strongly related to job satisfaction (Leone, Burns, 2000; Spector, 1988). In this respect it should be pointed out that following the ideas of E.L. Deci and O.E. Dergacheva (Deci, 1980; Dergacheva, 2005), we do not consider the term "internal locus of control" to be a synonym to above-mentioned "perceived locus of causality", because "internal locus of control doesn't necessarily involve intrinsic motivation and self-determination" (Dergacheva, 2005 : 86).

Based on these ideas, we believe that the presence of internal locus of control is important, but not sufficient to make the teacher act autonomously. As for perceived locus of causality, it is often regarded, as it was mentioned above, as a continuum of perceived autonomy, the highest level of the latter (self-determination) being ensured by intrinsic motivation (Ryan, Connell, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Indeed, the concept of "self-determination" is often considered as a synonym to "personal autonomy", but the latest research indicates that personal autonomy is often defined as a broader phenomenon (Dergacheva, 2005; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

Drawing on the above mentioned Pearson and Moomaw's definition of teacher autonomy

(Pearson & Moomaw, 2005) and taking into account the context of university teacher professional activity, we assume that perceived university teacher autonomy can be involved in a wider range of processes than self-determination alone.

With regard to the above-mentioned and to the context of teaching, the perceived locus of causality seems to be an important teacher personality attribute which can ensure teacher's perception of work-related autonomy together with some other personality traits and work-related competencies.

It should be added that we consider the degree of perceived locus of causality (Ryan, Connell, 1989) to be central feature that differentiates the terms "autonomy" and "independence", which have often been used as synonyms in Russian pedagogical science. We assume that perceived teacher autonomy involves a higher level of independence, where the teacher decides not only how to reach the established educational goals but establishes new goals himself according to his own perceptions of the educational context.

Conceptual Model
of Perceived University Teacher
Professional Autonomy

Based on the above-mentioned ideas and drawing on Arseniev's idea about two types of freedom (Arseniev, 1999) and Leontiev's psychological theory of personal autonomy (Leontiev, 2006), this study regards perceived teacher autonomy as the core of "freedom to", which 1) implies professional interaction, personal development, self-actualization, self-empowerment and work engagement, 2) is ensured by intrinsic motivations to professional achievement and personal development, and a complex of such personality attributes (internal locus of control, professional responsibility, creativity) and competencies (ability to goal

setting, ability to decision making, ability to make choices, pedagogical mindfulness), 3) leads to better performance, job satisfaction, increase of self-esteem and work-related self-efficacy. In this interpretation perceived teacher autonomy is represented as a high-level competency, ensured by a set of teacher personality traits and leading to better performance.

We consider autonomous activity to be related to comparisons between self-generated teacher professional goals and the extent to which they are reached in practice. These comparisons seem to characterize the degree of perceived teacher autonomy.

As a result, a review of the professional literature with respect to SDT, Competency-based approach, the Tuning approach and the Theory of a rational performance allowed us to pose the following definition of perceived teacher autonomy: **Perceived teacher autonomy is determined by intrinsic motivations to professional achievement and development, professional responsibility, creativity and relative independence from external factors generic competency, that underlies successful performance across different teaching-related situations through creating one's own professional goals, taking intellectual and moral decisions, making free choices, and self-monitoring one's own professional experience.**

With regard to this definition, an autonomous teacher seems to always be ready to deal with challenges which appear in the changing educational environment. In other words, an autonomous teacher is able to deal with his stress positively through transforming the existing stressors into the factors of his own self-development. Subsequently, for an autonomous teacher teaching generally represents a wide range of experiences and relationships with joy, fascination and satisfaction rather than risks for frustration and disappointment. This viewpoint corresponds with the idea proposed by Priebe & Reininghaus (2011) who turn from the negative stress model to an approach that emphasizes the positive sides of work – i.e. the factors that promote "work engagement", a positive, fulfilling, effective-motivational state of work-related well-being (Bakker et al., 2005). The above mentioned ideas are relevant to 'positive psychology', a new research and application field that describes aspects of the human condition that lead to happiness and fulfillment to determine the factors that better one's life (rather than trying to prevent negative situations) (Ryan, Deci, 2000, Ryff, 1995, Caprara et al., 2010).

Our investigation allows us to reveal the benefits of promoting perceived teacher autonomy through development of teacher intrinsic motivations to professional achievement and teacher personal development, together with teacher personality attributes (internal locus of control, professional responsibility, creativity) and work-related competencies (ability to goal setting, ability to decision making, ability to make choices, pedagogical mindfulness), ensuring perceived teacher autonomy (Fig. 1).

The research model investigated in this study as shown below in Figure 1 implies that being intrinsically motivated to professional achievement and personal development, and having a complex of such personality attributes (internal locus of control, professional responsibility, creativity) and competencies (ability to goal setting, ability to decision making, ability to make choices, pedagogical mindfulness), an autonomous teacher is able to deal with any educational environment challenges positively through transforming them into the factors of his own self-development. This activity implies professional interaction and pro-social behavior, self-actualization, self-empowerment and leads to personal development and job satisfaction, promoting work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, effective-motivational
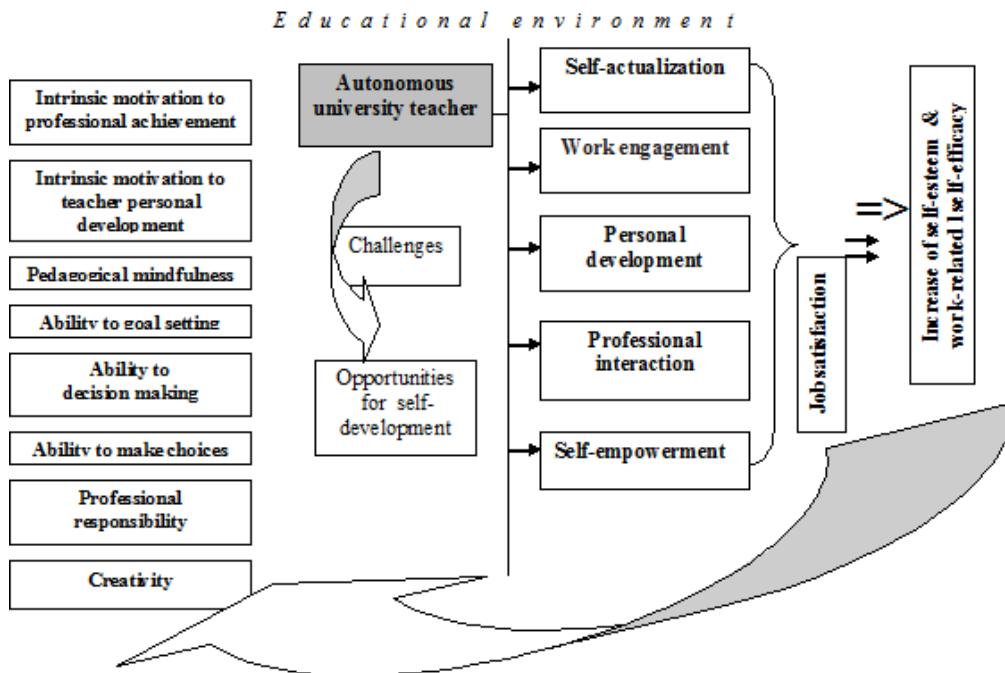
Fig. 1: Conceptual Model of Perceived University Teacher Professional Autonomy

state of work-related well-being considered above as the antipode of teacher burnout. Engagement is related to better performance which leads, in its turn, to the increase of teacher self-esteem and professional self-efficacy. This helps the teacher to constantly keep and develop his personality traits ensuring his professional autonomy. In other words, an autonomous teachers is well adjusted with the possibility of high job satisfaction since there is always a chance for a positive change in his/her value orientation which results, in its turn, in more autonomous behavior. Accordingly, perceived teacher autonomy may allow him / her to tolerate occasional frustrations and setbacks, and prevent exhaustion as one of three main burnout components. In the context of new social and professional demands, perceived teacher autonomy, thus, helps the teacher to keep his / her individuality in each act of his / her self-fulfillment.

The proposed approach to investigate perceived teacher autonomy reveals its special potential as a mainspring of higher education reform, ensuring pedagogical research, effective implementation of new educational technologies, teacher influence on university policies, teacher professional development and self-actualization.

Resume

In this paper we showed several theoretical approaches able to become the methodological bases for investigating perceived teacher autonomy phenomenon. Among them SDT, competency-based approach, theory of a rational performance and the Tuning approach to university teacher professional activity, based on which we have proposed an integrated definition of perceived teacher autonomy.

We consider perceived teacher autonomy as teacher generic competency, determined by intrinsic motivations to professional achievement and development, professional responsibility, creativity and relative independence from external factors and underlying successful performance

across different teaching-related situations through creating one's own professional goals, taking intellectual and moral decisions, making free choices, and self-monitoring one's own professional experience.

At the conceptual level of our research it means that a teacher himself, his desires, his process for forming the desires and the resulting actions are all the sorts of things that could be regarded as autonomous.

The proposed aspect of understanding perceived university teacher autonomy reveals its crucial role in providing a new type of higher education through allowing pedagogical research,

effective implementation of new educational technology, ensuring teacher psychological well-being as well as teacher professional development and self-actualization.

Finally, implications for future research are based on the conclusion that University teacher autonomy cannot be understood without studying teacher motivations, personality traits and work-related competencies in a broad socio-cultural context. We hope this work will set the stage for research initiatives investigating the potential of perceived university teacher autonomy as an important factor which must be taken into account to prevent teacher burnout.

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Автономность преподавателя университета как движущая сила реформирования высшего образования

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Продолжая попытки определить и описать автономность преподавателя как существенный фактор его профессионализма и саморазвития, данное исследование расширяет понимание освоенной автономности преподавателя вуза посредством изучения содержания этой сложной личностной характеристики в контексте современных преобразований в российском высшем образовании. С учетом теории самодетерминации, компетентностного подхода, теории рационального стиля деятельности и тюнингового подхода к профессиональной деятельности преподавателя вуза эта работа дает интегрированное определение освоенной автономности преподавателя вуза как его метакомпетенции, обеспечивающейся динамическим комплексом личностных характеристик и профессиональных компетенций. Содержание понятия «освоенная автономность преподавателя вуза» представлено в концептуальной модели. Исследование раскрывает потенциал освоенной автономности преподавателя вуза как движущей силы профессионального саморазвития педагога, повышения его профессиональной активности, удовлетворенности работой, а также его умения эффективно справляться с различными типами профессиональных стресс-факторов в контексте реформы высшего образования в России.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, преподаватель вуза, личностная автономность, освоенная автономность, самодетерминация, внутренняя мотивация, профессиональное саморазвитие, локус контроля, целеполагание, принятие решений, осуществление выбора, рефлексивность.