



# **Teacher Autonomy in Singapore's Private Institutions of Higher Learning: Teacher Experiences and Expectations**

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(PhD)

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I hereby declare that this thesis is all my own work, except as indicated  
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## **Abstract**

This research investigated teacher perceptions of the concept of teacher autonomy (TA) in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning (PIHL). The thesis explores how teachers in Singapore's PIHL view TA by studying their understanding of autonomy, factors that enhance or hinder their autonomy, degree of autonomy they experience in their institutions, and their expectations of TA. The research also explores the differences between the ways in which teachers in two levels – non-managerial and managerial – view teacher autonomy. While the research is focused on studies conducted in Southeast Asian countries, it has also incorporated countries that are like Singapore in terms of geography, culture, or education.

This research collected qualitative data through face-to-face interviews and quantitative data through survey questionnaires. The participants were teachers and teacher-managers who were selected through convenience sampling. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaire survey and 157 participants participated in the survey. They were teachers or teacher-managers from 12 institutions that volunteered to be a part of this study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews provided qualitative data from 12 participants of the same demographic background as the survey participants. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time, and both data was analysed separately, and the results were compared.

The quantitative data analysis suggested that participants were generally in favour of having teacher autonomy (TA) at work while showing a lower level of agreement when it came to their own current experience of having teacher

autonomy. Participants' responses towards perceived TA differed depending on the type of work-related processes. The results from the analysis of the differences in participants' current experiences and opinions found higher levels of perceived TA in their opinions rather than in their experiences, indicating a possibility that participants did not actually experience the degree of autonomy which they believed they had at work.

The qualitative data analysis indicated that while both groups agreed on the need for some level of autonomy for teachers in the classroom, they differed in their opinion about teachers having complete autonomy in making decisions about their classroom teaching and teachers' involvement in administrative decision-making matters. While management participants were mostly informed about the government policies related to private higher education in Singapore, teacher participants were generally unaware of the existence of such policies suggesting a possible lack of communication among different levels in the hierarchy. The research also implied that teachers and teacher-managers perceive teacher autonomy differently while teachers' expectations were not met due to institutional restrictions. The degree of autonomy that teachers got to exercise was dependent on the outcomes of teaching that were pre-determined by the market forces.

The data analysis has also led to the design of a teacher autonomy framework that linked teacher autonomy with four areas that it depended on: teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development. While teachers can perform well in these four areas with the right degree of autonomy, policies, leadership, political and cultural landscape of a country can determine the performance of teachers. However, to what extent teachers get influenced by these

factors also depend on their views and perceptions about autonomy, degree of motivation, and professional competence.

The thesis also suggests the influence of market forces on teacher autonomy in Singapore. In an environment of marketization, teacher autonomy cannot exist as the education system is driven by institutional regulations and market forces (Berry, 2013). As a result of the influences of marketisation where academic results took precedence, teachers were evaluated based on the academic achievement of their learners, pressurising teachers to focus on results instead of the process of learning (McGowan, 2015).

The limitations of this research are also areas for further research. First, recruiting participants and collecting information were challenging due to the sensitive nature of the research topic in the Singapore context. Moreover, PIHL were generally not interested to support research projects as the research would not directly benefit them. If public institutions were involved, more participation could be expected. Also, there was a lack of data on teacher autonomy as there was limited published information available in these areas. Had I considered religious, political, and social factors as areas shaping teachers' perceptions in this study, it would have broadened the scope of this research. However, the limited time and resources did not allow a comprehensive study of that magnitude.

The framework that was developed from this research has identified the external influences on teacher autonomy that comprise government and institutional policies, leadership, local politics and cultural landscape of the country and the region while the internal influences comprise teacher motivation, their perceptions and teacher professional competence. These influences shape the perceptions of

teachers on teacher autonomy in teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development.

**Key words:** *teacher autonomy (TA), teacher perceptions, performativity, marketization, massification, institutional policy, government policy, educational policy, cultural patterns, private institutions for higher learning (PIHL), leadership, Council for Private Education/Committee for Private Education (CPE).*

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

TA	Teacher autonomy
PIHL	Private institutions of higher learning
CPE	Committee for Private Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
GDP	Gross domestic product
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
WEF	World Economic Forum
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNESCO	United Nations Economic and Scientific Cooperation
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
ITE	Institute of Technical Education
NIE	National Institute of Education
SMU	Singapore management University
MTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
PEI	Private Educational Institutions

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

This thesis investigates teacher perceptions of the concept of teacher autonomy in Singapore's private higher education sector. The research is aimed at finding out teachers' understanding of the term teacher autonomy, the factors that shape their perceptions, the level of TA those teachers can exercise, their expectations of teacher autonomy, and whether the views of teachers on TA differ from that of the views of teachers in managerial capacity. The study focuses on the research question on teacher autonomy by exploring the perceptions of teachers through face-to-face interviews and questionnaire surveys.

This chapter will state the aims and rationale of this research followed by the research questions. The next part of the chapter will provide a brief background information about the higher education policy and goals of the Singapore government. The chapter will also look at the way public and private education sectors are operated in Singapore and how they contribute to Singapore's education landscape. The next part of the chapter discusses how the private education sector is regulated by the government. The chapter ends with a brief statement on the method of research, anticipated outcomes and the limitations of the study followed by the conclusion.

### **1.1. Research Background and Context**

Singapore, the country where this research takes place, is reputed worldwide for its quality education system (Goodwin et al., 2017; Viswanathan, 1994; Yeo & Li, 2012). In a recent study on world-class higher education strategies, Hazelkorn (2015) refers to Singapore as one of the countries that has a world-class higher education strategy in practice Unlike many other countries that have been



traditionally known as education hubs for foreign students, Singapore stands out among its Asian counterparts. In those countries, students pay international student fees and complete their studies, after which they are expected to return to their home countries. Whereas Singapore government's policy of reinventing itself as an innovation-driven knowledge hub welcomes locally educated international students and highly skilled labour to remain in Singapore as talented immigrants. In short, Singapore's policy is to recruit high-value international students of high value to contribute to its knowledge capital (Sidhu et al., 2014) that makes Singapore education attractive to foreign students. Its high education standards have been attracting international students since mid 1990s when the public schools opened their doors to international students. Moreover, unlike in the 1980s, Singapore now provides a wide variety of educational pathways catered through specialized schools to meet individual needs and talents of students.

This research is a study of the concept of teacher autonomy, and how teachers and teacher-managers view it in Singapore's institutions of higher learning. ***Teacher autonomy in this study refers to teachers' decision-making ability and involvement in setting the curriculum, teaching methodology, management of materials and learning resources that include core curriculum, supplementary materials, online learning materials, and teacher-made and student-made materials; learning conditions and context; and assessment.*** A broad meaning of the term "teacher autonomy" is used here as mentioned in the literature review where I have explained my working definition of teacher autonomy in more detail. Students taking up higher education in Singapore have the option to take up their higher studies in one of the 172 private institutions of higher learning (PIHL) in Singapore (Foo, 2016) that offer certificate, diploma and degree courses in various

specializations including arts, social sciences, and engineering. A significant number of about 230000 local and foreign students take up post-secondary courses (Ministry of Education Singapore, [MOE], 2016) and about 14500 teachers are employed in the private higher education sector (Sam, 2017) that are privately owned and locally governed in Singapore. The teachers in this study are educators teaching in private higher education sector in Singapore. They teach foundation level, diploma, degree, and postgraduate courses. They are classified as teachers as that is the common term that refers to instructors, tutors, and lecturers.

Researchers in the past and present including some of those who have been discussed in this paper have highlighted the importance and invaluable contribution of student autonomy in learning (Benson, 2013; Knowles et al., 2015; Lamb, 2015; Stephenson & Yorke, 2012). These studies suggest that learner autonomy is essential for effective learning. This can be made possible only when teachers believe in their own autonomy, an educational concept which Finland and Sweden have pioneered according to a survey-based study among 708 Swedish and 1583 Finnish teachers (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019). The study investigated teachers' perceived autonomy on who makes decisions in their institutions where Finnish teachers perceived themselves to be individually autonomous whereas Swedish teachers, collegially effective, no doubt both situations nurture educational environment.

The Finnish education system has been ranked as the top in Pisa ranking since 2001 (Crouch, 2015). As observed from the successful education systems in the world like that of Finland, TA is a key factor in a successful education system as TA acts as a motivational factor in students' success (Sinclair A. L., 2017). Ramos also stated that teacher autonomy is a prerequisite for student autonomy where, teacher autonomy allows teachers to reflect on their role as teachers and seeks ways

to change it to adapt to the new students' roles to help them to their growth to autonomy and independence (Ramos, 2006). To highlight the importance of TA, Schleicher (2016) refers to the importance of including teachers in decision-making, having professional autonomy for teachers, and strengthening teacher leadership to achieve excellence in teaching. All these research studies point to the importance of the currently prevailing trend of a close link between teacher autonomy and educational excellence. Therefore, a study about teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy in Singapore as the country is known as a destination for quality education for many foreign students and the government has been focusing on improving the quality of Singapore's private higher education sector will add to the body of knowledge focusing on teacher autonomy in Singapore context.

A vast amount of literature discusses teacher autonomy in Singapore's public education system (Chee et al., 2016; Dimmock & Tan, 2015; Goodwin et al., 2017), there is very little research conducted on TA in the private higher education sector. Therefore, this research is relevant and timely at a period when Singapore is racing to become a hub of global education (Sidhu et al., 2014) as the government is making this sector a key economic contributor in the future. The government has been giving the private education sector an increasing level of importance since the 1990s, trying to make it an education hub of the future, taking the example from successful education providers like Australia and New Zealand. To this effect, the government has since established various quality control establishments like the Council for Private Education (CPE) and Private Education Policy Branch at MOE. As a result of the combined efforts of the administrative and quality control sectors in education, the government managed to execute its plan of making the private higher education sector more reliable and competent. As many as 43 private higher

education institutes were forced to close as they failed to meet the government's criteria, and more will cease their operations as the government audit progresses (Davie, 2017). This move by the government over the years points at its intention to make Singapore's private higher education attractive and reliable for students locally and overseas and in turn increase the income from this sector which currently stands at around 0.8% of the GDP but is expected to grow in the next decade (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017).

Education has always been one of the most important sectors of financial and manpower investment in Singapore. This is evident as Singapore spends 13.2% of its annual budget for 2019 on education (Chang, 2019). As a small country whose only resource is its people, Singapore invests heavily in education to build and maintain a well-educated work force" (BBC, 2013). As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong mentioned in his speech in 2014, Singapore has been obsessively focusing on education for a very long time as the nation's only reserve is its people, and the country has built a good education system (Lee, 2013). The minister for education emphasized this view once again in his speech when he addressed a teachers' conference in 2016. According to him, nations would rise or fall in importance and fortune based on their human capital, and this is especially relevant for a small country like Singapore. Therefore, Singapore citizens are encouraged to focus on education (Lin, 2016) noting that what Singapore has as its capital been just manpower.

The importance attributed to education in Singapore has produced remarkable results through academic success based on the results of research studies conducted at national and international levels. According to a BBC report, based on rankings achieved in mathematics, science and reading literature, Singapore comes second in

the overall results while 12.3% of students in Singapore achieve the highest levels of proficiency in all three assessment subjects (BBC, 2013). According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016, Singapore was ranked first for its quality of education. In 2016 PISA rankings, Singapore was ranked 1st internationally by the OECD for the quality of its educational system (Coughlan, 2016). It also points out that education ministers around the world are keen to explore the reasons behind Singapore's success in education (Pota, 2016). Professor Andy Hargreaves of Boston College, an expert in education commented during a national discussion on education that the island nation has caught the world's attention because of their excellent performance in PISA (Ng & Hargreaves, 2013). This achievement of Singapore's education system was highlighted in the Straits Times news as a potential factor that attracts foreign students into the city-state (Iyer, 2017). Studies also show that the quality of its schooling is one of the best in the world. For example, Singapore's Mathematics Education has attained worldwide attention with consecutively good results in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Coughlan, 2016). Singapore-based mathematics textbooks are used in countries as diverse as the United States and Indonesia (Tan, 2019). While these findings pertain mostly to Singapore's public sector education, a study into private sector education might draw parallels to the qualities identified in public education system here.

Besides a quality education system, the geographical location of Singapore is another important factor that makes it attractive to foreign students (Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2003). Singapore is situated within eight flying hours for 2.8 billion of the world's population (Singapore Tourism Board, 2013) that makes Singapore a choice-destination for international students.

## 1.2. Background of the study of teacher autonomy and its definition

A general meaning of the term “teacher autonomy” is used in this study and the terms *teacher independence* and *teacher autonomy*, in the literature review for this study means one and the same. Teacher autonomy in this study refers to teachers’ decision-making ability and involvement in setting the curriculum, teaching methodology, management of materials and learning resources that include core curriculum, supplementary materials, online learning materials, and teacher-made and student-made materials; learning conditions and context; and formative and summative assessment that the students undertake. The research also looked at the ways in which various institutional and national policies influence the perceptions of teachers on their autonomy. All other variables are out of the scope of my research. However, there cannot be a conclusive definition for teacher autonomy as this is a term that varies in its meaning from country to country and culture to culture, it is appropriate to look at definitions from various sources before arriving at a working definition for this research. A broader definition is provided by Aoki who defines teacher autonomy as a concept that involves the ability, liberty, and/or responsibility to make selections concerning one’s own teaching (Aoki, 2000) whereas, Thavenius (1999:160) has a different definition for TA as “the teacher’s ability and willingness to help learners take responsibility for their own learning. The autonomous teacher is thus a teacher who reflects on her teaching role and who can change it, who can help her learners become autonomous, and who is independent enough to let her learners become independent” (Little, Teacher autonomy for learner autonomy, 2000).

Research studies also indicate the ways teachers perceive TA and suggest the influencing factors on their perceptions. Huang defines teacher autonomy as the

readiness, aptitude, and liberty of the teacher to take up the control of personal learning and teaching (Huang, 2011). Smith agrees with Huang as he says that Huang's definition relates to the ability for self-directed professional development and the liberty from any form of control by the authorities in teaching-related areas (Huang, 2011). Thomas uses the term "professionalism" to refer to a set of capabilities and knowledge of teachers, the purpose and ethical underpinnings of their work, the level to which teachers are able to exercise independent and critical judgment, their role in shaping and leading changes in education, and their relationship to policy makers (Thomas, 2011). Thomas's use of the term 'professionalism' is similar in meaning to teacher autonomy by other researchers. However, Moomaw (2005) states in his doctoral thesis that a review of the literature on TA reveals that there is no consensus on the definition of TA as different researchers form their own definitions. This could also be attributed to the fact that in various cultural environments, teachers too perceive autonomy differently. For example, the way teachers perceive autonomy in South-east Asian context is different from the way teachers in Europe or Middle East view teacher autonomy.

It is also suggested from many readings that TA is not confined to classroom practice or teachers' role within the classroom. Rather, it covers all the roles taken up by teachers, and their say in the teaching-related decisions made by the school, human resources management, materials and finance management and the general working environment of teachers (Ozturk & Freidman, 2011). However, it must be in an environment where teachers are accorded the freedom to act on their own regarding their teaching and self-development. In any case, Albedaiwi's study concludes that even though many believe that teachers can perform at optimal level

even without autonomy, they still need autonomy to remain competent (Albedaiwi, 2011).

While discussing the concept of teacher autonomy, it is also important to explore situations where there is an absence of teacher autonomy. Based on various studies, researchers differ in their views of teacher autonomy. As suggested by Little, teacher autonomy is essential in teaching, and it is regarded as a prerequisite for learner autonomy (Little, 2012) without which the learners will not be driven to learn. According to Little, successful teachers are autonomous teachers most of the time (Little, 2012) and that teachers can only develop learner autonomy if they themselves are autonomous (Little, 2000). According to Lamb, teachers who consider themselves as powerless to act in an autonomous way may become dissatisfied and may leave the profession (Lamb, 2008). Lamb's study which was based in the UK is once again emphasized in another quantitative study 12 years later by National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which found that teachers having more autonomy was positively related to their retention and job satisfaction (Lough, Teachers have second-lowest autonomy of 11 professions, 2020). This view is emphasized in a study conducted by Brunetti among long-term high school teachers. The study revealed that freedom and flexibility in the classroom were highly influential in their decision to remain in teaching (Brunetti, 2001).

It is also relevant to see how the understanding of the concept of TA varies among individuals. As seen in the earlier studies, Moomaw (2005) states that autonomy means differently to different teachers. What appears to be autonomy to one teacher may seem like isolation to another. Although this research is set in Singapore's private higher education context, information is scanty about teacher



autonomy. Considering the lack of ample research studies on TA in Singapore's higher education, a relevant example that is closely connected to Singapore context would be a study conducted in South Korea. According to the study, a new curriculum was being implemented that would empower schools and individual teachers. However, unlike many researchers might believe, the South Korean teachers, instead of welcoming greater autonomy and flexibility, did not take the situation positively and were doubtful about the positive effects of the newly offered curricular freedom (Goh & Liu, 2016). The perception of these teachers towards TA was one of 'fear of the unseen' that they did not wish to experiment it in their teaching. It could be the cultural aspect that makes the South Korean teachers feel the same way that caused them to react negatively towards autonomy.

On the other hand, Fraser and Sorenson (1992) state that some teachers may view autonomy as a means to get away from interference and monitoring, while others view it as the freedom to develop collegial relationships and accomplish tasks that extend outside the classroom. In short, some educators thrive on TA, whereas others use it as an excuse to avoid their duties and responsibilities (Fraser & Sorenson, 1992). O'Hara who warns that teacher autonomy is a double-edged sword warns that leaders must be cautious and constantly monitor if teachers use this freedom for the benefit of their students or if they are hiding behind the autonomy and misuse it (O'Hara, 2006). Such misuse takes place when teacher autonomy is not defined clearly, or when teachers are not trained on maximizing the benefits of it, or when the authorities are not clear about it. While in one context, teachers do not view teacher autonomy as something positive, in another context, they are monitored by the authorities of possible abuse of teacher autonomy. The extent of this can be

measured only based on the analysis of participant views about TA and their experiences with TA in their professional teaching life.

### 1.3. Teacher autonomy versus academic freedom

It is significant to note that teacher autonomy should not be equated with academic freedom, as both are entirely different in this context. Academic freedom is more general and broader in outlook that includes teaching, learning, and all components related to education and educational management. From a layman's point of view, academic freedom can be explained as the liberty experienced by educators and learners to teach, learn, and pursue knowledge and research without irrational interference or legal restrictions, institutional protocols, or public pressure. It has been defined by the senate of the University of California as the independence enjoyed by teachers, students, and academic institutions to look for knowledge wherever it may lead, without unwarranted or irrational interference. The Senate's definition of academic freedom encompasses the freedom to engage in all the activities involved in the production of knowledge, that include choosing a research focus, deciding what to teach in class, and publishing or sharing research findings with fellow teachers (University of California Santa Cruz, 2017). As seen in the definition, my view is that academic freedom is a broader concept than teacher autonomy. Academic freedom involves teachers and students, the teaching environment, influencing factors like the ministries and government authorities, political and social influences on teachers and teaching and many more. Therefore, it is a more general concept, and it comprises of more external influences as mentioned above than internal ones that are limited to teachers' work within the school.

In the real-world scenario, it is impractical to function as a teacher without influences from authorities and ideals. I would agree with Pitt's view of teacher autonomy that focuses less on release from governing authorities, whereas based within a complex relation to the influence and authority of individuals and ideals that we accept or reject as our own (Pitt, 2010).

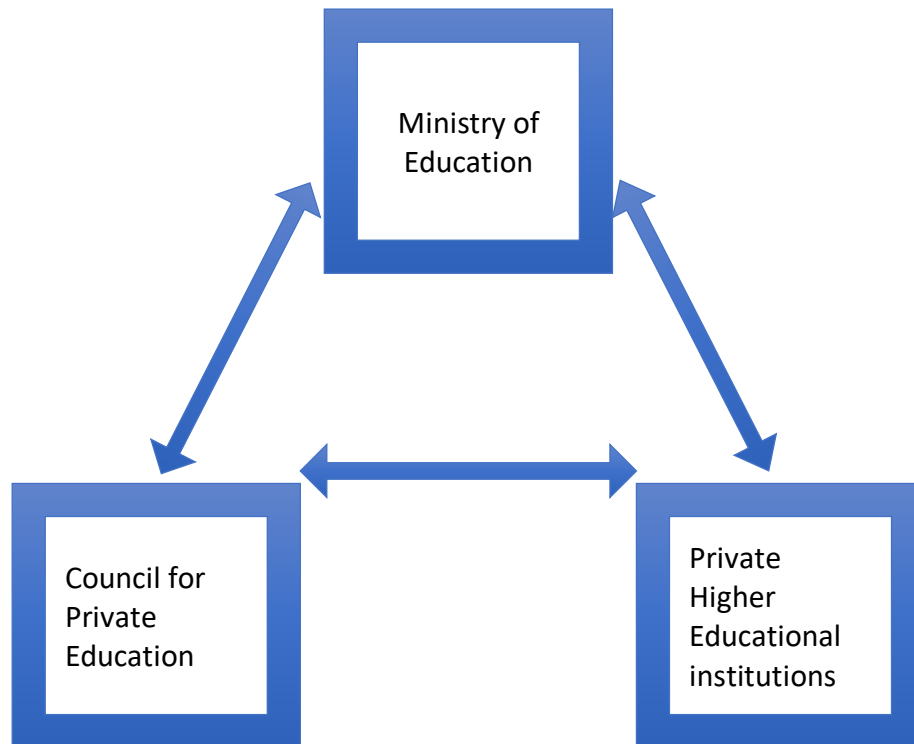
#### 1.4. Private educational institutions versus public institutions

In Singapore's PIHL, teachers have a far different role than those teaching in public higher educational institutions. Teachers in public higher educational institutions are under the Ministry of Education or government although each one of them is given certain level of autonomy that is determined by the institution based on policies set out by the Ministry of Education.

Whereas the PIHLs in Singapore are not under the direct control of the government, while a different government department called Council for Private Education oversees the running of private institutions in the country. They set policies and guidelines to maintain the quality of private institutions and protect the interest of the students. Interestingly, this control is also aimed at making sure that the institutions' finances are in order, teachers have the basic qualifications to teach, governmental taxes are promptly paid, and that the students' fees are appropriately handled. The Council for Private Education (CPE) is "a statutory board sanctioned with the legislative power" to regulate the private educational institutions. In addition to its role as the controller of private institutions of higher learning (PIHL), it also facilitates "capability development efforts to uplift standards in the local private education industry" (CPE, 2009). Both CPE and MOE do not set stringent guidelines for PIHL on academic matters. Such decisions are left with the individual PIHL to decide whereas MOE and CPE involvement is limited to financial

regulations; matters related to protecting student interests and management matters. It is interesting that PIHLs in Singapore are involved in a different tripartite alliance that is different from public higher educational institutions.

**Tripartite alliance among MOE, CPE and private educational institutions**



Teachers in PIHL while having similar responsibilities do not enjoy the same privileges as those in the public sector. My experience shows that in most PIHL, teachers oversee their curriculum planning and implementation, teaching, assessment, liaising with parents and working together with the institutional management on student matters. While they are given a significantly higher level of freedom in planning their curriculum and lesson plan, they often lack the essential training needed for this purpose. However, training and research facilities are the major areas that teachers in PIHL lack support in. If teachers in PIHL are involved in research and publication, they could only do it at their own time and expense; no

allocation of research funding, library facilities, research scholarships, grants or any other kind of support could be expected. While these factors make a significant difference in the teaching environments of the teachers in public and private sectors, it is possible to look into the ways in which teachers in the private sector view TA as effective employment of TA needs skills and expertise (Eurydice, 2008; Payneandy, 1997) as opposed to the views on Finnish education system (Crouch, 2015) which emphasizes on high-level teacher training as the main criteria for teacher autonomy to be successful.

Therefore, autonomy in the context of teaching in PIHL is different from that in the public sector. It involves teachers' having access to resources with minimal restrictions and without compromising the essential privacy and security of academic records, teachers being able to participate in professional development like research and publications, taking up courses to upgrade themselves, take up research studies in their areas of interest and publish their findings, and be able to discuss and debate national policies in class if necessary. UNESCO statute highlights that higher education teachers should not be forced to instruct against their own best knowledge and conscience or be forced to use curricula and methods contrary to national and international human rights standards. In short, they should be able to work under a contract that bestows the above-mentioned UNESCO recommendations of 1997. The teachers are also to be given the flexibility to undertake professional activities outside of their employment. This is necessary in this changing world where multitasking is important, and that it is important to relate to or be an expert in many fields to be employable. Teachers should also be given the freedom to criticize the functioning of the institution in a constructive manner without any effects on their jobs or promotional prospects (UNESCO, 1997). While Singapore attributes so

much of importance to PIHL, it would be interesting to look at how teachers in Singapore's PIHL view their autonomy, and what factors form their perceptions of teacher autonomy.

### 1.5. Call for greater autonomy

Singapore's former Minister for Education Heng Swee Kiat spoke about the need for teachers to be self-directed learners during the Annual Teachers' Conference in 2012. According to him, teachers would become more reflective learners and positive role models of self-directed learning by making self-evaluation and reflection on their own learning needs (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). However, the Ministry of Education or CPE in Singapore does not provide a definition for teacher autonomy. Therefore, there is no commonly accepted definition of teacher autonomy in Singapore. Teachers have their individual views about the definition of TA and the roles of TA due to a lack of common understanding in this area.

Interestingly, Singapore's education system has been through a fast-paced transition over the last four decades turning out to be one of the most successful ones in the world. It has always been open to changes as required by the changing world. As mentioned by Singapore's education minister Mr. Heng Swee Kiat in 2010,

“The educational paradigm of our parents' generation, which emphasised the transmission of knowledge, is quickly being overtaken by a very different paradigm. This new concept of educational success focuses on the nurturing of key skills and competencies such as the ability to seek, to

curate and to synthesise information; to create and innovate; to work in diverse cross-cultural teams; as well as to appreciate global issues within the local context.” (Heng, 2010).

The minister’s words summarize what the education system has undergone in the past and what it is undergoing now. Further, he emphasizes in his speech the need for teachers to have autonomy in decision making. Singapore’s Ministry of Education established the need for teachers to be more independent in their work as it states in its website what the minister has said earlier. According to MOE, teachers would get more time for self-reflection on their lessons, share lessons with their peers, and to develop new teaching approaches for their learners (MOE, 2015). It is noteworthy that his speech is in the context where he addressed the educators from public educational institutions. It clarifies the education minister’s perception about TA when he states,

“ ... we should encourage teachers to be self-directed learners, to take ownership for charting their own professional development. By making self-assessment and reflecting on their own learning needs, our teachers will become more reflective learners and be good role models of self-directed learning. They will be able to optimize their learning and to make thoughtful choices in developing certain competencies over others” (as cited in Heng, 2012).

I agree with Heng Swee Kiat’s views on TA that also reflect Littlewood’s definition of autonomy. Littlewood defines an autonomous person as one who has an

autonomous ability to make and execute his or her choices, which govern his or her actions (Littlewood, 1999). It incorporates the ideas of choice, capacity for change and drive as important elements in the make-up of autonomous behaviors. The minister's words resound the basic traits of teacher autonomy through which they aim to achieve teacher competency, which is the factor that is highlighted in the success of Finnish education system. Although his focus is on teachers in public schools, it is also relevant to the teaching community in private as well as higher levels. It is also clear from various research studies and international seminars that a high level of importance is given to teacher (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007; O'Hara, 2006; Tay, 2017; Wilches, 2007) although the term might vary in the way it is perceived in various cultural and political contexts, which would be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

#### 1.6. Public education sector

To understand the importance of the private education sector, it is beneficial to discuss briefly about Singapore's public education sector. The public education system consists of six years of primary, four years of secondary, two to four years of post-secondary, and university studies before professional work-life. English is used as the medium of instruction at all levels. Besides public sector education, Singapore offers a choice of private, foreign system or international schools with some restrictions for citizen children at primary school level. These schools offer curriculum and education pathway for mostly expatriate students, similar to what they are offered in their home countries. Singapore has six publicly funded universities, which are autonomous in their governance (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2019). Besides these, many private institutions – locally or internationally



affiliated – have also become operational in the last 10 years. In addition, Singapore’s five polytechnics also offer diplomas to post-secondary students. They also cater to training middle-level professionals, along with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), which was also established as a post-secondary technical institution.

It can be noted that National Institute of Education (NIE) trains and supports educators in the public sector. Most of the key programs at NIE are almost closed to educators from PIHL. The Singapore Ministry of Education supports and governs the National Institute of Education in education research and is strongly committed to evidence-based policy development and improved teaching practices in public schools (<http://www.nie.edu.sg>). The MOE acts as the lead agency in Singapore’s education system. It leads the co-agencies – the National Institute of Education and the schools in Singapore. The three agencies together develop a shared vision about what the desired outcomes of education ought to be. The MOE would put in place a set of policies that would enable the desired outcomes to be achieved. The schools would translate the policies into the right practices that would enable the achievements of the desired outcomes in teaching. In addition, NIE, which is involved in preparing the teachers to deliver these practices must also translate these policies into teacher preparation programs so that they would then be built with the right attributes grounded with the right skills and knowledge and be able to deliver the curriculum that would achieve the desired outcomes (Lee, 2013). This tripartite alliance among the MOE, the Schools and the NIE will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on literature review.

### 1.7. Private higher educational institutions and their role in the economy

Unlike in the public education sector, teachers from PIHL undergo higher education and training in universities of their choice, and at their own expense. While it does not directly get involved in the appointment or promotion processes of the teaching staff in PIHL, Council for Private Education has the authority to disqualify the authorities in charge of a PIHL if the person is found not responsible (CPE, 2017). In other words, PIHL are given the authority to accept or reject teacher applicants, after which the decision is endorsed by CPE (CPE, 2009). While complete autonomy is given to PIHL in Singapore, the CPE endorsement is an essential component for the institutions to admit foreign students, who makes up most of their student population.

While there has always been a high demand for places in public universities, it is not feasible for the Singapore government to provide the large number of places required to accommodate foreign students in public institutions. Therefore, the government encourages PIHL to operate educational services offering a variety of courses to cater to an increasing number of foreign students. In addition to local students, a significant number of foreign students also form a part of the student population in private educational institutions. While there is no legal limitation in the number or proportion of foreign students that can be admitted into a private institution, different PIHL have different local to foreign student ratio. This situation highlights the importance of the private education sector in Singapore.

According to CPE, the regulator of private education sector in Singapore, there were a total of 319 registered private education institutions in 2014, of which 172 were colleges and universities offering diploma and degree programs (Council

for Private Education, 2015). Besides many options to study in public institutions, students may take up their higher studies in one of the 172 private institutions of higher learning (PIHL) in Singapore (Foo, 2016). These private institutions offer a wide range of certificate, diploma and degree courses in language and professional areas. Although a significant number of students undertake their higher education courses in Singapore's private institutions (MOE, 2016), unlike in the case of public educational institutions, MOE has limited jurisdiction over PIHL. However, PIHL are legally bound by certain conditions – on teacher qualification recognition, teacher registration, course approval and approval of teaching premises – set out by the CPE to operate in Singapore.

Despite comprising a major share of the country's education landscape with 172 private higher educational institutions (CPE, 2009), Singapore's private post-secondary, education sector does not enjoy significant governmental privileges like school building and maintenance funds, scholarship funds, or grants for student assistance schemes, all of which are reserved exclusively for public educational institutions. Singapore's PIHL generate significant income by attracting foreign students to study, live and spend money on the island nation (Davie, 2014; Singapore Management University, [SMU], 2017). While the teaching staff in PIHL are educated in local or foreign universities, but mostly without any formal training in higher education or university teaching. Any training or upgrading of their qualifications would be a matter of their personal choice and individual expense. However, there are some differences between pre-tertiary teachers and those teaching at institutions of higher learning. The key difference between pre-tertiary teachers and IHL teachers is in their qualification. PIHL generally require their teachers to hold at least a master's degree to teach whereas pre-tertiary teaching is

allowed with a bachelor's degree. Other than this, PIHL teachers are under private management whereas most of the pre-tertiary education institutions are under the jurisdiction of the MOE Singapore.

It is important to explore further on the way the private education sector operates in Singapore. Singapore has a unique system of private higher education, which is increasingly tightly monitored by the authorities. This quality control builds up trust in the country's education system among foreigners and locals alike. Moreover, unlike in many countries, PIHL in Singapore play a major role in bringing in foreign students who contribute to Singapore in various ways. PIHL attract students to stay and study in Singapore, while the foreign students bring in foreign money, which directly and indirectly helps in building the economy. However, for the continued success of its education sector, it is crucial for Singapore to maintain its quality. It is also noticeable that unlike many countries, Singapore economy depends also on its education sector (Hon, 2017). Waring notes that Singapore was set to position its education sector to generate 5% of its GDP from its education sector (Waring, 2014). Its education sector currently contributes to 1.9% of the GDP, and the government is targeting to reach 3-5% in the next decade (MTI, 2003). It is relevant to note that 0.8% of the GDP is contributed by private sector education. This income comes from the increased institutional and student spending, especially from full fee-paying international students (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017).

The private education sector also plays a major role in local employment. It is also a major provider of jobs as it employs about 47000 people (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017), which is a significant number for a comparatively small country like Singapore. In a recent study, Singapore Business Review has identified its education sector as one of the six key growth industries in 2016

(Bakhda, 2015). Therefore, research into Singapore's private education sector that is a significant provider of education services cannot be ignored. According to Spring Singapore (2013), the global education market is worth about US\$2.2 trillion every year. Besides this, it is predicted that there will be an increase in the number of international students to about 7.2 million by 2025 (Spring Singapore, 2014), and Asia could be the major player meeting the demand for higher education for almost 70% of the 7.2 million students (Spring Singapore, 2014). Singapore has only about 95000 places in its local universities that are divided between local and foreign students (Alfaro & Ketels, 2016) while the demand for more places at university level is growing. While Singapore's public higher education sector provides limited opportunities for foreign students due to limited number of places making up only about 20% annually (Seah & Png, 2018), its private higher education institutions provide opportunities to study and seek job placements while Singapore aims to become an educational hub of Asia (Davie, 2016).

It is also noteworthy that Singapore welcomes locally developed talents remain there and contribute to the economy. Consequently, some of the foreign students eventually settle down in Singapore following their studies and add to the country's manpower resources, and this is what Singapore government encourages to take Singapore to the next level of economic growth (Ng, 2018). In this way, resource-poor Singapore greatly benefits from the operation of good quality private educational institutions. According to Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry research, Singapore's tertiary sector would be the largest incremental contributor to the country's economy, followed by the commercial and specialty schools, corporate training centres and executive education, and finally the preparatory and boarding schools (MTI, 2002). With such an elaborate vision, the government also ensures

that Singapore's private education sector is regularly audited to assure quality of service for the students which will be discussed in the next section.

#### 1.8. Quality markers for private educational institutions

In Singapore, MOE checks on all the educational institutions on a regular basis while Singapore's private educational institutions fall under another quality control body called Council for Private Education (CPE). The '*EduTrust* for Education' awarded by the Council of Private Education, and 'Singapore Quality Class for Private Education Organisations' are recognitions based on service quality in Singapore. The CPE assesses PIHL based on six criteria: Management commitment and responsibilities, Corporate governance and administration, External recruitment agents, Student protection and support services, Academic processes and assessment of students and Quality assurance, monitoring and results (Council for Private Education, 2016). The CPE introduced another quality measurement standard called '*EduTrust Star for Education*' in 2009. This award recognizes PIHL for excelling in all key areas of management and maintaining high quality in education. While these quality markers help to weed out educational institutions that do not meet the quality criteria set out by the regulatory authorities, it also discourages potential educational business operators from running their business in Singapore if they do not meet the criteria. While poorly performing educational institutions struggle to survive in Singapore, those with high standards are encouraged and enriched by various steps by the CPE and other divisions of the government. For example, foreign students applying for student visa into EduTrust Star-rated private educational institutions would find it a fast process to get their pass approved in a much shorter period of time compared with students joining a non-EduTrust Star-

rated institutions.

CPE's certification of PIHL signifies "higher standards in key areas of management and provision of educational services" (Council for Private Education, 2016). As Singapore considers its education system on par with some of the competent systems in the rest of world, quality control is an area that the government consistently works on, and the establishment of CPE is a result of that (Yat W. L., Think global, think local: The changing landscape of higher education and the role of quality assurance in Singapore, 2014). It oversees 319 private educational institutions in Singapore, making sure that the institutions are run in line with the policies of the government (CPE, 2009). The benchmarking is aimed at helping students to choose among the institutions based on quality and reputation while bringing more healthy competition among private players in higher education.

### 1.9. Research Problem

Teachers in Singapore's PIHL have mixed perceptions about autonomy at work. They either do not know what autonomy is, or they do not explore it in their work as teachers. Yet another group may not be concerned about it at all as the presence or absence of TA does not matter to them – an attitude due to their ignorance of the concept of autonomy or due to the fear of accepting anything new.

While researchers view student autonomy as a crucial factor for a successful education system, they also state that there is no student autonomy in a system without teacher autonomy (Benson & Voller, 2013; Lier, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This points to the importance of teacher autonomy in a successful education system. From these research studies, it can be suggested that teachers should be autonomous if they were to promote autonomy among their learners. The studies

point out that teachers believe in better learning experiences of their students, which they derive from critical reflections of their teaching, and action research. Such teachers have strong institutional knowledge, and they would be able to tackle institutional barriers in socially acceptable ways and make them opportunities for themselves and their learners, while they try to turn the constraints they face into opportunities for change.

A study of successful education systems like those in Finland and Sweden have shown the success rate of teachers being autonomous in their profession and how their belief in their own autonomy leads to their success (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019). Therefore, as mentioned earlier, if teachers do not believe in being autonomous, they wouldn't be able to make their learners independent (Cardenas, 2006) as both teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are interdependent. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the ways teachers perceive autonomy.

In short, researchers have generally agreed on the importance of TA as a pre-condition for learner autonomy which is essential for student success. However, teachers either do not employ autonomy in teaching, or totally ignore TA either because they are not aware of its benefits or because they are not confident to experiment something new. Research studies have also indicated two groups of teachers – one who are in denial of using TA and the other who are trained to use TA successfully in class as in the case of Finnish teachers.

In Singapore's private higher education context, there are several issues that were observed: (a) PIHL teachers do not have a common understanding of TA that is important in higher education. (b) PIHL teachers do not have the flexibility of making decisions pertaining to their teaching context. (c) They are not privy to



important documents like question papers and decisions on moderation. (d) They do not have the freedom to express their views without fear of being victimized.

In this research, I wish to explore teachers' perceptions about teacher autonomy, whether there is a common understanding about autonomy between teachers and authorities, and whether they experience TA according to their expectations.

#### 1.10. Research question

The main objective of this research is to investigate how teachers in Singapore's private higher education sector perceive teacher autonomy. I have developed one research question which is (1) How do teachers in Singapore's PIHL view teacher autonomy? This research question has five sub-questions. The first one is (a) *What do teachers understand by the term TA?* This sub-question is aimed at finding out the way teachers perceive the concept of teacher autonomy. The next sub-question is (b) *What do teachers perceive to be the factors encouraging or discouraging their autonomy?* This sub-question investigates the acts that enhances or diminishes teacher autonomy in their professional work. The third sub-question is (c) *What is the degree of TA experienced by the teachers?* This sub-question explores the teachers' beliefs about the degree of teacher autonomy that they experience in their planning and execution of lessons and all their responsibilities and tasks related to teaching. (d) *What are the teachers' expectations of TA?* This differentiates between the experience of teachers with teacher autonomy and the desired levels of autonomy that they wish to have in their profession. The last sub-question is (e) *How do the views of teachers in a non-managerial capacity differ from teachers in a managerial capacity?* This sub-question explores the differences

in the views of teachers who are in positions of authority and those in the non-managerial capacity.

### 1.11. Significance of the study

In developed countries like Finland where the education system is counted as the top in the world, teacher autonomy is considered as an important concept, and teachers there take ownership of it (Crouch, 2015) and employs it to produce the best results for their students. However, it is not clear how the concept on teacher autonomy is viewed by teachers in Singapore where the education system is also counted among the top in the world. Therefore, a study into this aspect in Singapore context is essential to add to the existing knowledge of literature as Singapore has performed well in global competitive exams.

The importance of this research lies in the fact that this is the first study of its kind carried out in Singapore, and that there have been no studies conducted on the area of teacher autonomy in Singapore's private higher education sector. The study emphasizes one of the key areas of interest in education – teacher autonomy (TA) – highlighted by educational experts and researchers as one of the reasons behind successful education in countries like Finland and Sweden where teachers consider TA as an important factor that contributes to their professional effectiveness (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019). However, research studies in the past lacks focus on studies about teachers' perceptions of TA in the context of Singapore's private higher education sector. Moreover, research studies highlight the presence of restrictions in Singapore's educational, social, political, and economic sectors – factors that could influence teachers' perceptions of TA. For example, Harvard Political Review refers to Singapore's political system as "Stubborn" (Reyes, 2015) that refers to the inflexibility of the system. As Singapore has a government that

believes in “authoritarian pragmatism” or “soft authoritarianism” according to The Guardian (Tan C. , Lee Kuan Yew leaves legacy of authoritarian pragmatism, 2015), it is necessary to find out if this concept also boils down to the country’s education system, and to explore how Singapore’s educators view teacher autonomy and what are the possible influencing factors on their perceptions. In other words, it is important to explore how teachers in Singapore’s PIHL view autonomy while making the system function successfully. If the external influences are strong on teachers’ perceptions, it would be convincing that an education system can also be effective even when teacher autonomy is under internal and external influences.

Another factor that warrants this study is the economic vision of the Singapore government which is emphasizing more importance for private educational institutions than ever before aiming at developing the sector to contribute more to Singapore’s GDP in the future by providing education to a larger number of foreign students and providing jobs for more local residents (Waring, 2014). Therefore, the economic vision of the government makes this study significant as it outlines the views of teachers in Singapore PIHL sector and would act as a point of reference for further improving the private higher education sector that is one of the economic and employment contributors in Singapore.

The outcome of this research would highlight the way teachers in Singapore’s PIHL view TA and would bring to light the factors that directly or indirectly influence their perceptions of TA. The study would also point out the possible sources of internal and external restrictions or influencing factors – political, social, and institutional – on teachers’ perceptions. Additionally, it might also highlight that although Singapore’s education system is one of the best in the world in many ways (as mentioned earlier), it needs further research to explore the factors that contribute

to the success. Therefore, this research could be a reference guide to the future researchers and educators who are interested to take this study to a higher level. As this is unique research in Singapore's private higher education context, it highlighted the importance of teachers' involvement in decision-making related to teaching, communication between management and teachers, and to have a common understanding of TA.

### 1.12. Limitations

Singapore has 295 Private Educational Institutions (PEI) and around 14500 teaching staff working in these institutions (Sam, 2017). Out of these 295 institutions, 172 of them provide higher education, which fall under this study. This research collected survey data from 157 teachers (out of 1000 teachers contacted) from 12 out of the total 172 PIHL in Singapore as involving more participants is time consuming and costly in terms of negotiating access, communication, transcription, and data management. Such selection of a sample might limit information from potential teachers who might be able to contribute other relevant information for the research. However, the research would take into consideration the importance of having male and female participants, all ethnic groups, nationalities, age groups, and participants with various levels of qualifications and teaching experience. All PIHL in Singapore run similar post-secondary programs – certificate, diploma, degree, and master levels - and set their own admission requirements or develop a set of criteria in collaboration with their partner universities. Each institution has its own character, which is dependent on its management's vision and the priorities that they set.

Moreover, the degree of autonomy existing in the schools under observation may vary and not every aspect can be quantitatively measured, hence the research heavily depends on qualitative data collected from interviews and study of documents that are related to the research area. To explain further, institutions involved in this research may have different levels of autonomy depending on the institutional culture. Larger institutions differ from smaller ones in the level or degree of autonomy that their teachers can execute. While gathering the data, there were areas that I have no access to, and that the participants may not reveal through the survey and interview due to the sensitivity of the topic. Quantitative data provides limited information in this area of research while qualitative data allows participants to share more information as they have the flexibility during the process of sharing using semi-structured interviews.

Furthermore, the teaching and learning environment in each school depends on its unique background, management policies and teacher dynamism, all of which affects or shape teachers' views and beliefs. Each institution has its own culture, and therefore, the more the number of schools in the research, the richer the data would be. However, there are also limitations to this due to constraints of time and expense. In addition, as the participants are expected to provide data on a voluntary basis, the results may be distorted due to the absence of feedback from those who might choose not to participate after committing to it due to other commitments.

One of the limitations of this study is that it deals with a sensitive topic of 'teacher autonomy' in Singapore where there is a conservative relationship that exist between the authorities and private higher education operators, and between institutional authorities and teachers leading to a challenging process data collection. The choice of research topic led to a reluctance among participants to provide

information to questions that they consider were ‘unsafe’ to reveal. While there were participants who decided against participating in the research or withdrew after committing to it, it is understandable considering the level of sensitivity involved in answering the research questions as many teachers would fear repercussions for participating in the interview and sharing their views on a sensitive topic like teacher autonomy.

The study being conducted among private institutions is also a challenge as this led to an enormous task in getting individual participants and in getting open opinion from the participants as many of them chose to provide short responses or neutral views about the topics discussed. In addition, many key persons – mainly from CPE and MOE – who could provide valuable information for this research declined to be interviewed because they were not comfortable to air their views and did not want their views to be a part of a study that is meant for publication. In addition, as private institutions of higher learning are generally not inclined to support research in any form, getting participation or support from institutions was also a challenge as they did not have policies to support research and development that did not benefit them. If this study were to involve public higher education institutions, there would be more participants willingly participating in the research.

Finally, while I explored some factors that influence teacher perceptions on TA, I have not considered other factors that might also have a potential impact on teacher perceptions of TA. For instance, I have not studied religious, political, and social factors which are also areas that could be investigated as aspects shaping teachers' perceptions. Nevertheless, the limited time and resources of this research do not allow a comprehensive study of that magnitude. Hence, my research is limited to

the theme of teacher autonomy, teacher perceptions, and the factors that influence teacher autonomy within the scope of my study.

### 1.13. Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters, including this chapter. The literature review in Chapter 2 explores the concept of teacher autonomy and discusses TA in various educational contexts before arriving at my working definition of teacher autonomy. The literature review leads to a framework for the research study which is developed into a research framework after data analysis.

Chapter 3 is Methods that explains the rationale for the research methods that I have adopted for this study. The purpose of this chapter is to report what I have done and justify the research pattern through which the study can be carried out.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss data analysis. Chapter 4 examines the findings and analysis of the quantitative data that was collected through the questionnaire surveys on teachers' perceptions and experience of teacher autonomy, and Chapter 5 discusses the qualitative data collected through face-to-face interviews on teachers' views on teacher autonomy. Chapter 5 also compares the various ways in which the views of teachers in a non-managerial capacity differ from teachers in a managerial capacity.

Chapter 6 will discuss the results and consolidates my findings from the quantitative and qualitative instruments in the light of the literature review. The chapter discusses the five key areas that are relevant to teacher autonomy - planning, teaching, assessment, decision making and professional development.

The last chapter is Chapter 7 Conclusion Chapter that answers the research questions of this study. It will also state the summary of the findings from the data

followed by a discussion of the significance of this study and the implications that it has on Singapore's private higher education sector. I will also state the limitations of this research followed by the prospects for future research.

#### 1.14. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an insight into the research background and context where I have described the education system in Singapore and has highlighted the role played by the private higher education sector in Singapore. I have also explained the research problem, significance of the study, research questions that leads this study, limitations of this research and a brief structure of the thesis. The next chapter will discuss the literature review where it will focus on the concept of teacher autonomy in the context of Singapore's private institutions of higher learning.



## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter will investigate the key concepts used in some of the research studies in the past before focusing on the how these concepts are explored empirically. These studies will be summarized and analysed in the chapter while the concept of teacher autonomy will be discussed based on various studies discussed here. In addition, the chapter will identify the significant gaps left by the past researchers in the same topic and will highlight the need to fill these gaps through the study. The chapter will also compare various research methods used in other studies and will select the most appropriate method for developing my conceptual framework. First, I shall consider the various definitions of teacher autonomy from literature and discuss the significance of the topic. Then, I will discuss various studies that have been carried out in this field globally. Following that, I will explore the various themes identified from the literature before concluding the chapter.

### **2.2. Definition of teacher autonomy**

Studies have shown that teacher autonomy has been in the decline. According to National Education Association, teachers reported lower levels of teacher autonomy in American schools due to government policies restricting teachers' decision making (Walker, 2016). Research among schoolteachers in the UK shared a similar result where TA was hindered due to globalization and political agendas (Adams & Povey, 2018).

Teacher autonomy has been defined differently by researchers over the years. Anderson defined teacher autonomy as the freedom from control by others

(Anderson, 1987), a view Benson also indicated in his studies (Benson, 2007). Benson (2007) focuses on work published in the twentieth century on teacher autonomy. For example, Benson's review views autonomy and related concepts such as self-regulation, inspiration, and teacher development (Benson, 2007). The review also covers relevant advances in the concept of autonomy and the role that teacher autonomy plays in global education policy and reform. Benson states that teacher motivation is closely linked to teacher autonomy (Benson, 2007). This view was also suggested by Banegas (Banegas, 2013) in his doctoral study that was undertaken in Argentina. Banegas views that teacher autonomy could refer to a professional attribute that points to teachers' freedom to implement a curriculum discreetly, to control the process in teaching, and the ability to regulate one's development as a teacher. In Argentina's context, teacher autonomy is expressed as the freedom to select and design teaching materials and to teach using the materials they have prepared (Banegas, 2013). Another definition from the early years of research in this area is that autonomy is the perception that teachers have regarding whether they can control themselves and their work environment (Pearson & Hall, 1993). It is also relevant to see what autonomy is not to get a clearer picture of the definition of teacher autonomy. Lundstrom (2015) defines teacher autonomy as the degree of freedom teachers have in order to plan their teaching and to determine the procedures in carrying it out in class – a process that includes the freedom to choose teaching methods and materials, within limits defined by legislation and official policies, as well as the responsibility for professional development (Lundstrom, 2015). Tomlinson (2019) states that autonomy doesn't mean license for anything for the teacher or acts of selfishness at work in a system where every teacher thinks and acts for him or herself, or disregard for the feelings and needs of peer teachers.

In short, various definitions of teacher autonomy from the literature overlap but not the same. On the one hand, researchers state that autonomy is the freedom from prescriptive curricula, oppressive regimes of testing and inspection, lack of opportunities for teachers to shape their work and their working environment (Biesta et al., 2015). On the other hand, teacher autonomy is also defined as an environment for teachers having complete freedom to choose within limits (Erss, 2018) where teachers have the freedom to make decisions in relation to the function of their role as teachers and the structure in which they act (Salokangas & Wermke, Unpacking autonomy for empirical comparative investigation, 2020), a definition similar to one that was suggested by Jackson (2018) where teacher autonomy refers to teachers' self-direction, capacity, and freedom which are limited by institutional and other factors (Jackson, 2018), a definition that summarises all the other definitions mentioned here.

### 2.3. Significance of teacher autonomy

Teacher autonomy has been a matter of reflection even in the early 1970s when Connelly stated that making teaching professional is often accomplished by claiming autonomy for teachers (Connelly, 1987). The need for learner autonomy has been highlighted by researchers and educators alike while Little (2000) states the necessity of having teacher autonomy for the development of learner autonomy. According to Little, the development of learner autonomy depends on the development of teacher autonomy which shows an interdependence between the two. Little's view is that learner autonomy cannot be fostered unless teacher autonomy is encouraged. By this, Little means two things: (i) that it is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they do not know what

it is to be an autonomous learner; and (ii) that in determining the initiatives they take in the classrooms, teachers must be able to exploit their professional skills autonomously, applying to their teaching those same reflective and self-managing processes that they apply to their learning (Little, 1995). Lamb agrees with Little and states that teachers who perceive themselves as powerless to behave autonomously may become disaffected, possibly leaving the profession (Lamb, Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, 2008). Kong's (2019) study explored the teachers' perspectives of the role of teacher autonomy, and the participants articulated TA as a professional attribute that plays a significant role in the enhancement of teaching. The significance of teacher autonomy cannot be underestimated as it is associated with higher job satisfaction and intention to stay in teaching (The National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, 2020) which is important for the success of any education system.

#### 2.4. Methods of research studies on teacher autonomy

It is also relevant in this chapter to discuss some of the methods used in various studies that explored teacher autonomy. In a qualitative study carried out among Mexican teachers, Nucamendi (2009) used semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis to collect information from teachers on their perceptions on teacher autonomy. The researcher found that the teachers who participated in the study were ignorant about how to use autonomy in their classroom teaching or they had a misconception about what autonomy refers to (Nucamendi, 2009). Nucamendi's study suggests a lack of teachers' understanding about the concept of autonomy or employing autonomy in teaching. This study was entirely qualitative in nature as it involved interviews, focus group discussions and document

analysis only. It did not employ any questionnaire survey by the participants that would have otherwise allowed them to express their views anonymously.

Banegas (2013) employed action research as a qualitative method for his study on teacher perceptions on teacher autonomy in Argentina. The researcher identified a rise in the level of teachers' perceived autonomy when teachers were empowered to develop their materials and teach what they had developed. During the research, the lessons were audio-recorded, and teachers were interviewed. The study showed a higher level of teacher satisfaction and increased level of teacher motivation when they had the autonomy to design materials and teach their self-designed materials (Banegas, 2013). While the methods used in this study is solely based on action research, using a blend of methods like face-to-face interviews and quantitative questionnaire surveys would bring more reliability to the data as the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than just one approach alone (Creswell & Clark, *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*, 2007). In addition, although Banegas makes suggestions about how TA helped the teachers make their teaching more effective thereby benefiting their students by empowering them as autonomous learners and encourages teachers to be more collaborative with their peers at work, the study does not bring to light much about how they perceive teacher autonomy.

Another qualitative study was conducted by Berry (2013) that was meant to measure teachers' professional autonomy in England. The study was carried out by interviewing teachers, educational experts and heads of departments and gathering some written responses from them. The research suggests that TA remains restricted, while any independence of action depends heavily on the production of outcomes.

The study also identifies a detachment between teachers' aspirations about TA and that of some head-teachers. There is also a disconnection between the goals of teachers and the policies of the authorities. There were also differences in the way teachers perceived autonomy and their goals in teaching. Some teachers were not comfortable with the idea of having to undergo the inspection regime at the institution, which they believed could affect their professional autonomy. The study concluded that teachers' autonomy was restricted, with any autonomous decisions depended on the outcomes predetermined and ideologically driven outcomes. Interestingly such outcomes are met in those schools that enjoyed popularity among the stakeholders. In short, the teachers were optimistic about TA and enjoyed it only in those schools that enjoy market popularity (Berry, 2013). Berry (2013) suggests that although the British government expressed its commitment to establish an autonomous teaching profession, such autonomy would not be able to exist in a system that is driven by market forces and government policies (Berry, 2013). While this study was entirely qualitative in nature and has depth in gathering information from the participants, it lacks the provision to gather data anonymously from the participants.

In a qualitative doctoral study among teachers in Bahrain, Hasan (2014) employed in-depth interviews, observations, and reflective writing to explore teachers' beliefs and professionalism. The research identified that the teachers in Bahrain believe that any form of control in education – increased monitoring, collaborative culture and academic practices, and imposition of certain teaching strategies restricted their autonomy (Hasan, 2014). –The teachers felt that they were put through a set of administrative procedures like peer reviews and observations merely for the sake of satisfying bureaucratic demands rather than for genuine

development of teaching and learning. The study indicated that the teachers' perceptions changed depending on the control exercised by various factors like superiors and government authorities (Hasan, 2014). The research concluded that Bahraini teachers considered such controlling measures at work a hindrance to their autonomy. Although this research involves in-depth interviews and other ways of qualitative methods to collect data, this is also a single-method study while a mixed method would have provided more reliable data from the participants.

Another doctoral research teacher autonomy was carried out among Saudi Arabia's teachers using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations by Abdulaziz (2011) where the researcher collected qualitative data to explore the degree to which Saudi Arabia's public-school teachers engage in materials development that would indicate their teacher autonomy (Abdulaziz, 2011). This research employed narrative and grounded theory approaches to analyse the data. While the researcher investigated Saudi educators' willingness and ability to take control of learning and pedagogy – what they teach and how they teach – many participants who claimed that they were exercising autonomy at work were found to have a misconstrued notion of the concept of autonomy. The teachers either did not know what autonomy means or they had a different idea about the concept. According to the researcher, even if teachers in Saudi Arabia were granted TA, the actual level of autonomy is not evident; it is only a mere perception of the teacher (Abdulaziz, 2011). The methods used in this study and the background are like that of Mexico where the teachers did not have a clear notion about the concept of teacher autonomy or employing TA in their teaching profession (Nucamendi, 2009).

In a doctoral study by Wong (2010) exploring teacher perceptions on their autonomy in classroom practices in Hong Kong, semi-structured interviews were

used to collect information and inductive methods to analyse the data. This qualitative study suggests that teachers have different views about their responsibilities as teachers. In other words, while one of them felt that she was responsible for executing the curriculum, syllabi and assessment, the other teachers believed that they had a shared responsibility with the students in the learning process. The research indicates that cultural aspects play an influential role in shaping the perceptions of teachers (Wong, 2010). In this research too, multiple methods of collecting information would have enhanced the quality of data.

To look at some studies of common result, it can be noted that while the qualitative study in Saudi Arabia showed results of having a dire lack of teacher autonomy, another qualitative study in the UK, a country with a school system that is among the most autonomous in the world (Greany, 2014) also recorded a lack of teacher autonomy. Yet another report based on the first large-scale quantitative study among teachers in the UK indicated the opinion of teachers in the public sector that they did not feel empowered while those in the private sector were slightly better (Lough, Teachers have second-lowest autonomy of 11 professions , 2020).

Connected to this, another qualitative exploratory research study that was conducted at Bucklands Academy to investigate whether the autonomy accorded to the institution benefitted the teachers there and to what extent it influenced their role as teachers (McGowan, 2015) is significant. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentary analysis. The findings of the study highlighted that although the school enjoyed a significant level of freedom to set its guidelines and policies for raising its standards, the teachers did not get to enjoy much of the freedom as their performance was evaluated based on their



students' academic results, which put pressure on the teachers to 'teach to produce results' (McGowan, 2015).

In short, it can be observed that in most of the studies on teacher autonomy discussed here, the researchers have used qualitative methods to collect information. This is because qualitative study addresses the ‘how’ questions in the research and enhances better understanding of participants’ experiences. In other words, qualitative research gathers more data from the participants can provide answers with flexibility and ease with minimal restrictions. In addition, qualitative research allows the researcher to pose questions that are not easy to be quantified to understand participant experiences (Cleland, 2017). While qualitative data provides a rich source of information, it is suggested that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods would make the data more reliable and mutually supportive of each other (Creswell & Clark, *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*, 2007).

For this research, I have found SASS-STA and TAS (Moomaw) to be reliable and satisfy acceptable levels of validity as they are closest to the context of my research of TA. Studies have used the SASS-STA and TAS (Moomaw) to study teacher autonomy in US context and have found it to measure teacher autonomy with statistical significance. The studies on the reliability and validity also justify why I have adapted my own TAS, and how the reliability and validity of my own instrument should not be too different even though factor analysis was not done.

## 2.5. Conceptual framework

For this research, I will look at the various factors that influence TA and teachers’ perceptions of TA and examine whether the teachers have a common understanding of the concept of TA or whether the perceptions differ among teachers

and teacher-managers. Below is the conceptual framework incorporating the key concepts discussed in the literature review chapter as presented below. They include marketization of education, performativity, policies, teacher-professionalism, decision-making ability, job satisfaction and teacher-motivation:

- (a) Marketization of education: Teacher autonomy cannot exist in a system that is driven by market forces and government policies, and for this reason, many teachers don't believe that there's real autonomy (Berry, 2013),
- (b) Performativity: Teachers are evaluated based on their students' performance, which obviously puts pressure on the teachers to 'teach in order to produce results' (McGowan, 2015),
- (c) Influencing factors: Teachers' perceptions of autonomy are influenced by many factors - institutional, social, political, religious, cultural and legal policies (Hanson, 1991),
- (d) Teacher professionalism: Teacher autonomy or "teacher professionalism" involves a set of capabilities and knowledge of teachers, the purpose and ethical underpinnings of their work, the level to which teachers are able to exercise independent and critical judgment, their role in shaping and leading changes in education, and their relationship to policy makers (Thomas, 2011),
- (e) Teacher decision-making: Freedom and flexibility in the classroom are highly influential in teachers' decisions to remain in teaching (Brunetti, 2001) Teachers feel that they are in control of the classroom when they determine the curriculum, develop the teaching methods, select teaching

materials, establish the daily schedule, and enforce the classroom management system (Lee et al., 1991)

(f) Job satisfaction: Autonomy is vital in gaining job satisfaction among teachers (Charters, 1976; Franklin, 1988; Gnecco, 1983)

(g) Teacher-motivation: Teachers show a higher level of job satisfaction and increased level of motivation while having autonomy to design materials and teach their self-designed materials (Banegas, 2013)

### Conceptual framework for teacher autonomy



The presence of teacher autonomy is determined by factors like teachers' decision-making ability, teacher motivation, teacher professionalism, job satisfaction and teacher retention. However, the study of the literature indicates that TA is

influenced by marketization, performativity, institutional and government policies, political and cultural environment and institutional leadership as indicated in the chart.

## 2.6. Key themes identified

I have identified from the key themes from the literature that are areas that influence TA or the impacts of TA on teachers. These themes are the summary of the readings and were instrumental in designing the data collection instruments. The themes also form the foundation on which my theoretical framework was constructed.

### 2.6.1. Theme 1: Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation is an integral factor of teaching success. Teacher motivation involves or is signified by teachers' willingness to stay in the profession, love of teaching and enthusiasm at work. The available literature that explores this area in Singapore context is extremely limited and therefore we have to look into educational contexts in other countries. I shall explore the literature suggesting a link between teacher autonomy and teacher motivation, I shall identify the connection between teacher autonomy and teacher retention, and teacher autonomy and teachers' passion or enthusiasm for teaching.

#### *2.6.1.1. Teacher autonomy leading to motivation.*

The connection between teacher autonomy and teacher motivation has been the subject of many studies. Research indicates that teacher autonomy is one of the basic psychological needs that supports teacher motivation (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Benson too suggests that teacher motivation and teacher autonomy are closely linked (Benson, 2007). Benson's view is endorsed by Banegas (2013) in a study

among ESL teachers in Argentina. When the teachers had the autonomy to develop their teaching materials and had control in the teaching content, they felt motivated. Banegas suggests that these teachers who are motivated are successful in motivating their students and colleagues. According to the teachers, when they realized that they were fully capable, autonomous, and confident, their materials acquired positive features like creativity and fun, and the lessons became more context-responsive and class activities better organized in terms of complexity (Banegas, 2013). A similar view is expressed by Crouch in a study among Finnish teachers. Unlike in the case of Korean teachers, Finnish teachers expressed an entirely different view about teacher autonomy. Finnish teachers are granted high levels of autonomy (Ng & Hargreaves, 2013) and they are free from external pressures such as inspection, standardized testing and government control (Crouch, 2015). The teachers there felt inspired by their freedom to experiment with various things in class.

However, it must be noted that teachers from culturally different contexts may think otherwise. Unlike in Finland where teachers welcomed autonomy in their system and felt motivated by that, the situation is very different in South Korea where teachers did not see autonomy as a positive development (Hong & Youngs, 2015). A study conducted by Hong and Youngs (2015) pointed out that teachers in South Korea were neither convinced nor comfortable with the autonomy they were provided. They did not feel empowered or motivated as they felt the autonomy artificial.

#### *2.6.1.2 Motivation leading to job satisfaction.*

Another key idea that affects teacher autonomy is job satisfaction that leads to their motivation. Many researchers have suggested that teachers consider

autonomy as a necessary component for job satisfaction. Charters (1976), Franklin (1988), Gnecco (1983) and other researchers point out that autonomy is vital in gaining job satisfaction among teachers. In addition, Lee et al. (1991) points out that nurturing cooperative environments and allowing TA in their classroom practices could lead to efficacy and satisfaction among teachers. For teachers, teacher autonomy is a prerequisite for teacher satisfaction. In short, self-developed materials and a say in the teaching content make teachers feel autonomous and motivated as seen in the case of Argentine teachers. Teachers feel that they are in control of the classroom when they determine the curriculum, develop the teaching methods, select teaching materials, establish the daily schedule, and enforce the classroom management system (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991). Teachers consider themselves as having increased efficacy when they gain control of their classroom environment. In short, teacher autonomy is inseparable from teacher satisfaction.

#### *2.6.1.3. Job satisfaction leading to teacher retention.*

The next area to explore is the link between teacher autonomy and teachers' decision to stay in their profession or teacher retention. Brunetti states that teachers' freedom and flexibility in the classroom are highly influential in their decision to remain in teaching (Brunetti, 2001). Another example is seen in a recent study in the US where teachers suggested that they felt motivated to stay in their profession when they had the autonomy to teach certain content area (Parr et al., 2020) which is in other words, curricular autonomy. This view is also supported by the results of a study in the US context where the researcher indicates that curricular and pedagogical autonomy leads to job satisfaction, and job satisfaction determines whether teachers choose to remain in their profession (Wright et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the studies suggest that teacher autonomy is closely linked to teacher motivation that comprise job satisfaction, interest to teach and decision to stay in the profession. Teachers enjoyed teaching when they were given the authority to develop or select their teaching materials, decide on their teaching methods and are in control of their teaching content.

#### 2.6.1. Theme 2: Planning and decision-making

Planning and decision-making on matters pertaining to teaching are important for the success of the education system (Laguna-Sanchez et al., 2020). This section will explore the views of researchers on how teacher autonomy shapes or fails to shape these pre-teaching responsibilities. There is a limited literature exploring this in Singapore, or even from wider South-East Asia, and therefore where appropriate we will look further afield. After exploring the literature suggesting a strong connection between planning, decision-making and teacher autonomy, I shall identify recurrent sub-themes appearing in the literature: first, the relationship between teacher autonomy over planning and teacher motivation; second, teacher planning autonomy and teacher effectiveness; and third, varying emphasis placed on the importance of this aspect of autonomy in different cultural contexts.

##### *2.6.1.3. Factors impacting autonomy in planning.*

Planning and decision-making have been long been suggested as a key element of teacher autonomy and has featured in studies for several decades. Back in 1991, Hanson (1991) pointed out that teacher autonomy is impacted when restrictions are made on pre-teaching tasks like dictating textbooks and sometimes even specific curricula, the court system that controls issues such as prayer in

schools and controlling the use of books, the school board which may stipulate teaching strategies, and the school administrator who expects teachers to fill certain roles (Hanson, 1991). Similarly, Lee et al. (1991) noted in the same period that teachers feel that they are in control of the classroom only when they determine the curriculum, develop the teaching methods, select teaching materials, establish the daily schedule, and enforce the classroom management system.

#### *2.6.1.4. Teacher decision-making leading to teacher satisfaction.*

More recent literature has enabled us to explore the importance of this aspect of teacher autonomy. First, several studies have identified a relationship between teacher control over planning and decision-making and teacher satisfaction (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019). In short, self-developed materials and a say in the teaching content make teachers feel autonomous and motivated as seen in the case of Argentinian teachers studied by Banegas (2013) and in the case of Saudi Arabian teachers studied by Albedaiwi where the researcher views that teachers become autonomous when they take ownership of their self-developed materials (Albedaiwi, 2011). They were motivated and were successful in motivating their students and colleagues. According to the teachers, when they realized that they were fully capable, autonomous, and confident, their materials acquired different features like creativity and fun, and the lessons became more context-responsive and class activities better organized in terms of complexity (Banegas, 2013) that make them successful at work.



#### *2.6.1.5. Teacher autonomy in planning leading to teacher effectiveness.*

A second theme that predominates in the literature is the relationship between teacher autonomy over planning and teacher effectiveness (Berry, 2013). Finnish and Swedish teachers felt that with more autonomy given to them, their work was more effective, and they were able to make effective decisions concerning their teaching environment (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019) that involved pre-teaching responsibilities like lesson planning and materials preparation.

However, there is variation between teachers in their evaluation of the importance of autonomy over decision-making and planning. A study in Mauritian ESL context shows the belief of the teachers that while they wanted more autonomy in decision making, the authorities lack trust in the teachers' abilities (Payneandy, 1998). However, the situation is very different in South Korea where teachers do not always see 'autonomy' as a positive development (Hong & Youngs, 2015). The teachers in Hong and Youngs' research pointed out that teachers in South Korea were neither convinced nor comfortable with the autonomy they were provided. To make things worse, they did not feel empowered as they felt the autonomy artificial (Hong & Youngs, 2015). Instead, they preferred to have clear directives on the various stages of their lesson planning and decision making in their profession.

In summary, then, the extant literature points to the importance of planning autonomy to both motivation and effectiveness in diverse cultural settings. However, the contrasting emphasis placed on this element of autonomy in different contexts reaffirms the importance of studies to investigate how it is viewed in other parts of Southeast Asia including Singapore.

### 2.6.2. Theme 3: Teaching

This section will explore the views of researchers about how teacher autonomy shapes or fails to shape the teaching activity. Teaching activity involves the implementation of various methods to instruct the learners, managing the classroom, providing care as a teaching quality, and teaching as an act of collegial collaboration. I will explore the literature connecting the link between teacher autonomy and teaching methods, teachers' role in providing care, and their collegial collaboration at work.

#### *2.6.2.3. Teacher autonomy in deciding on teaching methods.*

Recent studies have stated a link between teacher autonomy and teaching success as seen from a study conducted among higher education teachers in Bahrain. The teachers there believe that any form of control in education – increased monitoring, collaborative culture and academic practices, and imposition of certain teaching strategies – restricted their autonomy (Hasan M. , Bahraini School English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Professionalism under New Educational Reforms in Bahrain: An Interpretive Perspective, 2015). The teachers felt that they were put through a set of administrative procedures like peer reviews and observations merely for the sake of satisfying bureaucratic demands rather than for genuine development of teaching and learning. This study agrees with the research by Lee, Dedrick and Smith who claimed that teachers consider themselves as having increased efficacy when they gain control of their classroom environment (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991). However, these findings differ from what was observed in the study among the Korean teachers who expressed satisfaction when they were instructed the tasks rather the tasks being left to them to decide (Hong & Youngs, 2015). These two

studies also highlight an entirely different set of perceptions among teachers from two different countries within Asia.

#### *2.6.2.4. Teacher autonomy enhancing teaching quality.*

Studies have also shown that when teachers become autonomous, their lessons became more context-responsive and class activities better organized in terms of complexity. Teachers involved in a study in Argentina (Banegas, 2013), Finland (Crouch, 2015) and Sweden (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019) believed that neither they nor their institution set an agenda for them to follow strictly as the teachers were self-directed and experienced, and their teaching model was a result of individual effort and collegial collaboration. The importance of collegial collaboration with peers is also stated in another study that calls teacher collaboration as a factor presumably shaping teacher quality instruction that is the key to student learning (Vangrieken et al., 2015).

The teachers also believed that they enjoyed autonomy that led them to perform as successful teachers who believed that the pinnacle of achievement lies in student performance and satisfaction. From the literature, it can be presumed that if teacher autonomy acts as a catalyst for student success, it is an inevitable factor in a successful education system (Sinclair A. L., 2017). In the case of the teachers mentioned earlier, they believed that they felt motivated when their students expressed their positive view that they saw their teachers active, interested, participatory and independent in class (Banegas, 2013). Although these studies show much about how autonomy helped the teachers make their teaching more effective thereby benefiting their students by empowering them as autonomous learners and make the teachers more collaborative with their peers at work, the study does not

explore much about how the teachers perceive teacher autonomy or what according to the teachers are the factors that contribute to autonomy.

#### *2.6.2.5. Other views among teachers on their responsibilities.*

It is also relevant to explore situations where cultural aspects play an influential role in shaping the teachers' perceptions of and attitude towards teacher autonomy. A doctoral study by Wong among senior high school students in Hong Kong in 2010 is another research of interest in my study as Hong Kong is geographically closer to Singapore, its population and culture are similar in many ways to those of Singapore's, the study is on autonomy in classroom practices, and it involves teachers' perceptions. However, Wong's qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews to collect data and inductive methods to analyse them. The study highlights that teachers have different views about their responsibilities as educators. While one of them felt that her prime responsibilities lied in executing the curriculum, syllabi and assessment, the other teachers believed that they had a shared responsibility with the students in the learning process. This example also suggests that teachers have varied views on their responsibilities as teachers.

#### *2.6.2.6. Lack of trust deterring teacher autonomy.*

While discussing teacher autonomy, it is also important to study the way autonomy is explored in different contexts and how trust plays a role in determining the level of autonomy among teachers. In Berry's research, teachers felt that when people are told to read a particular book or do a particular thing, then the system is constraining what the teachers are doing, and that will tell them how to teach rather than leaving the choice to the teachers. For this reason, the teachers interviewed

don't believe that there's real autonomy (Berry, 2013). While on the one hand, the authorities encourage teacher autonomy; on the other hand, stringent measures are taken to improve the quality of the education system that includes teachers to learn and replicate from more successful systems like that of Singapore (Nussbaum, 2010).

A similar lack of trust is observed in the Mauritian context reflecting the perceptions of authorities. The authorities have a lack of trust in teachers' ability to fulfil their roles in education, a lack of confidence in the ability of teachers (Payneandy, *Teacher Autonomy and the Quality of Education in Mauritius*, 1997). This lack of trust also ends up in a lack of initiative from the authorities to provide the necessary training for the teachers, which in turn makes the teachers perform poorly in teaching. While there is a strong urge for teachers to be autonomous, there is also a need to have some form of control over teachers. In this context, which is very different from the other studies discussed here, two key elements for successful teacher autonomy are lacking: training for teachers to be successful in an autonomous environment and the authority's trust in the teachers' ability. The study exposes that the authorities in Mauritius are not clear about the benefits of teacher autonomy, and they do not believe in investing in their teachers by training them to be successful implementers of TA in their classroom practice.

In short, various research studies have suggested links between teacher autonomy and classroom teaching. Various studies show that while increased monitoring and sanctions hinder teacher autonomy, teachers gaining control of their classroom environment enhances learning. In addition, when teachers are trusted by the authorities on the choices that they make, teaching becomes more effective.

There is no sufficient literature to show a clear link between teacher control and teacher autonomy in classroom teaching. This is an area to research further.

#### 2.6.3. Theme 4: Assessment

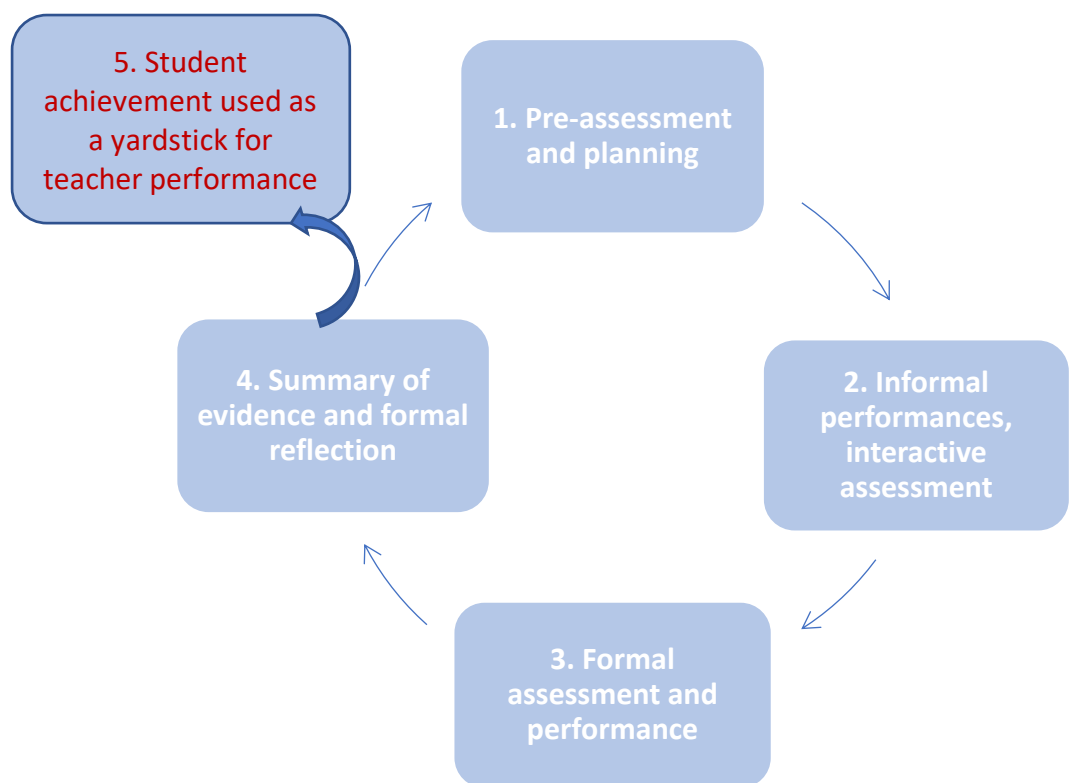
This section will explore the views of researchers about how autonomy shapes or fails to shape assessment and tasks related to it. Teaching activity involves various ways of conducting assessment for the learners. Here, I will explore the literature connecting the link between teacher autonomy and assessment including formative and summative assessment, teachers' decisions on assessment decisions, setting of questions, their weighting, and deadlines.

##### *2.6.3.3. Aims of assessment.*

Assessment forms a crucial part of teachers' responsibility. Research studies share similar views on the aims of assessment. For example, they agree that the purpose of assessment is to improve teacher quality and demonstrate impact on student outcomes, accreditation, program improvement and self-reflection (Richmond et al., 2019). A study by Chen & Bonner on classroom assessment also has closely similar views. The study states that assessment benefits students to understand more their learning and helps teachers to learn about their own instruction, formally and informally gather information about individual and group achievement in class, make instructional decisions to improve their teaching, and class achievement can be used in the teachers' communication with students, parents and school leaders (Chen & Bonner, 2020). In short, both studies emphasize the benefits of assessment for teachers and learners.

However, literature also claims that the aims of assessment have become diverted and have become different from its original aims in the modern education system. For example, high-stakes assessments like board exams, and other student assessment and their performance or achievement is sometimes used as a measurement of teachers' success in their role as educators.

**Assessment framework adopted from (Chen & Bonner, 2020)**



As seen from the chart, assessment consists of the four stages – pre-assessment and planning, informal performances and interactive assessment, formal assessment, and performance, and finally, summary of evidence and formal reflection (Chen & Bonner, 2020). However, in some educational contexts, assessment can take a different route by being used as a yardstick to measure or assess teacher performance based on student achievement.

#### *2.6.3.4.Types and attributes of assessment.*

Assessment consists of four stages that are pre-assessment, the learning cycle, formal assessment and providing assessment evidence (Chen & Bonner, 2020). Assessment involves test and exam time scheduling, setting of exam papers, conducting formative and summative assessment and post-exam processes including exam moderation. Teachers conduct assessment through ongoing semestral tests, end-of-term exams, assignments, presentations, quizzes, class discussions, peer assessment, class participation, teacher-monitored self-assessment by students, and portfolio assessment. This section will explore the views of researchers about how teacher autonomy shapes or fails to shape teachers' responsibilities on deciding on the mode of assessment, choice of questions, weighting for assessments, duration of tests, and pass and fail rate of their students.

#### *2.6.3.5.Teachers' views on teacher autonomy in assessment.*

Teachers hold different perceptions about teacher autonomy at work. A qualitative study by Wong (2010) in Hong Kong's educational context suggests that teachers have different views about their responsibilities as educators. While one of them felt that she was responsible for executing the assessment in her role as a teacher, whereas the other teachers believed that they had a shared responsibility with the students in the learning process (Wong, 2010). The teachers in this research perceive that they had such levels of autonomy to carry out their responsibilities, however, these are mere observations or insights. This is like the situation of teachers in Saudi Arabia who also believe that they exercise autonomy, but in effect, they do not exercise the level of autonomy that they perceive they do (Abdulaziz, 2011). Contrasting both these studies is the research among Finnish educators who



are trained to handle various situations and take ownership of their work and as a result of their training, they are able to understand the concept of autonomy and are able to employ it to achieve the best results from their students' performance (Crouch, 2015). It is also important to note that teachers in Finland do not believe in producing results through assessment to denote the mark of quality. Instead, they consider the high ranking of their education system as a by-product of the system rather than the central goal (Crouch, 2015).

#### *2.6.3.6. Digressing focus of assessment hindering teacher autonomy.*

Teachers also feel pressurised when assessment loses its original aims or focus. As stated by Payneandy (1997), teachers are constrained by the expectations of the system like examinations and related tasks which would affect their autonomy at work including tasks related to assessment (Payneandy, 1997). In this study, Payneandy points at the struggles that teachers undergo when there is too much of control or when there is a lack of autonomy by the system having high expectations from teachers. This is explained in another study by McGowan. This study in the UK's private education context shows that the teachers did not get to enjoy much of the freedom as they were evaluated based on their students' performance, which put pressure on the teachers to 'teach to produce results' (McGowan, 2015), an exact opposite to the situation in Finnish education.

Looking at the studies above, it can be observed that while it is a common practice to teach to produce results, the teachers are put through unnecessary stress to produce results while instilling fear of being evaluated based on wrong criteria. The culture of putting pressure on teachers to produce results can be understood in the light of some specific studies that are relevant to Singapore's PIHL context. As Ball

stated, in such a culture, teachers are subjected to judgments, comparisons, and displays as a means of incentive, control and change (Ball, 2010). As a result, it brings in a sense of insecurity among teachers, and they become less confident about their abilities in teaching. Moreover, performativity brings in a culture of individual contest instead of cooperation and trades collective responsibility as teachers are made responsible for the balance between the security of their job and their contribution to the institution (Ball, 2010). The contribution mentioned here is often through student achievement or student performance in their assessment.

In short, the research studies discussed here points out that first, there is a link between teacher autonomy and assessment. Second, most of these studies have suggested assessment autonomy as a key element of teachers' overall autonomy. In other words, without assessment autonomy, it is difficult for teachers to claim having teacher autonomy. However, in the context of a highly centralised education system such as Singapore where almost everything about assessment is centrally decided, it is unclear to what extent there is meaningful assessment autonomy. While it can also be observed that in some contexts, student achievement is used as a yardstick to measure teacher performance, and teachers are put under tremendous pressure to produce results.

#### 2.6.4. Theme 5: Professional Development

Professional development is part of teachers' ongoing progress and growth in their profession. According to Lundstrom (2015), teacher autonomy involves the freedom for teachers to decide on their choices of professional development that are aimed at enhancing teaching. This includes higher studies that teachers undertake, ongoing training programs, involvement in research, writing, publication and,

attending seminars and workshops that are aimed at enhancing their professional capabilities to help their learners achieve their potential. Literature exploring professional development of teachers in Singapore or South-East Asia is limited. Therefore, I will be drawing information from the contexts in other countries and explore the literature to identify connections between teacher autonomy and teachers' ability to make decisions on their professional development. After that, I shall identify the common sub-themes in the literature. The following paragraphs in this section will study the relationship between teachers' decision-making autonomy and teachers' ability to make independent choices on their higher education options, teachers' decision-making autonomy and their ability to attend ongoing training programs, conduct research, write and publish their papers, and attend seminars and workshops that are aimed at their professional growth.

#### *2.6.4.3. Teacher autonomy in deciding their professional growth.*

Recent research studies have stated a connection between teacher autonomy and teacher-professional development. A study by Banegas among teachers in Argentina shows that teacher autonomy is linked to teachers' ability to control their development as teachers (Banegas, 2013). These teachers believed that they enjoyed autonomy although they were under the institution's control in making personal decisions concerning their higher studies in the case of teachers in Argentina, suggesting that teachers give less importance to having their say in matters pertaining to higher studies and further training.

However, many other studies show that teachers' involvement is crucial in deciding on their higher study options. Huang suggests that teachers become autonomous only when they can display their ability to be self-directed in their

professional development, not controlled by the authorities in making their choice (Huang, 2011). Leahy and Wiliam (2011) explained this further by saying that when teachers themselves make the decision about what it is that they wish to prioritize for their own professional development, they are more likely to make it work rather than the teachers being under the control of authorities (Leahy & Wiliam, 2011).

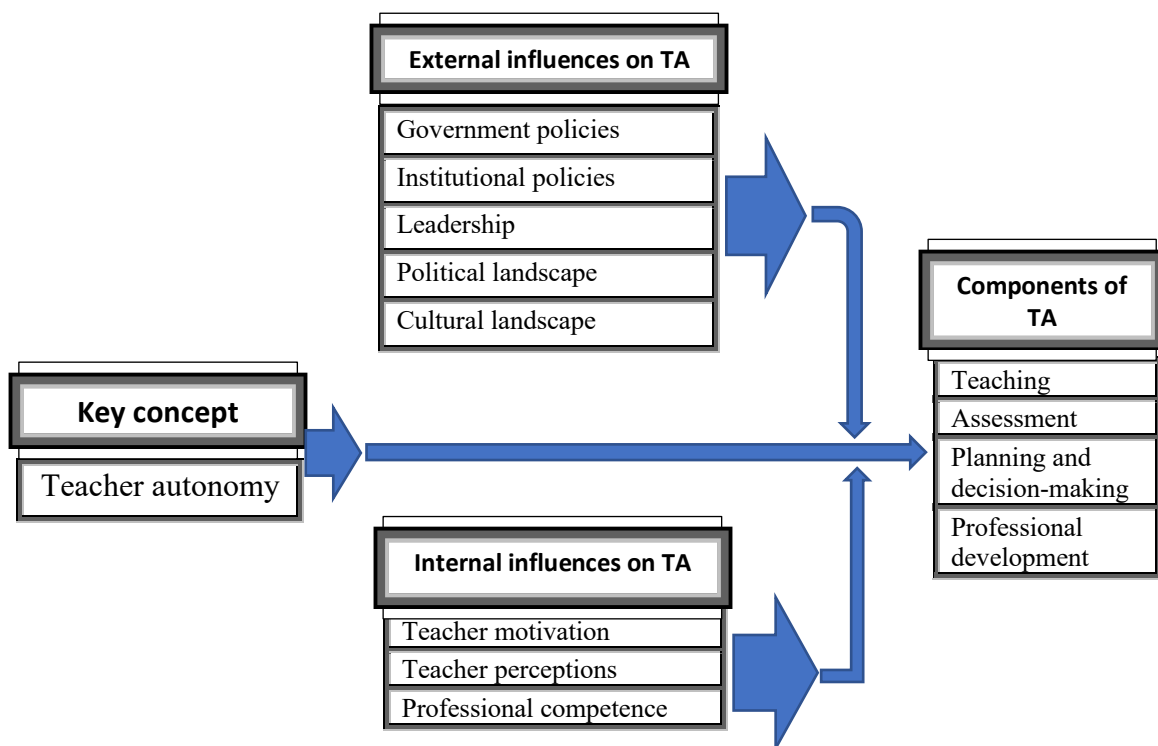
Hargreaves et al (2013) supported this idea by contending that teachers' own choice of their professional development is an important factor that determines the success of their professional development. . This view that shows teachers' role in making decisions pertaining to their own professional development is supported by the views of the National Foundation of Educational Research UK that points out that when teachers are granted more involvement in their professional development goal setting, they get more motivated and tend to stay in their profession (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2020).

To conclude, the literature suggests two different views about teacher autonomy in teachers' professional development. The first scenario is where teachers believed that they were enjoying teacher autonomy even when their rights to make decisions on their professional development were curtailed by the authorities. The other scenario is where teachers believed that they enjoy autonomy only when they are able to make decisions pertaining to their professional development options. Therefore, more research is needed to explore who decides on teachers' professional development and whether teachers are autonomous in making decisions in such situations.

The theoretical framework that I have developed from the literature review can be represented as a flow chart. It can be indicated from this chart that teacher autonomy plays a major role in teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making,

and professional development of teachers – views generated from the literature review. However, the literature also indicated that the role of TA can be influenced or shaped by external influences like government policies, institutional regulations, leadership, political landscape, or cultural setting. Besides that, as stated in the literature review, TA can also be influenced by internal influences like teacher motivation, teacher perceptions or professional competence.

### Teacher autonomy framework



The key concept discussed here is teacher autonomy which influences the four themes that are parts of a teacher's professional practice - teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development of teachers that are mentioned in items a to j listed earlier.

### 2.7. Conclusion

This literature review was primarily directed by my areas of interest which is teacher autonomy at the initial stages of this research which was later augmented by

my own readings of the literature. Much discussion has taken place on teacher autonomy during the international educational conferences at Nottingham 1998, Hong Kong 2000 and Singapore 2002 (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2000), (Centre for research into foreign and second language pedagogy, 1998), (AILA, 2002). However, research in this field has been extremely limited leading to a lack of clarity in the definition/s, purpose/s and possible measurable benefit/s of teacher autonomy.

As seen from the literature, authorities view teacher autonomy differently from teachers. Some leaders in education view that granting autonomy to teachers might lead to misuse of freedom (O'Hara, 2006) although this perception might vary from culture to culture. However, researchers have clearly indicated that teachers believe in autonomy as a necessary component for job satisfaction and motivation. Charters (1976), Franklin (1988) and Gnecco (1983) point out that autonomy is vital in gaining job satisfaction among teachers. Research conducted by Lee, Dedrick and Smith confirms this view that nurturing cooperative environments and allowing TA in their classroom practices could lead to efficacy and satisfaction among teachers. Teachers consider themselves as having increased efficacy when they gain control of their classroom environment. Teachers feel that they are in control of the classroom when they determine the curriculum, develop the teaching methods, select teaching materials, establish the daily schedule, and enforce the classroom management system (Lee et al. 1991).

On the other hand, research also points out that the culture of putting pressure on teachers to produce results or performativity can be understood in the light of some specific studies. As Ball (2010) stated, in such a culture, teachers are subjected to judgments, comparisons, and displays as a means of incentive, control and change

(Ball, 2010). As a result, it brings in a sense of insecurity among teachers, and they become less confident about their abilities in teaching. Moreover, performativity brings in a culture of individual contest instead of cooperation and trades collective responsibility as teachers are made responsible for the balance between the security of their job and their contribution to the institution (Ball, 2010). Looking at the studies discussed, it can be suggested that while it is an unethical practice to teach to produce results, the teachers are put through unnecessary stress to produce results while instilling the fear of being evaluated based on wrong criteria.

Lastly, culturally different countries view teacher autonomy through different lens. For some, teacher autonomy may be an isolating experience, whereas for others, it enhances teaching. For example, South Korean teachers shunned teacher autonomy while the Finnish teachers welcomes the high degree of autonomy granted to them (Ng & Hargreaves, 2013) and the Finnish system produces the best results. Finnish teachers are free from external pressures such as inspection, standardized testing and government control (Crouch, 2015). Here, it is the high-level training that is the basis of teachers getting a great deal of autonomy to choose their teaching methods. To empower its teachers Finland invests heavily in training them on the best ways to practice autonomy in their profession. Finnish teachers felt inspired by their freedom to experiment with various things in class, further indicating that the teachers are trained to experiment with autonomy and produce better results.

This chapter critically reviewed the literature on the constructs of mainly teacher autonomy and related concepts like teachers' perceptions about autonomy, and their expectations of autonomy. I have also looked at various methods that researchers have employed in studying teacher autonomy and suggested a model to study the views of teachers in my study. While the studies have looked at various

countries and contexts, there is a need to look at Singapore that has made its name globally for quality education despite being a geographically small city-state with tight government control on administrative matters. A study in Singapore's private higher education context would share the perceptions of local teachers, and how these perceptions might be different from their own managers and counterparts elsewhere. It would be also relevant to explore the way teachers experience TA in Singapore and the factors that enhance or hinder their autonomy. In short, through my examination of the literature and my current research process, I became aware of some aspects of teacher autonomy in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning that are not well-researched. Therefore, I refined my general areas of interest and arrived at the following research question and sub-questions:

*How do teachers in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning (PIHL) view teacher autonomy?*

- (a) What do teachers understand by the term TA?*
- (b) What do teachers perceive to be the factors currently encouraging or discouraging their autonomy?*
- (c) What is the degree of TA experienced by the teachers?*
- (d) What are the teachers' expectations of TA?*
- (e) How do the views of teachers in a non-managerial capacity differ from teachers in a managerial capacity?*

To conclude, my present study will examine how the teachers in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning view teacher autonomy in all the tasks they undertake pertaining to teaching, what they understand by the term 'teacher autonomy', what are the factors that encourage or hinder teacher autonomy, what teachers expect from an autonomous teaching environment, and how the views of



teachers in managerial capacity differ from that of those in a non-managerial capacity.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter will describe how this research was conducted and how the research questions were approached in this study. It explains and justifies the methods used in carrying out this study. It also presents a brief description of the participants, context, research design, tools of enquiry, methods of data collection, data analysis and a sample of the survey questions. The chapter opens with details of the paradigmatic underpinnings of this research and justifies the choices of methods in the study. This is followed by a discussion on the choice of instruments for data collection that will follow Creswell's Concurrent Triangulation Design where the qualitative and quantitative data are collected at the same time (Creswell, 2009) for data analysis where the qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed separately, and the results are compared for any similarities, differences or combinations. The section ends with a discussion on the ethical issues involved in the study and the limitations of the method employed by the researcher.

### **3.2. Research Design**

The ontology of this research is based on the participants' existential conditions linked to their socio-cultural context that formed their perceptions and beliefs about TA. The epistemology of this study is based on the interpretivist or constructivist view where the views of the participants are analysed and interpreted to find meaning.

The design of this study is established on constructivist and interpretivist views (Cohen et al., 2005) where the interpretivist views that are entrenched in the studies during the 1960s and 1970s provide a clear picture of the varied and complex

world by interpreting beliefs, perceptions, and concepts. Educational researchers who keep this view believe that society exerts a heavy influence on individual ways of thinking and interpretation and that individuals interpret the world based on their background that includes their personal experiences in life and the society's influences on them (Radnor, 2002). This means individuals from different cultures and political environments may interpret their world in totally different ways (for example, the participants in this study who are teachers who hold varied views). This idea is also expressed by Crotty who stated that different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of studying the world by social researchers (Crotty, 1998). However, Radnor (2002) also discussed about the concerns about interpretive research, which are validity (confirmability), reliability (consistency), and generalizability (transferability). A multiple-methods approach, however, reduces the bias that could result from depending on a single method to collect data (Cohen et al., 2005). Unlike positivist research methods that base their research on hypotheses, interpretivist methods use research questions focusing on collecting qualitative data that would be interpreted to arrive at meanings while I have qualitative and quantitative components. In this research, the tools used are survey questionnaires and face-to-face semi-structured interviews where questionnaires and interviews provide quantitative and qualitative data respectively.

The participants in this research are educators that include teachers and teacher-managers, and I encouraged them to provide their views based on their personal experiences and interpretations. These interpretations were systematically studied and interpreted to reach my conclusions. As this research falls in the domain of interpretivist outlook, I was exploring the meanings and interpretations of teacher autonomy from the perspectives of the participants or how they understood the

concept of teacher autonomy. Crotty (1998) stated that interpretivist researcher looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world which is what I was comparing by studying culturally derived meanings of the concept of teacher autonomy from the perspectives of the participants.

In this research, the study of teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy is solely based on the views provided by teachers based on their understanding of the concept of TA. Their opinion is subjective and is not always quantifiable as the information is based on personal feelings and interpretations of the concept of TA. Therefore, the focus of this study is compatible with the theoretical viewpoints of the interpretive paradigm that emphasizes subjectivity, as the teachers' subjective views on TA are the focus of the study here. Interpretive methods depend on interviewing as this method is grounded in strong interaction between the researcher and those participating in the research (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2006). In addition, face-to-face interview an appropriate data collection method to explore various perceptions and interpretations of teachers about teacher autonomy.

According to Robson, the selection of research methods is based on the kind of information that the researcher is looking for, from whom it should be collected, and under what circumstances it is carried out (Robson, 2011). This is a mixed-methods research that uses a combination of online questionnaire surveys and face-to-face semi-structured interviews to enhance the credibility of the study. As a result, the information from the survey provided more data besides the data collected through the face-to-face interviews. These were necessary as collecting data was a challenge due to the socially and politically sensitive nature of my research topic. As the study required collecting information about the perceptions of teachers about TA, and the influencing factors of their perceptions, the strategic instruments selected for

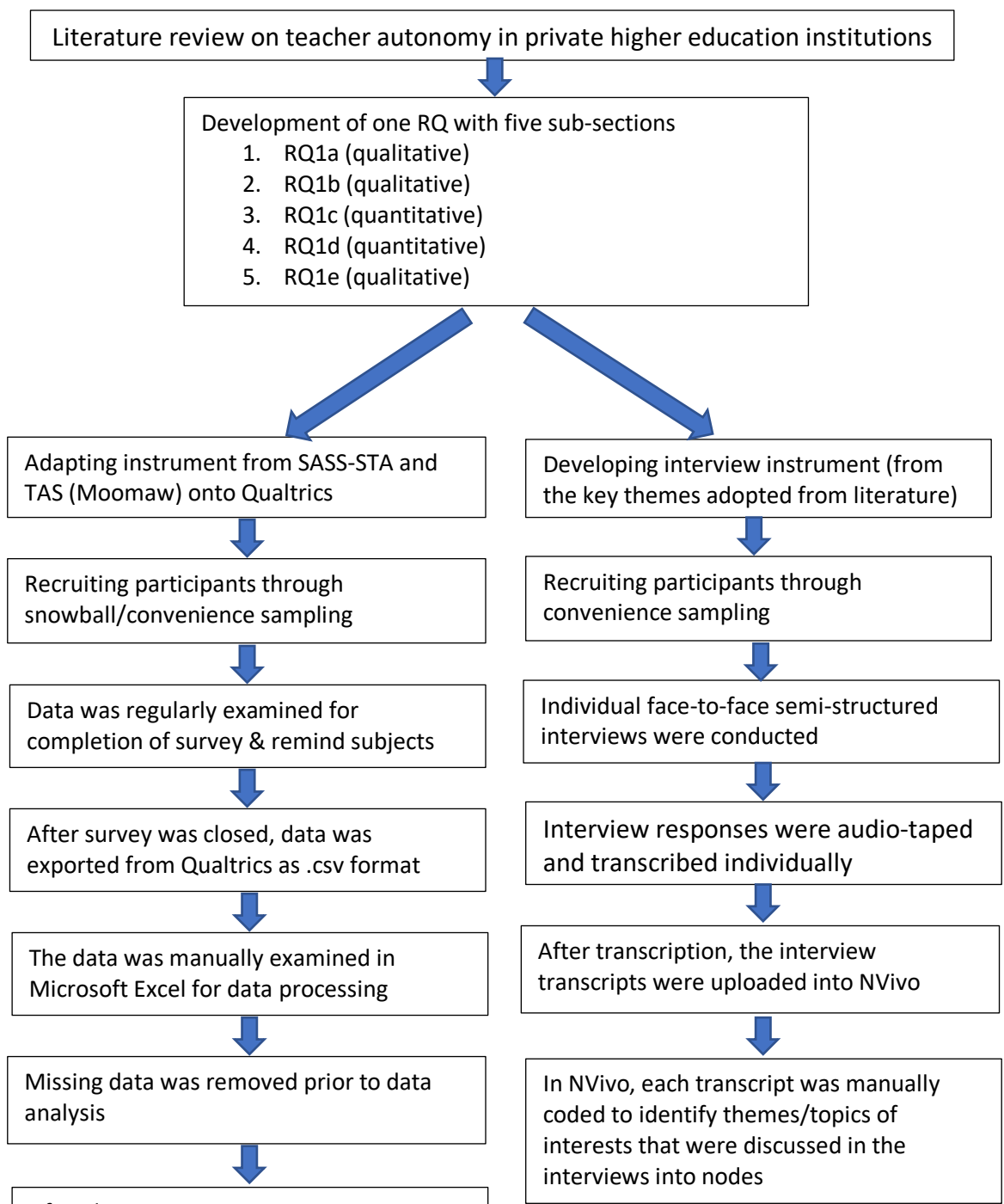
this study – questionnaire survey and face-to-face interviews – were aimed at maximizing the quality of information from the participants on their views on teacher autonomy. While feelings and opinions of the participants were not always quantifiable, the perceptions of the participants could still be observed in the data. By blending the quantitative and qualitative methods, it enabled me to fill the gaps in both methods as the qualitative information would explain the quantitative information and vice versa.

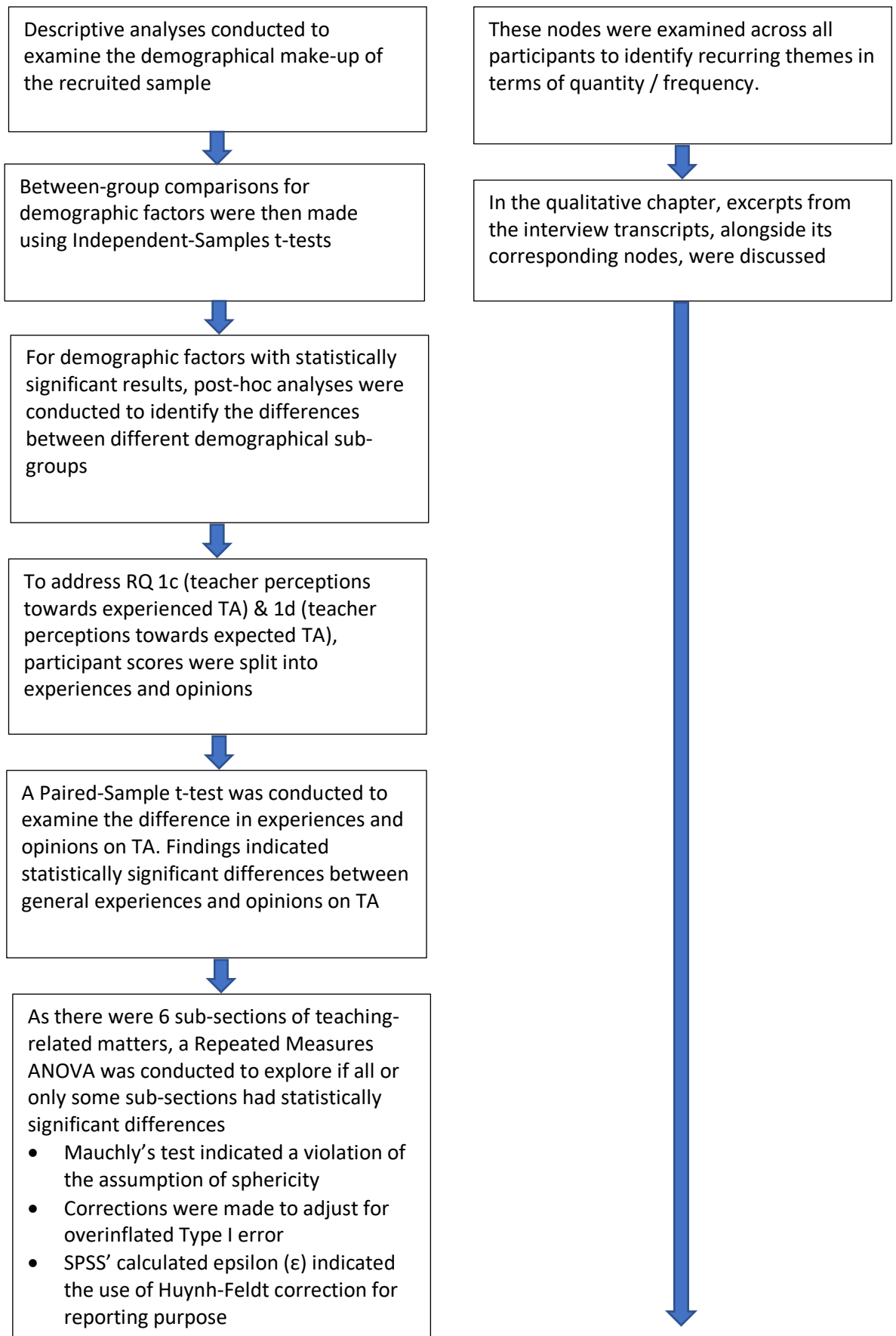
There were many challenges that I faced while planning the data collection. Completing the data collection within a short timeframe by arranging to meet participants for face-to-face interviews at their convenience was one of the major challenges. Therefore, disseminating Qualtrics survey questionnaires to as many participants through email is found to be the most efficient way for data collection. Using this method minimized errors and saved time and effort while it was also fast and the most inexpensive way of gathering information in my research context. As this method did not take much of the participants' time, they were more willing to participate, and I was able to get a better response from them in terms of the quality and amount of information. According to Gable and Wolf (2009), questionnaires, and survey instruments, such as Likert scales are designed to collect and measure a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs about selected subjects (Gable, 2009) as in the case of my study where the participants' attitudes towards and beliefs in teacher autonomy were explored. The quantitative data transforms meaning into numbers making them suitable for statistical analysis (Saldana, 2009). To make the process transparent, I was always willing to attend to the call of participants or to meet them personally if there were any concerns or enquiries about the survey.

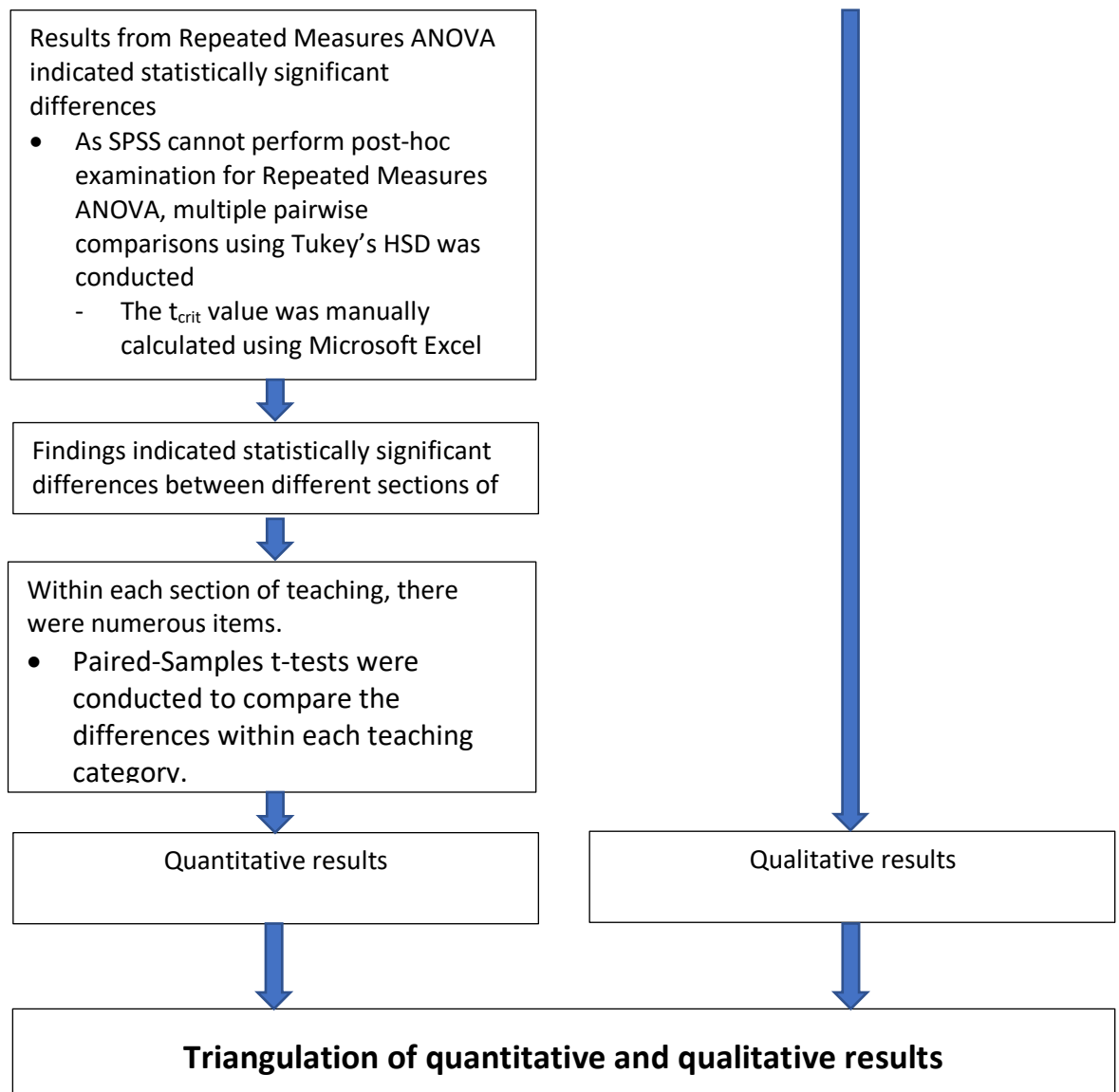
To strengthen the results, the data was triangulated - the conclusions drawn

from the qualitative and quantitative studies were cross verified to find similarities and differences in the data (Phothongsunan, 2010). While there were similarities in the findings, significant differences were also observed in both qualitative and quantitative data which will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

Given that the mixed methods used a triangulation method, the parallel flowchart below shows how both methods were done concurrently for this research:







### 3.2.1. Concurrent triangulation design

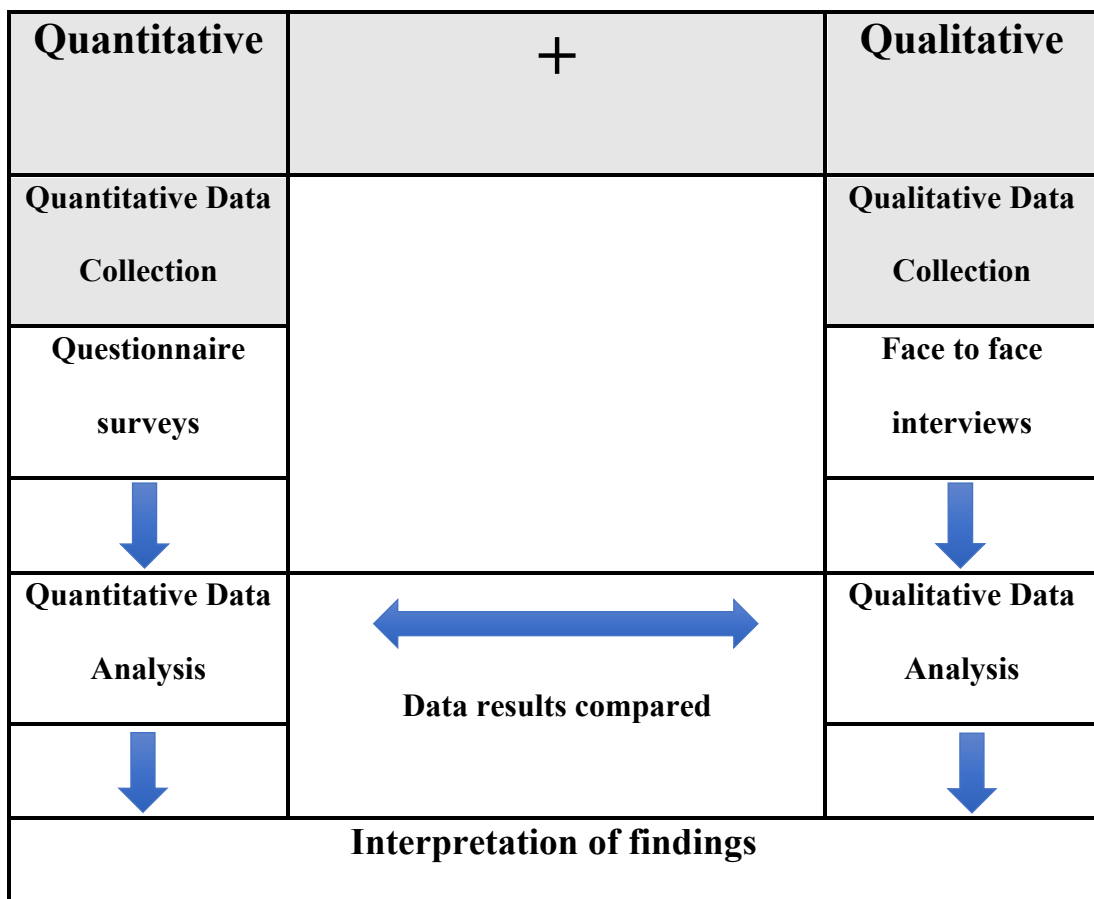
This research used concurrent triangulation design that used a mixed method as the quantitative and qualitative methods have complementary strengths and do not have overlapping weaknesses (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2017). For example, while the face-to-face interviews may be threatening (it is highly personal in nature) to some participants as it took place in front of the researcher, the questionnaire surveys ensured a high level of anonymity to the participants (despite lacking personal touch). The quantitative part of this research is



to obtain teacher’s perceptions towards their experiences and opinions of TA in their workplace and/or teaching-related matters. These perceptions are quantified using the modified TAS’ Likert-scale ratings from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), based on how much they felt that they experienced or felt that they should have TA.

The data collection phase followed Creswell’s Concurrent Triangulation Design where the qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time (Creswell, 2009). In the next phase, the data sets were analyzed separately, and the results were compared for any similarities, differences, or combinations. Concurrent triangulation design is relevant here as it helped me to cross-validate and corroborate findings from quantitative and qualitative methods that were used concurrently as displayed in the chart below.

**Concurrent Triangulation Design Chart**



**Adapted from Creswell and Clark, 2011.**

### 3.3. Research Paradigm

Kim recommends that the circumstances and questions to be addressed in research must be viewed as factors in deciding the kind of research approach to be undertaken by the researcher (Kim, 2003). Therefore, my methodological outlook would influence the selection of instruments and data collection methods (Cohen et al., 2005).

It takes a holistic approach to study any phenomena – teacher perceptions, reflections of certain influences reflected in teachers' work – by linking it with cultural, political, and social contexts (Lodico et al., 2010). In my research, I assume that the nature of the reality of the teachers' professional life can be subjective. This study explores the teachers' beliefs and perceptions about teacher autonomy and links it with the social, cultural, and political contexts of the society in which it is entrenched. From an interpretivist view, this research evaluated the data from the participants and interpreted the data based on the participants' socio-cultural background. As a result, this research believes that the views of participants are their individual views that can change according to the environment they live in.

To identify possible emerging patterns or themes that point out possible relationships among the variables in the study, data was collected and analysed. As Gray puts it, after observations are made from the analysis, generalizations and relationships were constructed (Gray, 2014) based on what was observed. As this is an inductive approach, unlike in the deductive method, the study gathers data and makes attempts to establish patterns and meanings. The element of interpretivism in this study sought to explore people's experiences and their views or perspectives

(Gray, 2014) as the study gathers and interprets participants' views on teacher autonomy.

While many research studies are based on existing theories, I carried out my study without having any preconceived idea to be tested. Rather, the study was expected to culminate in the emergence of a theory from the data. It is the data that would shape the processes in this research rather than the preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). In short, it is through gathering and analyzing relevant data that theory is developed and compared with existing theories in this research (Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2018). Moreover, this is a more creative approach (Flick, 2014), as in this approach the researcher does not follow any existing theories that have already been followed by numerous researchers that is the normal case in research studies. I was also encouraged by the doctoral research by Elphinah Nomabandla Cishe at the University of Nottingham in 2011 in which grounded theory was employed (Cishe, 2011). In this research, the success of the study was contributed by the detachment of the researcher from existing theories that closely guide the thought processes of the researcher. Similarly, in my case too, I minimized the influence of any existing theories on my key decisions in my research. Rather, I conducted an independent research inquiry free from too many external influences that could otherwise be binding or restrictive on my research.

#### 3.4. Population of the Study

The population in this research refers to the entire pool of individuals I am studying (teachers in PIHL). Sample refers to the group of individuals that have been

recruited which are representative of the population which I am interested to study for this research.

Singapore has 172 private higher education institutions that offer certificates, diplomas, and degrees in various fields – arts, sciences, and engineering. Just as the student population in these institutions comprises locals and foreigners, the teaching staff population is also made up of Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans. This study involved 157 participants from Singapore's private higher education sector and policymakers or teacher-managers from the institutions involved in the study. The private higher education institutions are scattered across the country in its five districts, and the study sample were all teachers from private institutions of higher learning across Singapore.

The institutions were selected based on convenience sampling and representatives from each of the 12 institutions were invited to participate in the face-to-face interviews, making a total sample size of 12. For selecting the institutions, I contacted as many PIHL through email that I collected using the Ministry of Education directory, and 12 of them volunteered to take part in my research. One thousand teachers from these twelve PIHL located in the five districts of Singapore – North-East, North-West, South-East, South-West and Central (Community Development Council, 2017) – were invited to join the survey. All of them were teaching various subjects ranging from English language, communication skills, engineering, accountancy, banking, business studies, mathematics, statistics, tourism and hospitality, life sciences, sports studies, IT, education, psychology, arts, and media studies, at foundation and diploma and undergraduate levels. Their students are mostly adult learners between the age of 18 and 28. Besides surveys among the 157 participants, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 12 teachers

and leaders in education like level heads, heads of departments, academic directors, and deans of participating institutions. As the institutions selected for this study comprised small, medium, and large ones, they are representative of Singapore's private higher education sector.

### 3.5. Sampling of the Study

Cohen (2005) recommends convenience sampling as it saves time and resources and saves the researcher the effort of recruiting less amenable participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). This research followed convenience sampling as it provided a readily available sample at low cost and allowed quick data collection (Qualtrics, 2023). It is important in a questionnaire survey to gain the participation of the maximum number of participants within a limited period. Time was an important concern as the participants may not stay in the same institution beyond one term. Therefore, reaching out to as many participants as possible in the shortest period was the priority. The research used convenience sampling to reach out to potential participants for both surveys and interviews.

#### 3.5.1. Recruitment of participants for survey

The data from questionnaire surveys had to be collected within a stipulated time of two months so that the information would be consistent and reliable. This was the priority as the participants would change their teaching jobs among various higher education institutions. I decided to have a safe sample of the population from the sample frame (PIHL in Singapore with 14500 teachers). Statisticians agree on having a minimum number of participants when sampling a large population (more than 1000) to derive the best results. The minimum number was determined using sample size determining tools as follows:

### Sampling of participants for survey

	<b>Calculation system</b>	<b>Population size</b>	<b>Confidence level</b>	<b>Margin of error</b>	<b>Recommended sample size</b>
1	Qualtrics	14500	95%	8%	149
2	SurveySystem		95%	7.78%	157
3	Raosoft		92%	7%	155
4	Calculator.net		95	7.8%	157

The calculation recommended to involve an average of 150 participants in the survey as this is the minimum required number for a confidence level of 92-95% and a margin of error of about 8%. In my research, as I have a sample size of 157 while there are 14500 teachers in the private higher education sector in Singapore (Sam, 2017). The sample size fulfils the required minimum criteria for the for survey.

To reach out to as many participants for the survey, I contacted as many private institutions of higher learning as possible through email that I collected using the Ministry of Education directory. However, only 12 of the institutions volunteered to be a part of this research. They agreed to reach out to their staff through email. As a result, about 1000 teaching staff were contacted out of which, 157 agreed to join the survey. The information through the survey questionnaires was gathered from this sample of the population comprising 157 participants.

The survey participants were teachers and teacher-managers from private institutions of higher learning in Singapore comprising small, medium, and large institutions to have a fair representation of all types of the teaching environment and

institutional managements in terms of student population size. The study selects four institutions from each category – small (less than 500 students), medium (500 to 2000 students) and large (more than 2000 students) – based on student numbers or otherwise the size of the institution. By selecting participants from institutions of various sizes of the student body, and those functioning from various geographical locations, a higher degree of generalizability and representativeness was achieved.

The population also consisted of heterogeneous participants and contained different groups for which convenience sampling method suits the research. A size of 157 for a study of this depth would provide reliable results, as the size was sufficient to cover participants of varying experience levels, genders, ethnic groups, and nationalities.

### 3.5.2. Recruitment of participants for face-to-face interview

Face-to-face semi-structured interview participants were selected through a convenient sampling method from the 12 institutions who have already volunteered to be a part of my research. The participants consisted of five teachers and seven teacher-managers who were invited for face-to-face interviews. While there were a much larger number of individual teachers and managers initially agreed for the interview sessions, many of them dropped out at various stages before the commencement of the interviews. In the end, only 12 participants finally agreed to be interviewed probably due to the sensitivity of the research topic and the questions they might have to answer.

The sample also allowed the opportunity to interview educational experts and authorities from the participating institutions for in-depth information and to verify the information that had already been collected through the questionnaire surveys.

### 3.6. Data Collection Methods

There were many stages in the data collection process. First, I conducted the surveys through Qualtrics, an online survey platform; and interviews were conducted personally (dissemination and collection of instruments) so that I could address any queries from the participants personally. As the participants were mostly working on contract teaching, there was a likelihood that they move on to other institutions after the end of their contract. This could hinder the data collection stage of the research. I had to plan the two months for data collection as this is the normal length of an academic term, and many participants may join other institutions after their contract ends which might make data collection challenges. Therefore, I had to plan that the surveys and interviews would be completed within the timeframe as intended in the research plan.

#### 3.6.1. Data collection instruments

This is mixed-method research – a combination of quantitative and qualitative study - designed to explore the perceptions of teachers about TA in Singapore's PIHL and the factors that influence their perceptions. The data was collected through survey questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale and face-to-face interviews.

##### 3.6.1.1. *Survey questionnaire*

This study collected information about the experiences and expectations of 157 participants, which is an acceptable sample size informed by expert opinion from sources like Qualtrics, SurveySystem, Raosoft and Calculator.net. In addition, considering the sensitivity involved in the topic of my research where participant hesitate to volunteer, it is a reliable sample size. I reached out to the participants



through email which was carried out by the institutions that sent the questionnaire survey to their teaching staff and teacher-management staff.

The first part of the study involves gathering information through survey questionnaires prepared on a five-point Likert scale that helped me to quantify the options 1 to 5 that were selected by the participants. The questionnaire was created keeping the research questions in mind. For this purpose, I carried out a comprehensive review of the literature related to teachers' perceptions of TA and policies that might influence teachers' perceptions of TA. Thereafter it was sent for pilot testing and after which it would be modified further for accuracy. Although the participants were emailed the survey link, they were informed that I would be able to provide them with the questionnaire in printed form if that suited their convenience. While paperless surveys are more efficient and inexpensive, the option was given to the participants.

#### 3.6.1.1.1. Description of survey questionnaire

Survey questionnaire has the advantage of collecting a large amount of information from many participants in a short period as in my study where I had only two months to collect the data. This is mainly because most of the private institutions of higher learning in Singapore conduct their foundation programs on a semestral or term basis where each semester or term can be between eight weeks and 12 weeks. I wanted to have the teachers complete the survey within the teaching term itself or else the teaching staff may leave the institution or new staff may join. Not only that this saves time and effort, but it is also an inexpensive option. Moreover, the information gathered from the survey could be easily quantified using analytical methods or specific software. The survey questionnaire was designed in a way that would make it easy for the participants to understand it easily. The responses were also easily quantifiable and could be subjected to the computation of some mathematical analysis (*LaMarca, 2011*). The questions were organized into sections based on the research questions that form the key to this research. In addition, additional space was provided to add their comments to each of the items if they chose to do so.

The survey was carried out through an online questionnaire using Qualtrics which is an online survey tool, used by researchers to build and distribute surveys, as well as conduct online data collection. Qualtrics was selected as this allows data transfer to other types of software smoothly. Qualtrics can also be used to do a quick analysis of the data, as well as manage the data online and access it whenever needed.

The survey instrument (attached in the appendix) also has an informed consent section and information sheet about my research. This was also used during participant recruitment. Items in the modified TAS consist of items from the SASS-STA and TAS (Moomaw). However, as these items were modified so it is an adapted instrument. The items in the instrument were made from multiple instruments and modified. As factor analysis was not done, the exact values of the modified TAS' reliability and validity cannot be quantified. However, I selected these instruments and adapted it into my research as this was the closest teacher autonomy scale that I came across although they were used in the US context.

A significant portion of items in this instrument was adopted and modified from two current existing measures, which were the Schools and Staffing Survey Scale for Teacher Autonomy (SASS-STA) (Gwaltney, 2012) and another instrument of the same name, Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS) (Moomaw, 2005). As some of the items in the questionnaire in the two scales were not relevant to Singapore context, they were combined and adapted into designing a new scale that is relevant to Singapore's private higher education context.

The questions for the survey had to be carefully worded for the new survey form and structured in a manner that would minimize confusion among participants and brings clarity about what was expected of them. The survey questions were divided into five sections that were designed based on the research questions of my study. The Likert-scale questionnaire on a five-point scale was provided, where the points are labelled "*strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree and strongly agree*" as shown below. This research uses a five-point Likert scale also because this gives more flexibility to the participants if they choose to stay neutral about a question and they would not be under any stress to express their views. Neutrality is also a valid

view of the participants, and questionnaires should collect nothing but the perceptions of the participants. The responses from the participants will be coded (for example 1-2-3-4-5) and during the data analysis process, translated into a numerical value that will be used for statistical analysis using SPSS.

**Sample Likert scale used in the survey**

Opinion on <i>teacher autonomy</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Elaborate if your answer is either “ <i>strongly agree</i> ” or “ <i>strongly disagree</i> ”
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The questionnaire (attached in the appendix) was modified in alignment with my research question. The questionnaire begins with demographic information - country of birth, ethnicity, gender, educational qualifications, place of school education, place of post-secondary education, years of teaching experience, and teaching level (predominantly).

The next section asks about the participant’s current experience on teacher autonomy that they exercise at various stages of their work that they had to indicate on a five-point Likert scale. The eight items were related to planning their syllabus, pacing their work, deciding their lesson activities and tasks, deciding their teaching methodology, selecting their course books, deciding on the choice of extra teaching materials, having control over the use of classroom space, and setting discipline standards in their class.

This is followed by questions about teacher autonomy that they exercise in planning and implementation of the curriculum. There were six items in this section, and they were about having their own guidelines and procedures in class, selecting their own objectives for teaching, deciding what they teach in class, selecting their

course books and teaching materials, deciding on extra teaching materials, and deciding on the educational content taught in class.

The next set of questions is about planning and decision making at the workplace. The six items in this section were about making decisions on budget planning, deciding on class timetable policy, participating in decision making at the institution, being a part of the decision-making body about matters related to work, having a say in what their responsibilities are, and having a say in decisions of the school.

The next section is about teacher autonomy in assessment. There were five questions in each set that dealt with deciding the type of ongoing tests that assess the student progress, the type of assignments for students, the type of questions for final exam, the allocation of marks for each section, and about deciding the level of moderation after exam.

The last section is about teacher autonomy in their professional development. The questions were on planning of their professional development activities, the pace of their professional development activities, the time their professional development activities need to be completed, the amount of time teachers spend for professional development activities, pursuing training programs that are aimed at the professional development of teachers, joining any associations that help in their overall development, writing and publishing articles freely, expressing their opinion during staff meetings without any fear, and questioning management decisions when teachers feel they do not benefit the students. At the

end of the survey questionnaire, there was space if they wish to share any other information about teacher autonomy that they were not able to present earlier.

#### 3.6.1.1.2. Rationale for selecting questionnaire survey

Questionnaire survey has advantages that other tools do not have. Unlike face-to-face interviews, survey questionnaires are non-threatening and therefore comfortable for the participants, as it does not involve the researcher. Above all, while using sensitive issues, survey questionnaires are more appropriate, as participants may prefer to provide their views on a questionnaire rather than speaking to the interviewer. This helped me to gather more reliable and unbiased views from participants. Also, questionnaires allowed participants to provide information at their own pace as in my study where the participants had two months to respond as the survey link was alive for two months. Moreover, as questionnaires are one of the most used methods to collect data, participants were familiar with the format.

While a questionnaire-based survey is beneficial in many ways as mentioned earlier, it also has some disadvantages. It was not possible to go back as the respondents as the questionnaire was made confidential. Moreover, there is always a possibility of not getting sufficient responses, or the participants could skip some of the questions. However, in this research, the face-to-face interviews balanced these shortcomings in the survey, as the participants had ample opportunity to speak their views that might have filled the qualitative information that questionnaire surveys are not able to collect.

#### 3.6.1.2. *Face to face interview*

I chose face-to-face interviews as this study might involve information that needs further clarification besides the information gathered from the surveys. Face-

to-face interviews provide qualitative answers to open-ended questions. Other forms of data collection provide only limited information, whereas face-to-face interviews allow flexibility of interaction and controlled digression that might be necessary for gathering a wide spread of information.

#### 3.6.1.2.1. Description of semi-structured interview questions

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were also designed in alignment with my research question (attached in the appendix). The interview questions were also aligned with the survey sections. There were 20 key questions under seven parts such as introduction, perceptions of the concept of teacher autonomy, teaching (kinds of autonomy teachers have and what they should have), assessment (What sort of autonomy do teachers have in the institution and what they think they should have?), planning and decision-making, professional development, and policy implementation. The key questions that I focused on were:

- (a) Please share with me something interesting about your role in this institution.*
- (b) Share with me some information about this institution.*
- (c) How would you define teacher autonomy?*
- (d) Do you think teachers should be granted the freedom to choose their teaching methods? Why / Why not?*
- (e) How do the teachers at your institution exercise or do not exercise their freedom to choose their teaching methods? Why/ why not?*
- (f) Should teachers be granted the freedom to decide on their assessment methods?*
- (g) How do the teachers at your institution have or do not have the freedom to decide their assessment methods?*
- (h) Should teachers be a part of the planning and decision-making committee?*
- (i) How do the teachers at your institution play or do not play any role in the planning and decision-making?*

- (j) Should teachers be encouraged in their professional development?*
- (k) Are the teachers at your institution encouraged in their professional development? Any examples?*
- (l) What are some of the key parameters for your teacher appraisal?*
- (m) What would the management consider as the key indicator of a good/poor teacher during the appraisal?*
- (n) What is the professional behaviour etiquette of the institution?*
- (o) Do you have a clear idea about the Ministry of Education's views on teacher autonomy in PIHL?*
- (p) How are you informed about government decisions on TA?*
- (q) How do you adapt or adopt the policies for your institution?*
- (r) How do you inform your teachers about new government policies that matter to their teaching?*
- (s) How do you develop institutional policies that are in line with the government policies?*
- (t) Who is involved in institutional-level policy development?*

While the focus was on the key questions, each of them also had sub-questions that further provided prompts for the participants. The questions were designed following the same themes as stated in the survey questionnaire.

#### 3.6.1.2.2. Rationale for selecting face-to-face interview

Unlike in survey, face-to-face interviews help to gather rich data that is not otherwise possible to gather from quantitative data collection. Face-to-face interview has been suggested as one of the most effective tools to collect qualitative data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 401). It further highlights that face-to-face interviewing puts less burden on participants, as they then do not have to read and write anything on paper. There are also views that research tools like face-to-face



interviews are direct and therefore personal (Ferrarotti, 2013), so it has its benefits. According to Polkinghorne, face-to-face interviews are more beneficial as they produce more authentic and in-depth descriptions, as the interviewers were able to encourage trust and openness in the interviewees. Such interviews would likely reduce the interviewee's stress level and allows more sharing of information (Polkinghorne, 2009). Face-to-face interviews often have a higher response rate than postal questionnaires, a good reason to consider face-to-face interview (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). Moreover, interviews allow spending more time with participants and collect more information. It is only through interviews that a researcher can take the social clues (Opdenakker, 2006) and allow participants to express their views and the researcher could clarify. Hiller & DiLuzio in 2004 and Carr & Worth in 2001 also share similar views. During face-to-face interviews, the interviewer and participant see each other's faces and read more than what verbal utterances communicate. This is because it allows the researcher to read body language and gestures which can add meaning to the data.

#### 3.6.1.2.3. Interview process

Getting participants for a face-to-face interview on a topic that is highly sensitive in the Singapore context was a challenge. While there were many more participants initially, when it was close to data collection, 12 of them agreed to join the interview. Although I tried to get at least one teacher and one teacher-manager from the institutions, due to the sensitivities involved in the topic, only 12 participants could be confirmed from six institutions. These 12 participants were among the survey sample who are in teaching and leading roles in the private education sector. The interview participants volunteered from all the 12 participating

institutions, expecting that two participants from each institute would take part in the interview. Having two participants from each institution enables cross-referring each other's views. Face-to-face interviews also helped verify and compare the views provided by the participants in the surveys. The participants were informed about the interview on a mutually agreed day and time. They were also informed all the details about the interview, including the topics that might be discussed during the session. The venue was left to the choice of the participants, as it would help them feel more natural and productive in providing information.

The interview questions were open-ended ones and probes were given only when the interviewees digressed from the topic. The participants were given the flexibility to speak the way they wanted without any leading role taken by the researcher except for introducing the leading questions and sub-questions. A semi-structured interview is selected for this study as it provides uninterrupted information on a topic that is predetermined by the interviewer while not imposing too many restrictions on the subjects at the same time, add more information to the surveys. In this way, semi-structured interviews provide the necessary guidance by the interviewer yet giving a high level of flexibility for the interviewee. The questions would give as little guidance as possible to allow participants to talk freely about what is of importance to them based on the context. This enabled me to extract and study the experiences that were shared as important for the participants by coding. Multiple codes could be grouped forming the basis of developing a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

After the interviews, transcription was the next stage. In carrying out the transcription, the close and repeated listening allowed me to become acquainted with and absorbed in the data leading to a deeper understanding of the interview. As I am

interested to be fully involved in transcribing the information gathered from the face-to-face interview, I completed the transcription myself so that I could familiarize with the data. Besides the transcribed data, it was also important to look at the gestures, tones, pitch changes and pauses to analyze the participants' thoughts as in the case of some participants who took long pauses before deciding to share some key information. For this purpose, I took field notes while interacting with the participants during the interview.

### 3.7. Gaining Access and Ethical factors

Several factors were taken into consideration before the research data could be collected. As the research involves educators and authorities, as well as student information (though indirectly from participants), prior consent has to be sought from all the parties involved in the study, which includes teachers, heads of departments deans and academic directors. The ethical considerations were mainly about gaining access to the participants and data, handling the data, interviewing the subjects, and using their documents for analysis. My key responsibility as a researcher was to inform the participants of any changes that might affect them. All data was encrypted and saved in a locked space to safeguard the details of participants and due to the sensitivity of the data.

At the first stage, I sought permission from the university (University of Nottingham) to gain approval for my research instruments and the research design for data collection from the participating teachers. The letter of approval was presented to the participants before conducting the survey and interview. The study was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines set out by the University of Nottingham. The two important ethical issues that were adhered to – confidentiality

and informed consent – were followed in the research (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). First, the participants were assured confidentiality of all the information that they were going to provide. Next, the participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and how its results would be used in the future. They were also informed that they were free to leave the study at any point in time. I made sure that the research or its reporting and publication would not expose or harm the participants in any way by maintaining their names anonymous in all records from the time of data collection. The participants' rights to confidentiality were always respected and I acknowledged any legal requirements on data protection. All participants were also provided with information about the purpose of this research and how the research data would be used. This information was sent to them by email a few days before getting their consent to participate in the study, thereby giving them sufficient time to think about their commitment to participate or decide to decline the offer (Robson, 2011). They were fully informed about the questionnaire survey and interview, and their consent was obtained. In addition, consent was also sought from participants for audio-recording their face-to-face interviews. As they joined the research voluntarily, there were no remuneration or rewards of any kind involved with participating in the research.

Ensuring the confidentiality of the participants taking part in the study was crucial. The researcher did this by making sure that none of their names or any information related to their identity was recorded on the research instruments. All data was encrypted, and the results of the survey and interview were placed in a safe place and were handled only by the researcher.

### 3.8. Data Analysis

Data analysis is aimed at summarizing the data to make it easily understood and to provide answers to the research questions. As for interviews and published documents, the qualitative data was analyzed using NVivo for content analysis. My data analysis was also thematically based on Taylor's approach which reflects a researcher's interest in wider social and cultural procedures recognized through words, leading to the analysis of the social impacts these might bring about (Taylor, 2010). In Taylor's approach, the qualitative data is to be studied to find out what the term 'teacher autonomy' means to different participants, and what educators in Singapore's context mean by that in their classroom work. It had to also look at how meanings are established, used, challenged, and changed. Themes were generated based on my reading of the relevant literature and the recurrence of common themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews. The results from this quantitative analysis were later used in tandem with qualitative data obtained from an interview session for a mixed-methods analysis to answer the research questions.

As there were numerous demographic factors and sections/sub-sections of teaching-related matters, the quantitative data could be useful in identifying 'between-group differences' in perceived TA, as well as uncover differences in teacher expectations and opinions on TA across different teaching sections/sub-sections.

Quantitative data, such as the demographic items and TAS, were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0. Descriptive analyses were used to summarize the overall perceptions towards TA for the sample, as well as make simple statements about demographic differences in perceived TA. T-tests and analyses of variance

were used to compare and evaluate differences between opinions and experiences in perceived TA, as well as within the different demographic factors. When statistically significant, post-hoc analyses and paired-sample t-tests were also used to identify which groups did these differences lie in.

To investigate the differences in perceived TA across the different teaching affairs, a repeated measures analysis of variance was also conducted. As assumptions of sphericity was not met, the Huynh-Feldt corrections was applied when reporting the findings. A critical value for Tukey's Honest Significant Differences (HSD) was also calculated to facilitate multiple pairwise comparisons between the different teaching affairs.

Qualitative data was first transcribed before they were manually coded in NVivo as nodes. One interview transcript served as a pilot for code development. After this interview was coded, the agreeability of the node and agreeability on the coding was decided.

The qualitative part covers demographic and general descriptions about the participants for the face-to-face interview and discussion of the major themes and patterns identified in the data. The themes emerging from the data were cross-referenced to themes invoked in literature. The analysis section discussed demographic variables followed by how coding was carried out. The participants' responses were coded into the following groups: negative, neutral, and positive. Negative responses encompassed participants' replies which were not in favour of teacher autonomy in the identified theme(s), neutral responses were replies in which participants were neither against nor in support of teacher autonomy in identified theme(s), and positive responses were when participants answered favourably towards having TA in the identified theme(s). The response groups in the qualitative

data were made in alignment with the question-themes in the quantitative questionnaire in mind. This allowed for a qualitative-quantitative comparison of the responses from both phases to be analysed with a pre-defined categorization. In other words, categorising the responses this way allowed viewing them in three groups for easier analysis where I have put “*Strongly Agree*” and “*Agree*” as “*Positive*”, “*Neither Agree nor Disagree*” as “*Neutral*”, and “*Disagree*”, and “*Strongly Disagree*” as “*Negative*” opinion for qualitative analysis.

In the integrated analysis, I combined my findings from the quantitative and qualitative instruments and discussed them in the light of the literature review. The data analysis highlights five key areas that are relevant to teacher autonomy in Singapore’s private institutions of higher learning - Planning and Decision Making, Teaching, Assessment, Professional Development, and Policy implementation – that will be discussed in the integrated analysis chapter. where the results obtained from the questionnaire (quantitative data) and interview (qualitative data) were compared using a mixed-method design to identify the associations between the different sources of data. In this study, the quantitative phase measures the levels of perceived TA amongst 157 teachers in PIHL. The subsequent interview phase (on 12 participants who had completed the questionnaire) was conducted to glean a deeper insight from participants' opinions and government-related policies and statements on TA which would explain or contradict the results obtained from the questionnaire. The integrated analysis will occur at the interpretation level using the data connection method.

### 3.9. Piloting Study

As a part of piloting the qualitative instrument, I held discussions with experts in qualitative research to identify possible problems in recruitment, assess feasibility of interview items and protocol, and to determine if the design of the interview method was the most suitable for my research. As some of the questions in the initial instruments were not open-ended, they were amended in the revised instrument. As for the quantitative instrument, a sample study was conducted on five participants who volunteered to be a part of it. Feedback was gathered from them to revise the instrument.

After the confirmation of the research plan, a sample study was conducted on five subjects to decide the feasibility of the research. The sample study also helped to assess the appropriateness and practicality of the methodology (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). More importantly, this helped me to solve any unanticipated problems through participant feedback about including the place of study (Australia) in my survey questionnaire which was not included earlier and simplifying some of the questions so that time could be saved when the real research began. Generally, the sample study provided positive feedback for me to carry out the survey. The feedback I received were as follows:

*(a) I have had a look at your survey. I think everything is clear, including instructions and questions.*

*(b) For the item you ask about nationality, for the option "**other country**", do you think it will be better if we are given a space to specify our nationality?*

*Thought it may be useful, just in case, because I'm thinking different cultures i.e. west and east may influence the way teacher autonomy is perceived.*

*(c) The term "**Place of school education**" sounds weird to me.*



*(d) Teaching level - what if there are two main levels? I saw for that item we can only choose one option.*

*(e) When I'm doing it, I feel it's a bit long, and the questions sound very similar. I'm thinking if you could highlight or bold or underline the aspects you ask for each item. Like highlight "assessment", "professional development" etc. Am I clear? I feel I need to read it again after answering a few questions because they all sound similar. However, they are all very clear questions.*

*(f) The survey is excellent and needs no changes at all.*

The feedback helped me to revise some of my questions to make them clearer and shorter. As for item (b), I did not make any changes as I wanted to have the options as a backup just in case, I later decide to consider taking “nationality” or “place of education” as areas for comparisons of teacher perceptions. For item (d), I did not do anything as the main area of teaching can be counted as hours mostly spend in a particular level or subject. Item (e) was a very helpful suggestion, and I reformatted my questionnaire to make it more reader friendly.

While it is not feasible to conduct data collection for reliability and validity testing, for the quantitative part, the current data can be used to conduct exploratory factor analysis. This can be used to test for internal consistency. However, as the sample used for factor analyses is the same as the main study, it is not possible to confirm that the reliability coefficients are valid. For validity, it may be possible to test content validity using the same data in SPSS. The best method to ensure validity and reliability of the study is to use the same instrument without modifying any items so that it retains its original reliability and validity and conduct a pilot study to test if there are any possible cultural differences when the instrument is used on a

different sample. For the qualitative part, it is not feasible to test for reliability and validity. One method to ensure reliability and validity is to use current interview tools that have already been tested by other researchers. The only methodical way to test for reliability is intercoder reliability, which looks at the extent to which two or more coders code the qualitative data similarly.

### 3.10. Limitations of the method

The study is focused only among teachers in private sector higher education as they comprise the largest number of educational institutions in Singapore, which would provide access for this research. However, I have not included public institutions and universities as they have their independent ways of funding, policy-making and administrative processes. Next, the study has not considered various other factors that might also have a potential impact on teacher perceptions of TA. For example, religious, political, and social paradigms are also areas that could be investigated as factors shaping teachers' perceptions. However, the limited time and resources of this study do not allow a comprehensive study of that magnitude. Therefore, the research is limited to the theme of teacher autonomy and the factors that shape teacher perceptions of it.

The next limitation is associated with the development of my research instruments. While this study involved quantitative data collection through questionnaire surveys and qualitative data collection through face-to-face interviews, I adopted a validated instrument for my data collection. After the instruments were designed, I further faced challenges in getting consent for participating in the pilot study. However, the questionnaire was adopted without making major changes in the

content while the context of the original one was USA whereas the context of my research is Singapore.

The key limitations can be summarized as follows:

- a) One key limitation is the lack of reliability and validity testing on the instrument which was adapted.
- b) I could have addressed the limitations of the original instruments and study how they might affect my data.
- c) Another possible limitation is the lack of categorizing participants according to their job positions/seniority apart from years of experience. This demographic variable could be more useful in triangulation with the qualitative data to answer RQ1e as this question was interested in differences in perceived TA between manager/senior-level teachers and junior/middle-level teachers.
- d) Another limitation is the inconsistency in Likert-scoring for some items.
  - a. Positive items should always be given a higher scoring (5 = best).
  - b. In sections on experienced TA, the Likert scale was 0 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).
  - c. In sections on opinions on TA, the Likert scale was 0 (very important) to 5 (not at all important).
- e) There was also a need to properly identify the research method utilized in the qualitative study. Then, I could discuss the limitations associated with this research method that have been identified in other studies employing the same method.

As for piloting the instruments, the best method was to use the data collected as a pilot study and conduct a new data collection for the main study. However, there

was no time to conduct a second round of data collection on entirely new participants. Hence, it was not possible to ensure that the reliability and validity of the modified TAS was the same as the original SASS-STA and TAS.

### 3.11. Conclusion

This chapter highlights details of the participants in this study, research design, data collection methods, ethical factors, data analysis methods and the limitations. The study follows a mixed methods approach where qualitative methods – interviews – and quantitative method – questionnaire surveys – were employed to collect data concurrently. The information collected was analyzed and the results were compared for similarities, differences, or combinations. As the methods were used concurrently in a concurrent triangulation design, it helped to cross-validate or corroborate findings from multiple methods that were used in this study.

## Chapter 4. Quantitative analysis

In this chapter, a 68-item Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS) was used to collect quantitative data regarding perceptions on teacher autonomy (TA) in Singapore Private Institutions of Higher Learning (PIHL). To measure TA, a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used. This instrument was adapted from two the Schools and Staffing Survey Scale for Teacher Autonomy (SASS-STA) (Gwaltney, 2012) and another instrument of the same name, TAS (Moomaw, 2005).

### 4.1. Reliability Analysis of Adapted Teacher Autonomy Scale

The TAS contained six separate sections, which measured participant demographic information (**section 1**), current experiences on perceived TA at various work stages and participants' opinions on perceived TA in undertaking primary work process (**section 2**), experiences and opinions on the planning and implementation of curriculums (**section 3**), current experiences and opinions on perceived TA in planning and decision-making in the workplace (**section 4**), current experiences and opinions on perceived TA in assessment-related matters (**section 5**), and current experiences and opinions on perceived TA in pursuing professional development (**section 6**).

To calculate internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal reliability of the instrument. The analysis revealed high internal consistency across all sections measuring teacher autonomy (work stages and processes;  $\alpha = .87$ ; planning and implementation of curriculums,  $\alpha = .87$ ; planning and decision-making;  $\alpha = .86$ ; assessment-related matters,  $\alpha = .88$ ; professional development,  $\alpha = .93$ ). Overall, the Teacher Autonomy Scale was found to be highly reliable (68 items;  $\alpha = .95$ ).

## 4.2. Hypothesis

The research question and the sub-questions explored the perceptions of the participants about TA. To explain further, the first sub-question explored possible definitions of TA in Singapore context. The second sub-question examined various experiences that the teachers undergo in their professional life that may either encourage or discourage them to exercise TA. The third sub-question examined the actual degree of TA that the teachers experience based on the self-reporting of their experiences. Related to this is the fourth sub-question that examined the degree of TA that teachers wish to experience in their job. The last sub-question compared the views of teachers and teacher-managers on TA that highlight how their differing views on TA.

To answer the research questions, the following hypotheses were made:

1. H1: Teachers in PIHL have low expectations and opinions on TA in their teaching responsibilities.
2. H2: There are differences in perceived TA based on demographic variables.
3. H3: There are no significant differences between expectations and experiences in TA.

## 4.3. Data Processing for Data Analyses

During data collection, participant responses were periodically examined to track survey progress. Based on pre-assigned IDs, emails were sent to remind participants to complete the survey and submit their responses. At the end of data collection, responses were downloaded for data processing and cleaning. During this process, missing responses were highlighted and subsequently removed. This resulted in participant count dropping from 228 to 157. Responses from negatively worded constructs were reversed scored, and all responses were calculated based on

mean scores to avoid inflation and to match them with corresponding Likert responses. Once this was satisfied, data analysis was conducted using SPSS Software.

#### 4.4. General Perceptions Towards Teacher Autonomy

The data gathered from the survey questionnaires brought to light the beliefs and perceptions of teachers about TA. All 157 participants in the study sample were taken from teaching staff in about 12 PIHL in Singapore that include small, medium, and large institutions. By involving these 12 PIHL of various sizes, it was assumed that the results of this study would be generalizable to the PIHL population in Singapore. Eight demographic variables were explored in this study, and they were: *Country of Birth, Ethnicity, Gender, Educational Qualifications, Place of School Education, Place of Post-Secondary Education, Years of Experience, and Teaching Level (predominantly)*. However, as there was no open access to the demographic data from CPE or MOE in Singapore, assumptions were made that the demographics of the sample in this survey reflected that of the PIHL.

Table 1  
*Overall Mean Scores on Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean total TA current experience	157	2.6235	.71808
Mean total TA opinion	157	1.9790	.44186
Mean total score	157	2.3012	.47657
Valid N (listwise)	157		

*Note.* Participants' current experiences, opinions, and perceptions towards teacher autonomy.

To understand current experiences, opinions, and overall perceptions towards TA, survey responses were averaged and aligned with the TAS' five-point Likert scale. While it was hypothesized that teachers would experience low TA, the mean reported perceived TA turned out to be positive instead ( $M = 2.3$ ). Surprisingly, there were differences between opinions and experiences on TA, with participants rating more favourably on expected TA ( $M = 1.98$ ) compared to experienced TA ( $M = 2.6$ ). This difference will be analysed and discussed with greater detail in 4.4.

The modal response throughout the questionnaire was *Agree* (2), which was selected by participants for 59 of 68 survey questions. Three items grouped under section 2.2 (*Opinions on TA in Primary Work Processes*) had the highest perceptions on TA (1; *strongly agree*), which were *Deciding Their Lesson Activities and Tasks* ( $M = 1.55, SD = 0.61$ ), *Deciding Their Teaching Methodology* ( $M = 1.57, SD = 0.6$ ), and *Setting Discipline Standards in Their Class* ( $M = 1.67, SD = 0.7$ ). On the other hand, *Making Decisions on Budget Planning* ( $M = 3.75, SD = 1.15$ ) and *Deciding on Class Timetable Policy* ( $M = 3.52, SD = 1.19$ ), categorized under sub-section 4.1 (*Current Experience in Planning and Decision Making at the Workplace*), had the lowest perceived TA. Furthermore, the variation in differences could be explained by differences in job roles and positions, where those in higher authority and seniority perceived more TA in planning and decision-making than those below them.

Table 2



*Ethnicity and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Chinese	66	2.4403	.45583	.05611	2.3282	2.5523	1.31	3.47
Malay	3	2.0833	.56294	.32501	.6849	3.4817	1.49	2.60
Indian	52	2.1292	.43214	.05993	2.0089	2.2496	1.10	3.26
Eurasian	7	2.5042	.51370	.19416	2.0291	2.9793	1.99	3.37
Others	29	2.2667	.49655	.09221	2.0779	2.4556	1.31	3.49
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on five categories of ethnicity.

Perceptions Towards TA Based on Ethnicity. When looking at ethnicity, all groups of participants shared similar responses towards perceived TA. Malay participants ( $M = 2.08$ ) reported the highest perceived TA, followed by Indian participants ( $M = 2.13$ ), participants from minority groups in Singapore who are mostly from Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines and many more ( $M = 2.26$ ), Eurasians ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ), and lastly, Chinese participants ( $M = 2.44$ ).

**Table 3**  
*Years of Experience and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
0-5 years	17	2.5588	.53805	.13050	2.2822	2.8355	1.26	3.37
6-10 years	23	2.1803	.43940	.09162	1.9903	2.3703	1.31	3.01
11-20 years	59	2.2176	.45469	.05920	2.0991	2.3361	1.10	3.47
Above 20 years	58	2.3588	.46812	.06147	2.2357	2.4819	1.22	3.49
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on four categories of years of working experience.

Perceptions Towards TA Based on Years of Experience. Across years of experiences, participants generally reported positive perceptions towards TA.

Participants who worked 6-10 years reported the highest perceived TA ( $M = 2.18$ ), followed by those who worked 11-20 years ( $M = 2.22$ ), more than 20 years ( $M = 2.36$ ), and lastly, 0-5 years ( $M = 2.56$ ).

Table 4  
*Country of Birth and Perceived TA*

	Country of birth	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean total score	Singapore	88	2.3088	.44067	.04698
	Other country	69	2.2916	.52193	.06283

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on two categories of country of birth.

Perceptions Towards TA Based on Country of Birth. When comparing between Singaporean and non-Singaporean teachers, the differences in perceived TA between Singaporean ( $M = 2.30$ ) and non-Singaporean participants ( $M = 2.29$ ) were minimal.

Table 5  
*Gender and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Male	87	2.3125	.51792	.05553	2.2022	2.4229	1.10	3.47
Female	69	2.2822	.42385	.05103	2.1804	2.3840	1.47	3.49
Prefer not to say	1	2.6324	.	.	.	.	2.63	2.63
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on three categories of gender.

Perceptions Towards TA Based on Gender. While male ( $M = 2.31$ ) and female ( $M = 2.28$ ) participants had very similar responses towards perceived TA, the single participant who preferred not to say their gender ( $M = 2.63$ ) reported poorer perceptions towards TA.

Table 6  
*Educational Qualifications and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Diploma	1	1.7941	.	.	.	.	1.79	1.79
Degree	26	2.3377	.47793	.09373	2.1446	2.5307	1.54	3.49
Masters	94	2.3220	.48973	.05051	2.2217	2.4223	1.10	3.47
Doctorate	36	2.2349	.44480	.07413	2.0844	2.3854	1.22	3.00
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on four categories of educational qualifications.

Perceptions Towards TA Based on Educational Qualifications. Interestingly, the highest perceived TA ( $M = 1.79$ ) was reported by the lone participant who possessed a diploma as their highest educational qualification. For the other groups, responses were very similar for participants with a degree ( $M = 2.34$ ), Masters' ( $M = 2.32$ ), and Doctorate ( $M = 2.23$ ).

Table 7  
*Place of School Education and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Asia	116	2.2916	.46133	.04283	2.2067	2.3764	1.10	3.47
Europe	15	2.3451	.55393	.14302	2.0383	2.6519	1.49	3.37
USA / Canada	9	2.1095	.31162	.10387	1.8699	2.3490	1.54	2.74
More than one region	11	2.4358	.60173	.18143	2.0316	2.8401	1.31	3.19
Australia	6	2.4191	.56733	.23161	1.8237	3.0145	1.94	3.49
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on five categories of school education location.

Table 8

*Place of Post-Secondary Education and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Asia	89	2.2708	.47861	.05073	2.1700	2.3716	1.10	3.47
Europe	22	2.3890	.47233	.10070	2.1796	2.5985	1.59	3.37
USA / Canada	12	2.2806	.36307	.10481	2.0500	2.5113	1.54	2.74
More than one region	22	2.3429	.51598	.11001	2.1141	2.5717	1.31	3.19
Australia	12	2.3100	.54357	.15692	1.9647	2.6554	1.26	3.49
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on five categories of post-secondary school education location.

Perceptions Towards TA Based on Place of Education. Participants from USA/Canada reported the highest perceived TA ( $M = 2.11$ ) for school education, while participants from Asia had the highest perceived TA for post-secondary education ( $M = 2.27$ ). Across both demographic variables, the highest perceived TA in school and post-secondary education were reported by USA/Canadian ( $M = 2.11$ ;  $M = 2.28$ ) and Asian ( $M = 2.29$ ;  $M = 2.27$ ) participants. These responses were not that dissimilar compared to participants from Europe ( $M = 2.35$ ;  $M = 2.39$ ), Australia ( $M = 2.41$ ;  $M = 2.31$ ), and those who studied in more than one region ( $M = 2.44$ ;  $M = 2.34$ ).

**Table 9**  
*Teaching Level (Predominantly) and Perceived TA*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Foundation	46	2.2398	.50660	.07469	2.0893	2.3902	1.26	3.47
Diploma	20	2.3897	.43461	.09718	2.1863	2.5931	1.49	3.09
Degree	69	2.3672	.47892	.05766	2.2522	2.4823	1.10	3.49
Postgraduate	22	2.1424	.40884	.08716	1.9611	2.3236	1.22	3.00
Total	157	2.3012	.47657	.03803	2.2261	2.3764	1.10	3.49

*Note.* Participant responses towards perceived teacher autonomy based on four categories of teaching level.

#### Perceptions Towards TA Based on Teaching Level (Predominantly).

Participants who taught at the highest level (postgraduate) reported the highest perceived TA ( $M = 2.14$ ), followed by those who taught at the foundation- ( $M = 2.24$ ), diploma- ( $M = 2.39$ ), and degree-levels ( $M = 2.37$ ).

#### 4.5. Demographic Differences in Perceived TA

While participant responses were generally similar across all demographic variables, it was still necessary to conduct between-group comparisons to identify statistically significant differences between different groups. To do so, one-way ANOVAs and post-hoc analyses using Tukey's Honestly Significant Differences (HSD) were conducted for all eight demographic variables, except for Country of Birth and Gender, which did not satisfy the minimum requirement of two cases per group for ANOVA analysis. Results from the between-group comparisons found statistically significant differences for the Ethnicity ( $p = .004$ ) and Years of Experience ( $p = .01$ ) variables. These results support H2, where it was hypothesized that participants will have different perceptions towards TA based on different demographic differences.

Table 10

#### *Differences in Ethnicity on Perceived TA*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15165.2	4	3791.31	3.876	.005
Within Groups	148666	152	978.066		
Total	163831	156			

*Post-Hoc Analyses for Differences in Ethnicity on Perceived TA*

(I) Ethnicity	(J) Ethnicity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Chinese	Malay	24.2727	18.4619	.682	-26.697	75.2423
	Indian	21.151*	5.79898	.003	5.1411	37.1607
	Eurasian	-4.3463	12.4315	.997	-38.667	29.9746
	Others	11.8015	6.96747	.441	-7.4343	31.0372
Malay	Chinese	-24.273	18.4619	.682	-75.242	26.6968
	Indian	-3.1218	18.5696	1.000	-54.389	48.1452
	Eurasian	-28.619	21.5811	.675	-88.200	30.9621
	Others	-12.471	18.9670	.965	-64.835	39.8929
Indian	Chinese	-21.15*	5.79898	.003	-37.161	-5.1411
	Malay	3.12179	18.5696	1.000	-48.145	54.3888
	Eurasian	-25.497	12.5910	.259	-60.258	9.2639
	Others	-9.3495	7.24813	.698	-29.360	10.6611
Eurasian	Chinese	4.34632	12.4315	.997	-29.975	38.6673
	Malay	28.6190	21.5811	.675	-30.962	88.2002
	Indian	25.4973	12.5910	.259	-9.2639	60.2584
	Others	16.1478	13.1700	.736	-20.212	52.5076
Others	Chinese	-11.801	6.96747	.441	-31.037	7.4343
	Malay	12.4713	18.9670	.965	-39.893	64.8354
	Indian	9.34947	7.24813	.698	-10.661	29.3601
	Eurasian	-16.148	13.1700	.736	-52.508	20.2121

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*Note.* These tables examine the differences between ethnicity on perceived TA, finding statistically significant differences between Chinese and Indian participants. **Ethnic Difference in Perceived TA.** As Singapore is a multi-racial country – a quality that builds the fabric of Singapore, it is important to investigate how different ethnic groups perceive autonomy in Singapore, and how their views run parallel or differ from each other. The post-hoc analysis for Ethnicity indicated that statistically significant differences ( $p < .01$ ) only occurred between Chinese ( $M = 2.44$ ) and Indian participants ( $M = 2.13$ ). Surprisingly, the largest difference in perceived TA was between Malay ( $M = 2.08$ ) and Chinese participants. Although

Chinese formed the majority of the Singaporean population, these participants reported experiencing the lowest level of perceived TA compared to their Malay and Indian counterparts.

Table 11  
*Differences in Years of Experience on Perceived TA*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9567.34	3	3189.11	3.163	.026
Within Groups	154264	153	1008.26		
Total	163831	156			

*Post-Hoc Analyses for Differences in Years of Experience on Perceived TA*

(I) Years of experience	(J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
0-5 years	6-10 years	25.7391	10.1561	.059	-.6413	52.1196
	11-20 years	23.203*	8.74063	.043	.4997	45.9071
	Above 20 years	13.6034	8.75747	.408	-9.1440	36.3509
6-10 years	0-5 years	-25.739	10.1561	.059	-52.120	.6413
	11-20 years	-2.5357	7.80555	.988	-22.811	17.7391
	Above 20 years	-12.136	7.82440	.410	-32.459	8.1881
11-20 years	0-5 years	-23.20*	8.74063	.043	-45.907	-.4997
	6-10 years	2.53574	7.80555	.988	-17.739	22.8106
	Above 20 years	-9.5999	5.87137	.362	-24.851	5.6509
Above 20 years	0-5 years	-13.603	8.75747	.408	-36.351	9.1440
	6-10 years	12.1357	7.82440	.410	-8.1881	32.4595
	11-20 years	9.59994	5.87137	.362	-5.6509	24.8508

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*Note.* These tables examine the differences between ethnicity on perceived TA, finding statistically significant differences between participants who worked 0-5 and 11-20 years.

For Years of Experience, the post-hoc analysis found significant differences ( $p = .018$ ) between participants who worked 0-5 years ( $M = 2.56$ ) and 11-20 years ( $M = 2.21$ ). This finding is supported by Erss (2018), who found that younger Estonian and German teachers preferred clearer and more teaching guidelines, as they had lesser experiences in teaching. Similarly, another study on TA by Wright, Shields, Black, Banerjee, and Waxman (2018) also found that participants with less than five years of teaching experience reported lower levels of overall perceived TA and pedagogical autonomy compared to participants with 10-14 years and more than 15 years of teaching experience, which was similar to the results from the current study where a statistically significant difference in perceived TA was found between participants who worked 0-5 years and 11-20 years.

The views of teachers in Singapore's private higher education sector could be compared to those in Hong Kong as both Singapore and Hong Kong are ideal cases for comparison as in many ways, they exhibit similarities – histories, cultures, and economic development, although in other ways – political structures, diversity, and regional integration, they are different Singapore and Hong Kong are comparable in terms of GDP, education expenditure, Gini coefficient as well as PISA rankings. Both can be comparable in terms of how teachers' perceptions are formulated through common ethics, values, and beliefs like significance of Confucianism and the use of English as the medium of teaching (The Head Foundation, 2017). These will be discussed in detail in the following sections.



To answer research questions (c) *What is the degree of TA experienced by the teachers?* and (d) *What are the teachers' expectations of TA?*, responses in the 68-item TAS were split into two categories, with 34 items measuring current experiences on perceived TA and 34 items measuring opinions on perceived TA in PIHL. Items in both categories were then tabulated to obtain mean scores for comparison.

#### 4.6. Teacher Autonomy: Perceived Experiences in the Workplace (RQ\_C)

For research question (c), it was hypothesised that teachers will report low experiences on perceived TA in planning and execution of lessons, and teaching-related tasks and responsibilities. However, findings from the descriptive analysis revealed the opposite, with mean responses falling between *Agree* and *Neither Agree nor Disagree* ( $M = 2.62, SD = .$ ). This indicated that teachers in PIHL did experience certain degree of autonomy at their workplace, and will be further discussed in 4.7, which examines the differences between experiences and expectations on TA within and across different teaching-related affairs.

Table 12  
*Mean Scores of Experiences and Expectations of TA*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean total TA current experience	157	1.12	4.50	2.6235	.71808
Mean total TA opinion	157	1.00	3.32	1.9790	.44186
Valid N (listwise)	157				

*Note.* Participant responses regarding current experiences and expectations on perceived TA.

#### 4.7. Teacher Autonomy: Perceived Expectations in the Workplace (RQ\_D)

Similarly, it was hypothesized that teachers' expectations of TA will be low and identical to their experiences in planning and execution of lessons, and teaching-

related tasks and responsibilities. Again, results from the descriptive analysis (see Table 12 above) showed that teachers desired higher degree of teaching autonomy in being able to make their own decisions regarding different teacher teaching-related affairs.

Subsequently, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to examine the differences in participants' experiences and expectations on perceived TA in their workplace. Results of the analysis (see Table 13 below) found a statistically significant difference between participants' mean current experiences and opinions on perceived TA in,  $t(156) = 11.27, p < .001$ . This finding indicated that participants' opinions on perceived TA was higher compared to their current experiences on perceived TA in their workplace, suggesting that 1) participants did not experience as much perceived TA than they assumed they had, or 2) participants expected to have more TA than they were currently experiencing.

**Table 13**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA*

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Mean total TA current experience - Mean total TA opinion	.64444	.71644	.05718	.53149	.75738	11.271	156	.000

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy.

4.8. Examining Perceived TA Differences Across Teaching Affairs (RQ\_D)

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to understand if teachers had different experiences and expectations of TA across different categories of teaching affairs. Prior to analysis, the data was examined for: 1) Independence of

observations, and 2) sphericity, which was examined using Mauchly's test of sphericity to identify if population variances of all possible different scores were equal before repeated-measures ANOVA could be conducted.

**Table 14**

*Mauchly's Test of Sphericity<sup>a</sup>*

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx.		Sig.	Epsilon <sup>b</sup>		
		Chi-Square	df		Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
Sections	.694	56.617	5	.000	.833	.848	.333

*Note.* Assumptions testing for equality of variances of differences between conditions.

- a. Design: Intercept

Within Subjects Design: Sections

- b. May be used to adjust the degrees of freedom for the averaged tests of significance. Corrected tests are displayed in the Tests of Within-Subjects Effects table.

While the data was observed to assume a normal shape, Mauchly's test of sphericity was found to be statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating a violation of the assumption of sphericity (as seen in Table 12). As such, corrections were applied to the degree of freedom to adjust for overinflated Type I errors, and the lower-bound estimate, Greenhouse-Geisser correction, and Huynh-Feldt corrections were used. With the epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) calculated by SPSS being  $> .75$ , it was recommended that the Huynh-Feldt correction was used for reporting purposes ( $\epsilon = .848$ ,  $df = 2.54$ , 396.71) (Field, 2013; Howell, 2002).

Results of the repeated-measures ANOVA found statistically significant differences between mean total perceived TA scores of the five sections,  $F(2.54, 396.71) = 546.59, p < .001$ . Here, participants reported the highest TA in primary work processes ( $M = 1.98, SD = 0.52$ ), followed by professional development ( $M = 2.21, SD = 0.65$ ), curriculum-related affairs ( $M = 2.26, SD = 0.58$ ), assessment-related affairs ( $M = 2.35, SD = 0.71$ ), and lastly, planning and decision-making ( $M = 2.87, SD = 0.68$ ). As SPSS could not perform a post-hoc examination for repeated-measures ANOVA, Tukey's HSD was used to run multiple pairwise comparisons to compare the  $t_{\text{obt}}$  scores against a manually calculated Tukey's HSD critical value,  $t_{\text{crit}} = 3.65$ .

Statistically significant differences in mean total perceived TA score were found between (1) primary work processes and curriculum-related affairs ( $p < .001$ ), (2) primary work processes and planning and decision-making ( $p < .001$ ), (3) primary work processes and assessment-related affairs ( $p < .001$ ), (4) primary work processes and professional development ( $p < .001$ ), curriculum-related affairs and planning and decision-making ( $p < .001$ ), (6) planning and decision-making and assessment-related affairs ( $p < .001$ ), and (7) planning and decision-making and professional development ( $p < .001$ ). While there were also statistically significant differences between (8) curriculum- and assessment-related affairs ( $p < .05$ ), and (9) assessment-related affairs and professional development ( $p < .05$ ), these findings did not satisfy the  $t_{\text{crit}}$  value of 3.65. Results of the multiple pairwise comparisons can be seen in Table 15 below.

**Table 15**

*Differences in Teacher Autonomy (Mean) Across Teaching Constructs*

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PrimaryWorkProcess - Curriculum	-.27389	.44207	.03528	-.34358	-.20419	-7.763	156	.000
Pair 2	PrimaryWorkProcess - PlanningandDecisionM aking	-.88270	.72738	.05805	-.99736	-.76803	-15.205	156	.000
Pair 3	PrimaryWorkProcess - Assessment	-.36911	.63534	.05071	-.46927	-.26895	-7.279	156	.000
Pair 4	PrimaryWorkProcess - ProfessionalDevelopm ent	-.22806	.63374	.05058	-.32797	-.12815	-4.509	156	.000
Pair 5	Curriculum - PlanningandDecisionM aking	-.60881	.63756	.05088	-.70932	-.50830	-11.965	156	.000
Pair 6	Curriculum - Assessment	-.09522	.59213	.04726	-.18857	-.00188	-2.015	156	.046
Pair 7	Curriculum - ProfessionalDevelopm ent	.04582	.64479	.05146	-.05582	.14747	.890	156	.375
Pair 8	PlanningandDecisionM aking - Assessment	.51359	.70026	.05589	.40319	.62398	9.190	156	.000
Pair 9	PlanningandDecisionM aking - ProfessionalDevelopm ent	.65464	.67847	.05415	.54768	.76159	12.090	156	.000
Pair 10	Assessment - ProfessionalDevelopm ent	.14105	.70795	.05650	.02944	.25265	2.496	156	.014

Note. Comparisons between participants' teacher autonomy across different categories of teaching.

#### 4.9. Experiences and Expectations on TA Across Teaching Affairs (RQ\_D)

Given that statistically significant differences were found between overall experiences and expectations of TA in the workplace, another paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine if these differences persisted within each category of teaching.

**Table 16**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA Across Teaching-Related Affairs*

Section	Experiences	Opinions	Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
2	Question 9.1 – 9.8 2.21	Question 10.1 – 10.8 1.76	.45	$p < .001$
3	Question 11.1 – 11.6 2.54	Question 12.1 – 12.6 1.97	.57	$p < .001$
4	Question 13.1 – 13.6 3.32	Question 14.1 – 14.6 2.41	.92	$p < .001$
5	Question 15.1 – 15.5	Question 16.1 – 16.5		

	2.70	2.00	.70	$p < .001$
6	<i>Question 17.1 – 17.9</i>	<i>Question 18.1 – 18.9</i>		
	2.54	1.89	.65	$p < .001$
Total	2.62	1.98	.64	$p < .001$

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy across different categories of teaching-related affairs.

In general, participants reported higher teacher autonomy for their opinions ( $M = 1.98$ ) on perceived teacher autonomy in private higher education institutions in Singapore compared to their experiences ( $M = 2.62$ ),  $t(156) = 11.27$ ,  $p > .001$ .

**Table 17**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA on Primary Work Processes*

<i>Section</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
2	<i>9.1 Plan syllabus</i>	<i>10.1 Plan syllabus</i>		
	2.61	1.82	.78	$p < .001$
	<i>9.2 Pace work</i>	<i>10.2 Pace work</i>		
	2.24	1.68	.57	$p < .001$
	<i>9.3 Decide lesson activities and tasks</i>	<i>10.3 Decide lesson activities and tasks</i>		
	1.91	1.55	.36	$p < .001$
	<i>9.4 Decide teaching methodology</i>	<i>10.4 Decide teaching methodology</i>		
	1.83	1.57	.26	$p < .001$
	<i>9.5 Select course books</i>	<i>10.5 Select course books</i>		
	3.10	2.20	.90	$p < .001$
	<i>9.6 Decide choice of extra teaching materials</i>	<i>10.6 Decide choice of extra teaching materials</i>		
	1.92	1.76	.15	$p = .04$
	<i>9.7 Control over use of classroom space</i>	<i>10.7 Control over use of classroom space</i>		
	2.03	1.81	.22	$p = .01$
	<i>9.8 Set discipline standards in class</i>	<i>10.8 Set discipline standards in class</i>		
	2.03	1.67	.36	$p < .001$

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy across different components of primary work processes.

For primary work processes, participants reported higher teacher autonomy for their opinions ( $M = 1.76$ ) than their experiences ( $M = 2.21$ ),  $t(156) = 8.04$ ,  $p > .001$ .

**Table 18**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA on Implementing and Planning Curriculums*

<i>Section</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
3	11.1 <i>Have own guidelines and procedures</i> 2.57	12.1 <i>Have own guidelines and procedures</i> 2.02	.55	$p < .001$
	11.2 <i>Select own objectives for teaching</i> 2.68	12.2 <i>Select own objectives for teaching</i> 2.08	.59	$p < .001$
	11.3 <i>Choose what to teach</i> 2.62	12.3 <i>Choose what to teach</i> 1.87	.75	$p < .001$
	11.4 <i>Select course books and teaching materials</i> 2.87	12.4 <i>Select course books and teaching materials</i> 2.18	.68	$p < .001$
	11.5 <i>Decide on extra teaching materials</i> 2.03	12.5 <i>Decide on extra teaching materials</i> 2.18	-.16	$p = .07$
	11.6 <i>Decide educational content taught</i> 2.50	12.6 <i>Decide educational content taught</i> 1.87	.64	$p < .001$

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy across different components of curriculum planning and implementation.

Similarly, higher teacher autonomy was also reported for opinions ( $M = 1.97$ ) on implementing and planning curriculums over their experiences ( $M = 2.54$ ),  $t(156) = 8.64$ ,  $p > .001$ .

**Table 19**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA on Planning and Decision-Making in the Workplace*

<i>Section</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
4	13.1 Make decisions on budget planning 3.75	14.1 Make decisions on budget planning 2.96	.79	$p < .001$
	13.2 Decide on class timetable policy 3.52	14.2 Decide on class timetable policy 2.54	.98	$p < .001$
	13.3 Participate in decision-making 3.31	14.3 Participate in decision-making 2.48	.82	$p < .001$
	13.4 Be part of decision-making body 3.06	14.4 Be part of decision-making body 1.99	1.07	$p < .001$
	13.5 Deciding responsibilities 2.93	14.5 Having a say in responsibilities 2.01	.92	$p < .001$
	13.6 Have say in school decisions 3.38	14.6 Have say in school decisions 2.45	.94	$p < .001$

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy across different components of workplace planning and decision-making.

With regards to planning and decision-making in the workplace, higher teacher autonomy was reported for opinions ( $M = 2.41$ ) compared to experiences ( $M = 3.32$ ),  $t(156) = 10.09$ ,  $p > .001$ .

**Table 20**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA on Assessment*

<i>Section</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
5	15.1 Decide type of ongoing tests 2.72	16.1 Decide type of ongoing tests 2.01	.71	$p < .001$
	15.2 Decide type of assignments 2.59	16.2 Decide type of assignments 1.90	.69	$p < .001$
	15.3 Decide type of questions of final exam 2.55	16.3 Decide type of questions of final exam 1.89	.66	$p < .001$
	15.4 Decide allocation of marks for each section 2.72	16.4 Decide allocation of marks for each section 2.03	.69	$p < .001$



	<i>15.5 Decide level of moderation after exam</i>	<i>16.5 Decide level of moderation after exam</i>		
	2.92	2.18	.74	$p < .001$

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy across different components of assessments.

There was also higher perceived teacher autonomy in opinions ( $M = 2.00$ ) on assessment against participants' experiences ( $M = 2.70$ ),  $t(156) = 8.36$ ,  $p > .001$ .

**Table 21**

*Differences in Experienced and Expected TA on Professional Development*

<i>Section</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Opinions</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
6	<i>17.1 Plan professional development</i> 2.25	<i>18.1 Plan professional development</i> 1.89	.63	$p < .001$
	<i>17.2 Pace of professional development</i> 2.61	<i>18.2 Pace of professional development</i> 1.92	.68	$p < .001$
	<i>17.3 Duration of professional development</i> 2.66	<i>18.3 Duration of professional development</i> 1.97	.68	$p < .001$
	<i>17.4 Time spent for professional development</i> 2.56	<i>18.4 Time spent for professional development</i> 1.90	.66	$p < .001$
	<i>17.5 Pursue training programs</i> 2.44	<i>18.5 Pursue training programs</i> 1.76	.68	$p < .001$
	<i>17.6 Join associations for professional development</i> 2.48	<i>18.6 Join associations for professional development</i> 1.97	.51	$p < .001$
	<i>17.7 Write and publish articles</i> 2.53	<i>18.7 Write and publish articles</i> 1.97	.55	$p < .001$
	<i>17.8 Express opinions during meetings</i> 2.38	<i>18.8 Express opinions during meetings</i> 1.73	.65	$p < .001$
	<i>17.9 Question management decisions</i> 2.66	<i>18.9 Question management decisions</i> 1.85	.81	$p < .001$

*Note.* Comparisons between participants perceived and experienced teacher autonomy across different components of professional development.

For professional development, participants also indicated higher perceived teacher autonomy in their opinions ( $M = 1.89$ ) compared to their experiences ( $M = 2.54$ ),  $t(156) = 8.09$ ,  $p > .001$ . When comparing across different teacher affairs, participants reported the lowest TA ( $M = 3.32$ ) in their experiences on planning and decision-making in the workplace, whereas the highest reported TA was in the opinions on undertaking primary work processes ( $M = 1.76$ ). Among the questions regarding *Current Experience on TA That You Exercise at Various Stages of Your Work*, participants reported experiencing the lowest perceived TA ( $M = 3.1$ ) when *Selecting the Course Books* (item 9.5), while experiencing the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 1.83$ ) when *Deciding the Teaching Methodology* (item 9.4). Similarly, when looking at teachers' *Opinion on TA in Undertaking Primary Work Processes*, *Selecting Their Course Books* (item 10.5) was the item which teachers reported the least perceived TA ( $M = 2.2$ ) while perceiving *Deciding Their Lesson Activities and Tasks* (item 10.3) as an area where they enjoyed higher TA ( $M = 1.55$ ).

Concerning teachers' *Current Experience on TA in Planning and Implementing Your Curriculum*, participants experienced the lowest level of perceived TA ( $M = 2.87$ ) when *Selecting My Course Books and Teaching Materials* (item 11.4) while *Deciding on Extra Teaching Materials* (item 11.5) reflected the highest level of experienced TA ( $M = 2.03$ ). On the other hand, participants indicated the lowest ( $M = 2.18$ ) when *Selecting Their Course Books and Teaching Materials* (item 12.4) and the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 1.8$ ) when *Deciding on Extra Teaching Materials* (item 12.5) for their *Opinion on TA in*

*Planning and Implementing Your Curriculum.*

For teachers' *Current Experience on TA in Planning and Decision Making at the Workplace*, *Making Decisions on Budget Planning* (item 13.1) was highlighted as the area of lowest perceived TA ( $M = 3.75$ ), while *Deciding what My Responsibilities Are* (item 13.5) reflected the opposite ( $M = 2.93$ ). However, it is important to note that these responses were neutral or leaning towards disagreeing about experiencing TA. Interestingly, participants responses in their *Opinion on TA in Planning and Decision Making at the Workplace* found *Making Decisions on Budget Planning* (item 14.1) to have the lowest perceived TA ( $M = 2.96$ ), where participants were neutral about their involvement and autonomy in this matter. However, *Be a Part of the Decision-Making Body about Matters Related to My Work* (item 14.4) had the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 1.99$ ).

Looking at teachers' *Current Experience on TA in Assessment*, participants reported experiencing low TA ( $M = 2.92$ ) in *Deciding the Level of Moderation After Exam* (item 15.5) while experiencing high TA ( $M = 2.55$ ) when *Deciding The Type of Questions For Final Exam* (item 15.3). A similar trend is seen in teachers' *Opinion on TA in Assessment*, where participants felt the TA should be given for *Deciding the Level of Moderation After Exam* (item 16.5;  $M = 2.18$ ) and *Selecting the Type of Questions for Final Exam* (item 16.3;  $M = 1.89$ ).

In teachers' *Current Experience on TA in Your Professional Development*, *Having My Say about the Duration for the Completion of My Professional Development Activities* (item 17.3;  $M = 2.66$ ) and *Question Management Decisions When I Feel They Are Not for The Benefit of The Students* (item 17.9) were selected by teachers as matters where they experienced the lowest perceived TA ( $M = 2.66$ ) while *Express My Opinion During Staff Meetings Without Any Fear* (item 17.8) had

the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 2.38$ ). Regarding teachers' *Opinion on TA in Professional Development*, three areas shared the lowest perceived TA ( $M = 1.97$ ), such as *Have a Say about the Time Their Professional Development Activities Need to be Completed* (item 18.3), *Join Any Associations that Help in Their Overall Development* (item 18.6), and *Write and Publish Articles Freely* (item 18.7). *Being able to Express Their Opinion During Staff Meetings Without Any Fear* (item 18.8) was selected as the item with the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 1.73$ ).

From the analysis of the individual questions within each survey subsections, it can be suggested that items which participants reported having the lowest level of current experience and opinion on perceived TA were similar across all sections, except in TA on professional development, where participants reported a few differences between the perceived TA they experienced and their opinion on perceived TA at their workplace. With regards to the highest level of perceived TA, participants generally had similar experiences and opinions for all sections, except in TA exercised at various stages of work and undertaking primary work processes. Moreover, the results support those of the earlier paired-sample *t*-tests for mean scores on current experiences on perceived TA and mean score on opinion on perceived TA, with participants reporting higher levels of perceived TA in their opinions in their workplace. These findings do not support H3, where it was hypothesized that there will be no significant differences between participants' experiences and opinions towards perceived TA at their various workplaces across different teaching responsibilities and affairs.

#### 4.10. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to measure the level of perceived TA amongst teaching participants from PIHL in Singapore. Overall, participants responded

positively regarding their current experiences and opinions on TA in their workplaces, with three items from sub-section 2.2, *Opinions on Teacher Autonomy in Primary Work Processes*, eliciting the highest number of positive responses. On the other hand, participants shared a negative response of perceived TA towards items 13.1, *Making Decisions on Budget Planning*, and 13.2, *Deciding on Class Timetable Policy*, which suggested strongly of low participation and involvement in administrative processes at their workplace.

Results of the data analyses found statistically significant differences in perceived TA for *Ethnicity*, with Chinese participants reporting the lowest perceived TA compared to Malays, Indians, Eurasians, and Others, as well as *Years of Experience*, with participants in the 6-10 years group expressing the highest perceived TA compared to those in the 0-5 years, 11-20 years, and Above 20 years groups. Subsequent post-hoc analyses indicated that only Chinese participants and Indian participants had statistically significant differences in their perceived TA scores, as well as between participants from the 0-5 years and 11-20 years groups.

A deeper look into differences between the four main sections of the TAS also revealed statistically significant findings, which suggested that participants' responses towards perceived TA differed depending on the type of work-related processes. Lastly, results from an analysis of differences in participants' current experiences and opinions found higher levels of perceived TA in the latter, indicating that participants did not experience the same perceived TA which they believed they had or should have. For the purposes of discussion, these results will be compared against qualitative data (interviews) in the discussion chapter to answer the research questions.

*Cronbach's alpha*

*Overall*

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.953	.953	68

*Section 2*

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.874	.880	16

*Section 3*

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.872	.873	12

*Section 4*

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.863	.857	12

*Section 5*

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.879	.884	10

Section 6

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.928	.928	18

## **Chapter 5. Qualitative Data Analysis**

### **5.1. Section 1 – Teacher-Perceptions on Teacher Autonomy**

This chapter discusses the qualitative data that was collected from teachers and teacher-managers through face-to-face interviews. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part of this chapter discusses teacher-perceptions of TA and the second part explores the perceptions of teachers versus managers. While section 1 is focused on teacher-perceptions, this also looks at teacher-managers who are also involved in classroom teaching. Section 2 compares the views of teachers and managers to realize how both groups view TA.

#### **5.1.1. Introduction**

The chapter covers demographic and general descriptions of the participants for the face-to-face interview and a discussion of the major themes and patterns identified from the data analysis. This chapter discusses two demographic variables – gender and seniority – drawn from the data analysis that points to how these variables affect participant views. Further, the themes emerging from the data will be cross-referenced to themes invoked in literature. In this study, the framework analysis approach was utilized to analyse the qualitative data collected. Although framework analysis is more commonly used in applied policy research, its strengths lie in its suitability for use in studies with pre-defined, research-specific questions, pre-designed samples (e.g. teachers in private institutions of higher learning), and organizational and integration issues (e.g. government policies on teacher autonomy and its translation to private higher education institutions) (Srivastava & Thomson,



2009). More importantly, framework analysis is primarily utilized for descriptive and interpretive purposes of a particular phenomenon (e.g. teacher autonomy) within a defined environment (e.g. private institutions of higher learning in Singapore).

According to Srivastava and Thomson (2009), framework analysis consists of five analysis stages, which are: 1) familiarization, where the researcher familiarizes themselves with the data transcripts of participants, 2) identification of a thematic framework, which aids in identifying emerging patterns of themes from the data, 3) indexing of data, which is to connect parts of the data with the corresponding theme(s), 4) charting, which involves arranging the obtained data within a chart or table and subheadings, and 5) mapping and interpretation, which is to analysis the concepts and themes obtained from the data collected.

#### 5.1.2. Demographic variables

The participants in this study come from different backgrounds. They are made up of both genders – five males and seven females. Among the twelve interview participants, five were teaching staff and seven were management staff, who are also teachers or had prior teaching experience. Seven participants were overseas educated while five were educated locally. Nine participants were from larger institutions (student population > 500) whereas only three were from smaller institutions (student population < 500). How the data was coded and analysed will be discussed in the following sections.

#### 5.1.3. Data Analysis and Coding

In this data analysis, participants' responses were coded into the following groups: negative, neutral, and positive. Negative responses encompassed

participants' replies which were not in favour of teacher autonomy in the identified theme(s), neutral responses were replies in which participants were neither against nor for teacher autonomy in identified theme(s), and positive responses were when participants replied favourably towards having teacher autonomy in the identified theme(s). The responses groups in the qualitative data were created with the responses of the quantitative analysis in mind, which had responses as 1) Strongly Agree, 2) Agree, 3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4) Disagree, and 5) Strongly Disagree. This allowed for a qualitative-quantitative comparison of the responses from both phases to be analysed with a pre-defined categorization. In other words, categorising the responses this way allowed viewing them in three groups for easier analysis where I have put “*Strongly Agree*” and “*Agree*” as “*Positive*”, “*Neither Agree nor Disagree*” as “*Neutral*”, and “*Disagree*”, and “*Strongly Disagree*” as “*Negative*” opinion for qualitative analysis. Furthermore, all twelve participants may provide negative, neutral, and/or positive responses to the same interview questions asked by the interviewer, resulting in large numbers of participants’ responses for certain themes. While not all participants were asked the same sub-questions and prompts due to time constraints and due to some participants responding with more details to certain questions, this resulted in some themes producing a limited number of responses. Lastly, participant responses were recorded as a single, continuous reply to the interviewer's questions. Participants' responses which were interrupted by interviewer replies or interview cues, as well as participants' recounts which did not answer the questions, were considered as a new, entirely separate reply. The initial coding phase identified the following eight areas:

#### 5.1.4. Conceptualization of teacher autonomy

Although the term 'teacher autonomy' was understood by different participants in different ways with slight variations in their interpretations and definitions, almost all participants (11 out of 12) felt that TA contributed positively to teaching and agreed that it refers to a level of "*freedom given to them to work within a framework*" where "*framework*" refers to a set of expectations to achieve a common goal for the benefit of the students. To most interviewees, TA meant having the freedom to exercise creativity, control, responsibility, and freedom of choosing teaching methods, styles, and materials in their teaching. One of the participants succinctly shared his/her understanding of TA as follows:

*"(TA refers to) teachers having the freedom to design lessons, to adapt materials, to personalize, to individualize lessons to fit their learners better"* (Participant: SN-M-Manager)

This participant's view comprises the views of all interviewees as it refers to the teacher's role in designing lessons, adapting, and collating teaching materials, personalizing the materials to suit the teaching style and context, and tailoring the lesson to suit the need of the learners. Participants also used words and expressions like "*there is a common goal*" (KS-F-Manager), "*freedom to change*", "*full freedom to the lecturers*" (NV-M-Manager), "*there is no way you can put a barrier or a parameter around the teacher's authority over the students*" (SV-F-Manager). Referring to TA, participants also used other words like "*to be independent, being creative*" (IA-F-Teacher), "*total freedom given to teachers and managers, fewer instructions and more freedom for teachers and managers*" (JL-M-Teacher).

Another participant was willing to put the views across very directly and stated that TA is *“the fact knowing that my boss does not look over my shoulders every minute, every second, or as to what am I teaching and how am I going about teaching it”* and *“they don’t micromanage”* (TB-M-Teacher). These are like the views highlighted in the literature review chapter where Huang defines TA as the readiness, aptitude, and liberty of the teacher to take up control of personal learning and teaching (Huang, 2011). Huang’s definition is also related to the teachers’ ability for self-directed professional development and the liberty from any form of control – complete trust in the teachers’ ability to execute the lesson – in teaching-related areas.

Most of the participants in the interview spoke favourably about having TA, agreeing that it encouraged teachers to have different teaching styles and personalities of teaching, a view like one expressed by Vangriekel et al. who claimed that teachers who collaborate improve their skills and thus, students’ performance as well (Vangrieken K. , Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015). Their views on the definition of TA can be summarized as the professional freedom of educators in their institutions, particularly the level to which they can make independent selections about what they teach the students and how they do it.

Participants also held strongly neutral views towards the concept of teacher autonomy, with ten participants agreeing that teacher autonomy may be interpreted and viewed differently by different teachers. One of the participants explained how the concept of teacher autonomy was expansive (Participant SV-F-Manager) giving it a broader reach.

Interviewer: *“How would you define teacher autonomy?”*

Participant SV-F-Management: *“I think teacher autonomy is something that is very broad... the language you use in class, the way you teach in class ... what you teach in class, all are very important.”*

The views of this participant highlight that TA is not just limited to the freedom to teach, rather, it extends to other areas that are related to teaching like the teachers’ use of language, materials used for teaching and the way teaching is carried out. However, the participant admits that the level of teacher autonomy experienced may be different among teachers. This is dependent on the teachers’ environment and other demographic variables. Regarding this, participant SV added:

*“Obviously there may be limitations because it depends whether you’re an associate or a full-timer. Associate lecturers would obviously be, curbed in, in, certain areas there are parameters that they must manage. Yeah, module leaders will have a bit more autonomy”* (SV-F-Manager).

As mentioned by SV, teachers can exercise TA depending on their employment status. Full-time teachers have more autonomy to make decisions whereas part-timers are under more restrictions. For these reasons, TA does not mean the same for both categories of teachers. This is the same view expressed by Moomaw (2005) in the literature review that states that autonomy means differently to different teachers, or in short, teachers perceived TA differently in various cultural environments.

Similarly, several participants also acknowledged that although teacher autonomy had many positive outcomes, there must still be a restriction on the level

of it and areas where teachers can utilize their authority. Eight participants provided negative responses towards teacher autonomy, sharing the view that teacher autonomy was not absolute.

*“JL (Teaching): Too much freedom, too much autonomy also might probably lead them or deviate from the main objective” (JL-M-Teacher).*

This is closer to the view highlighted in a study conducted among teachers in South Korea where the teachers did not view TA as a helpful element at work as they did not view TA as a sign of positive development, they were not convinced or comfortable with TA, and did not feel empowered by it (Hong & Youngs, 2015).

While another participant goes to the extent to say that

*“(there is a) need to balance autonomy with a certain degree of control. Therefore, teachers have to follow a set of rules and regulations”. The participant also believes that “if (teachers) have absolute autonomy, most of the time, (they) end up with anarchy, meaning total confusion and chaos. (This is) not fair to the students” (KS-F-Manager).*

Most participants also noted that although TA was important, most teachers still have to work within a clearly set, pre-defined boundary given by the management and school as seen from the response below:

Interviewer: *How would you define teacher autonomy?”*

SN (Management): *“... autonomy doesn't mean free for all, does it? The syllabus, the learning outcomes, there are certain set assessments the students must reach a passing criteria” (SN-M-Manager).*

Here, the participant while reckoning the benefits of TA highlights the importance of a 'criterion' for it which is tied to student performance. This situation

is far different from the TA experienced by Finnish teachers where they are free from external pressures such as inspection, standardized testing, and government control (Crouch, 2015). Whereas the interview responses point out that Singapore's situation is different where teachers follow the syllabus, lesson plan, and assessment structure – according to what has been provided by their respective Heads of Department, Head of School or level coordinators which the participants often refer to as “framework”.

#### 5.1.5. Features of teaching environment

The respondents in this study identified the teaching environment as an important factor in determining TA. In this study, the environment was categorized into two groups, which were positive factors encouraging TA in the workplace, and negative factors restricting TA in the workplace.

A TA-supportive environment is one in which teachers are encouraged to exercise TA in several ways, which include activities such as choosing their teaching methodologies, and external teaching materials, and incorporating their teaching philosophies and beliefs. Concerning the TA-supportive environment, the respondents indicated that the following areas were critical to an environment that fosters TA:

##### *Trust and respect.*

Mutual trust and respect are areas that were highlighted by many respondents as factors that foster TA at work. Participants felt that their work was made more effective and productive when they had the trust of their head of department or academic directors. One of the participants put it very openly that an environment

that fosters TA is one where teachers can work without having the fear of being monitored or micromanaged by the authorities:

*Interviewer: "What kind of an environment would foster teacher autonomy?"*

*TB (Teaching): "I guess is mm, environment where there's trust in uh, and respect in each individual's abilities and ... character as well. Knowing that, you know, that the individual will be able to carry out the task without being micromanaged or without, you know, having to worry about whether that teacher ... is not going to do anything about it in the confines of the classroom?" (TB-M-Teacher)*

This is the same view that I have mentioned in the literature review, a view raised by Payneeandy (1997) in her research in the Mauritian teaching context where the lack of trust in teachers' ability to fulfil their roles in education causes the authorities to show a lack of initiative to provide the necessary training for teachers. She points out trust as one of the essential qualities for successfully exercising teacher autonomy (Payneeandy, 1997).

*Relatable and flexible superiors.*

The data also indicated that people in authority played a major role in determining teacher perceptions. The way managers view teachers' work determined teachers' comfort level in teaching at the institution.

*"Interviewer: What do you see as the factors or features of an environment that fosters teacher autonomy?"*



*“AP (Teaching): A very relatable boss, a manager of the department that listens and gives us that flexibility ... coordinators that also work well with their teachers ... so that they can together decide on maybe a certain project that they might want to do, so I think that's a lot of teacher autonomy, changing exam questions, uhm, weightage of the exam components, uh, to suit the level at the very end.” (AP-F-Teacher)*

Having relatable and flexible supervisors encourages staff to be creative and adaptable in the ways that they teach their students or make use of newer materials to make their lessons more effective. It was also added that an environment that fosters TA will not have micromanagement by the authorities, an idea already emphasized by Little who states that teachers can only develop learner autonomy if they are autonomous (Little, Conference paper, 2000). Lamb endorses this view and claims that teachers who consider themselves powerless to act autonomously may become dissatisfied and may leave the profession (Lamb, Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, 2008). In short, freedom and flexibility in the classroom are essential factors that hold teachers in their profession (Brunetti, 2001).

However, some participants highlighted aspects that deter TA at work. These are factors such as close-minded views, micromanaging, authoritarian attitude, top-down policies, institutional policies, time constraints and individual personalities of teachers. The respondents also indicated several factors which could deter TA in the workplace, such as:

- 1) One of the key statements related to this aspect is close-minded, inflexible, and authoritative management with the tendency to micro-manage:

*“A management being too restrictive would then force um, a lot of um, oversight because they want to ensure that the teachers don’t, don’t break those restrictions.”* (TB-M-Teacher)

2) Outcome-based performances, individual personalities of teachers and limitation of time:

*“If there's a focus on exams for example, there is a limitation in terms of how far you can take your number of hours in terms of doing other activities... though you have autonomy, sometimes a lot of lecturers don't want to practice it, it's also individual personalities and limitation of time.”* (SV-F-Teacher)

#### 5.1.6. Teaching methodology

With regards to teaching methodology, all participants agreed that teachers should have TA in deciding their methods of teaching their students. Participants who were primarily involved in teaching (five) stated that teachers should be given autonomy in choosing how their students were taught as they were the parties directly involved in and spending most of the time with students, allowing them to see and understand the different weaknesses and strengths that different students might have and plan and teach these students accordingly. Concerning teaching methodology, four sub-themes were identified, which were: 1) Choosing teaching methods, 2) choosing learning activities, 3) incorporating teaching philosophy and beliefs, and 4) choosing teaching topics/themes.

Participants who were in the senior level management (seven) concurred that teachers have different styles of teaching, and having autonomy allows them to

display their creativity and personalities in adapting to the learning needs of different levels of students based on their learning abilities, as long as the main learning objectives were achieved. When participant GM-M-Manager, who is a senior director level, primarily involved in management level affairs, was asked whether teachers should have autonomy in choosing their teaching methodology, he replied that teaching guidelines may not necessarily be helpful to teachers, rather they should be left on their own to be more creative. In the interviewee's own words;

*“I think teachers that are creative usually will find a way to exercise autonomy anyway... I think ... giving too much direction and too much support um, comes off often as a crutch to weaker lecturers rather than ... anything else... By all means, give a common goal and say, this is what we're working towards ... You just basically give the lecturer ... an outline of the syllabus and tell them ... do whatever you want and just make sure that the students get there at the end.” (GM-M-Manager)*

GM's views reflect Banegas's views as stated in the literature review.

According to Banegas, teacher autonomy refers to a professional attribute that points to teachers' freedom to implement a curriculum discreetly, 'to control the process in teaching', and 'the ability to control one's development as a teacher' (Banegas, 2013). In this context, the teachers consider TA as the freedom to select and design teaching materials and to teach what they have prepared – views that GM has endorsed in the interview.

On the other hand, some teachers do not find it an effective choice for teachers to have the freedom to select their materials and use their methods to teach.

Rather they are comfortable with everything centrally planned and decided. As mentioned in the literature review (the study among South Korean teachers), many participants (nine) noted that there should also be a regulation on the amount of autonomy that teachers should have regarding teaching methodology, as autonomy is highly dependent on trust. Participants involved in teaching and management levels (four from teaching, five from management) agreed that there should be ample supervision and control of teaching methods as there is always a possibility of misuse by teachers, with participant SV-F-Manager, primarily involved in management level affairs, stating that “*there are certain environmental challenges ... there are limitations ... there are some, certain challenges the lecturer has to manage*”. This view echoes the warnings made by O’Hara who calls teacher autonomy a double-edged sword and warns that leaders must be cautious and constantly monitor if teachers use this freedom for the benefit of their students or if they are hiding behind the autonomy and misuse it (O’Hara, 2006). Again, participant GM-M-Manager noted that “*it needs to be of a certain standard ... the problem is you can’t get away from a framework anymore these days*”, a view shared by Pitt (Pitt, 2010), which suggests that the presence of pre-existing guidelines for teachers to follow within other similar-level institutions.

#### 5.1.7. External teaching materials

There is a high response rate from the participants to speak about TA in selecting external teaching materials that refer to materials other than those provided or stipulated within the syllabus and lesson outline and that are often sourced out by teachers themselves. With regards to choosing external teaching materials, such as audio-visuals and external textbooks, almost all participants (11) shared a similar

view that teachers should be accorded autonomy in doing so. Participants from teaching and management levels generally agreed that as long as external teaching materials were culturally, racially, and ethically appropriate (NC-F-Manager), as well as relevant to the topics being taught, teachers should be given the autonomy to introduce and incorporate them into their lessons as they would then help students in learning and understanding the concepts being taught. Participant GM-M-Manager stated that he encourages his staff to do so, as *“materials have to evolve ... you can’t always teach the same thing over and over and over again.”* This notion was also shared by participant IA-F-Teacher, who is primarily involved in teaching.

*“Interviewer: How do the teachers at your institution exercise or do not exercise their freedom to choose their teaching methods? Like for example, learning activities uh, audio-visuals ... outings?”*

*“SA (Teaching): As long as ... the teachers inform the module leader and if they um, show that this is really relevant, there is a goal behind it, I will always support the teachers. We (teachers) must have the freedom to choose different ... techniques because otherwise we simply lose the students that we have and they will get bored, and they will switch off immediately.” (IA-F-Teacher)*

However, some participants (five), particularly those at the management level (four), argued that it is difficult to ascertain the appropriateness of all external teaching materials and that teachers should still follow the materials approved by the institutions to follow standardization and consistency across different classes and to

minimize comparisons between teachers. One of the participants, KS-F-Manager had the following to say:

*“We are not sure uh, whether the students actually understood because uh, just simply watching it, the students may not get the message or truly understand what the video is trying to uh, demonstrate or ... what is the learning objective or the outcomes of watching”* (KS-F-Manager).

Another participant agrees with this view and feels that there is a need to standardize the materials as no class should have unfair advantage over others. In the participant’s own words, “... *we have to ... standardize our materials ... we don't want uh, any class that has uh, an advantage over others ... And consistency must be there*” (LM-F-Manager). Neutrally, six participants also opined that it would be difficult to ascertain the level of usefulness of the external materials, hence they should only be used as supporting and supplementary materials in classes and making sure that these external materials are used only after completing the common materials decided on by the institution.

#### 5.1.8. Assessment methods

Generally, participants (11) across all levels agreed that teachers should not have the autonomy to decide on assessment methods. This is largely because assessment methods in institutions have generally been designed based on prerequisites that the authorities (CPE, partnering universities or MOE) have introduced. Furthermore, these assessment methods would have already undergone rigorous testing and been in place for long periods. Participants involved in teaching were generally encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness of these methods, as well as allowed to suggest changes, but participants at the management

level have the final say in whether these assessment methods should undergo changes or need improvement. Regarding TA on assessment methods, four sub-themes were identified, which were: 1) Changing/choosing assessment weightage, 2) changing assessment types, 3) choosing assessment methods, and 4) deciding on how assessments were marked.

Choosing assessment weightage refers to deciding on weighting allocated for various types of assessed tasks like class tests, quizzes, presentations, group projects, graded homework, group projects, final exam and class participation just to name a few. One of the participants felt that it is acceptable for a teacher to decide on choosing assessment weightage *'if the existing system is not working and the system needs a change while the new change is a win for a long term'* (NV-M-Manager). Another participant stated that teachers being allowed to decide on the weightage is not possible as assessment is an area that needs standardization to maintain the quality of the program. In the participant's own words, *"I think it's going to be very difficult ... giving autonomy ... there should be some form of standardization"*. Moreover, the participant also felt that teachers teaching weaker students may feel pity for the students. As a result, *"the teacher (may) set a low standard. And all the students make it ... then we may be doing a dis-service to the students ... That affects not just the quality ... you are then disadvantaging the students into helping them realize that they are good enough for the next level (whereas) in reality, they are not"* (TB-M-Teacher).

Although most of the participants were not in agreement with changing the type of assessment, some participants expressed a different opinion. They stated that associate lecturers have the authority to provide feedback that would lead to changing, updating or altering testing methods (GM-M-Manager). Another

participant pointed out that *“the lecturer is given full freedom ... before the start of the class to decide the assessment”* (NV-M-Manager). Moreover, with regards to deciding the marking of assessments, the response rate for this section was very low with only four participant responses. One of the participants stated that it is alright for teachers to decide on marks *“if they can justify why a paper should be given marks or shouldn't be given marks”*.

One of the participants primarily involved in management stated that *“in practicality, that (choosing assessment methods) cannot work (as) there must be standardization in assessment”* (SV-F-Manager). Additionally, another participant (JL-M-Teacher), who is primarily involved in teaching shared a similar view that teachers should not have the autonomy to handle affairs regarding assessment due to its fundamental differences with teaching and learning.

*Interviewer: “Do you think, uhm, the teachers should be granted the freedom to decide on their own assessment methods?”*

*Participant: “I'm afraid we cannot give ... that much of freedom or autonomy to teachers uh, to do the assessment as you know there are different ways to assess at different levels ... so I don't think, you know, teachers should be given the freedom for the assessment, rather, the school should have established a certain method uh, of assessment.”* (JL-M-Teacher)

Similarly, a few participants (four) also agreed that as assessment types, weightage of assessments, and marking rubrics have all been pre-determined after considerable research into it, teachers should not have the autonomy to change these



components at their individual choice as this will disrupt the consistency of the program. Moreover, these components are designed and well-researched before implementing by the higher authorities making it difficult for teachers to change as they wish. The participants think that a system that is too flexible may act as a loophole for students who are not academically qualified to progress to the next level, which in turn affects the quality of the program.

However, six participants have also stated positively in favour of letting teachers choose assessment methods. Participants who were primarily involved in management-level affairs agreed that smaller assessments, such as daily or casual ones, could be changed by the teachers as they did not have many consequences on the overall study outline. One participant had the following to say:

*“But ... whether the lecturer uh, ultimately chooses (the case study) of a company or allows the student to choose a company on their own ... based on (the teachers’) understanding (of) the students’ strength, ... we (empower) the lecturers, to do that” (LM-F-Manager).*

Another managerial-level participant also agreed that *“if (the change is about) daily assessments I don’t think that’s an issue ... the freedom to discuss and the freedom to improve is always there”* (NC-F-Manager), and another participant at a senior level too supported this view by stating that if such changes are done well, it would be very productive and he/she would support such changes (SN-M-Manager). While two participants were strongly in support of teachers designing their tests for their classes as they know their students best.

**Table 5.15 Responses about Deciding on Assessment Methods**

<i>Choosing Assessment Methods</i>		
<b><u>Type of Responses</u></b>	<b><u>No. of Participants</u></b>	<b><u>Participants' Responses</u></b>
Negative	11	19
Neutral	7	8
Positive	6	9

Note: The number of participants in the table represents those who responded, not the total number of participants. Some participants chose not to respond, and in such cases, they will not add to the number of participants in the table.

#### 5.1.9. Planning and decision-making

The data analysis found that nine participants (five involved in management, four involved in teaching) were in favour of teachers having autonomy in planning and decision-making processes, as well as expressing their views at work and in meetings with their peers and supervisors. Concerning participants' responses, the four following sub-themes were identified: 1) Expression of teachers' views, 2) playing a role in planning and decision-making processes, 3) having a say in planning and decision-making processes, and 4) having a say in teacher administrative duties.

Concerning planning and decision-making processes in PEIs, participants mostly agreed that teachers should have the autonomy to play a role in contributing to these processes. According to a participant at the management level, it was quoted that:

*Interviewer: "... How do the teachers at your institution play or do not play a role in planning and decision-making?"*

*Participant: "Whether you are professional or academic staff, we like everybody to be involved more or less, just a question to what extent ... When we recruit our academic staff ... we would like them to be involved with our student services, for example, in providing advice and counselling to our students. Even if it's (about) non-academic matters." (KS-F-Manager)*

This view by KS-F-Manager is like what is being practised in the Finnish education system where much of the institutional-level decision-making in Finnish educational institutions concerning educational, social and developmental issues tend to be in the hands of teachers - either collegially or as individuals (Salokangas, Wermke, & Harvey, Teachers' autonomy deconstructed: Irish and Finnish teachers' perceptions of decision-making and control, 2019). This notion was also accepted by another participant at the teaching level, who concurred that teachers should be involved in the planning and decision-making process when asked:

*"Yes because ... we want a school that is well run ... from my perspective, the welfare of the students should be ... prioritized, because, uh, if they are comfortable, if they have good, uh, classrooms and learning resources, they will learn better." (SE-F-Teacher)*

**Table 5.16 Responses about Role in Planning and Decision-making**

<i>Role in Planning and Decision-making</i>		
<u>Type of Responses</u>	<u>No. of Participants</u>	<u>Participants' Responses</u>
Negative	6	9
Neutral	3	3
Positive	9	20

The same participant was cautious in pointing out the downside of teachers being involved in administrative planning and decision-making. The interviewee argued against the extent of the roles which teachers should have in the planning and decision-making process and committee, stating that by doing so, teachers might become more focused on administrative matters and may digress from the key responsibilities in teaching:

*“But at the same time, teachers don’t always have to be in committees because that may not be the best way to make decisions ... because if teachers sat on these committees, it then becomes ... management or administrative matters are now becoming more important than the teaching component.”* (SE-F-Teacher)

However, participants involved in teaching (five) did not have the same responses, stating that teachers, particularly part-time teachers, often did not speak out or criticize the system for fear of losing their jobs or because they believed that their opinions and suggestions would not be taken seriously by the management.

*“SA (Teaching): Sometimes, teachers want to have a job next term, so sometimes they may think twice ... maybe sometimes they also give up”* (IA-F-Teacher).

#### 5.1.10. Government Policies on TA

The interviews gathered information that showed evidence that there were recently many changes that the government has subtly implemented to protect the teaching staff, especially part-time teaching staff who were exclusively at the mercy of the private institutions. For example, the institutions are required to pay mandatory provident fund contributions to their contract teachers since 2016 (CPF Board, 2020) which makes their life safer and makes them more confident about their position as teachers. In addition, part-time teachers are now entitled to seven days of medical leave annually although they are not entitled to any paid holidays.

One of the participants stated that the government policies are mostly about fees and attendance and are mainly aimed at protecting student interests. Whereas another participant claimed that the teachers are not informed about government policies directly and they have to get to know about the new policies from newspapers or the media. Another participant at the management level stated that *"Singapore actually doesn't actually have an education framework (for private education sector)"* and that *"as of (2018), the institution must have a policy in place on (teacher autonomy), but the (authorities) leave it to the institutions to figure out how to implement TA as the (government) feels that the industry is mature enough to be able to deal with their own problems"* (GM-M-Manager).

Four participants felt that government policies related to TA have always been top-down in the form of precise guidelines from the government. However, this has recently become a bottom-up approach, where the government is expecting the institutions to develop their policies in line with a common framework. Others stated

that the government is more concerned about the process and product of the program rather than TA itself. As one of the respondents shared:

*"Interviewer: What, what do you think about, or what ideas do you have about the authorities' views on teacher autonomy for private higher education institutions? What do they say about teacher autonomy in the private educational setting?"*

*"Respondent: "They have changed the direction ... recently. They used to give us a framework, and then you have to uh, work around the framework ... But recently ... regulatory authorities ... have changed the way. They say that why didn't you ... So, it's a bit more like a bottom-up approach" (LM-F-Manager).*

However, six interviewees mentioned that the government has certain standard operating procedures to brief new staff or duties, and an EduTrust system which all institutions in the private education sector have to abide by. Furthermore, the government (CPE) may periodically send officials down to interview the teachers in the school to check whether these stipulated guidelines were followed by the institution before renewing the EduTrust accreditation which is essential for all private institutions.

Many participants were of the view that they are not in the know about whether government policies on TA exist or what they stipulate. One of the participants stated that the institution has its communication channel at the management level to share government policies on teacher autonomy and claimed

that "*anything that affects (them) immediately or is significant, (they) communicate with each other about it*" (SV-F-Manager).

While some participants share their view that they are updated about the policies by their institutions, others disagree by saying that the information may not be timely, "*even if it is timely it may not be 100%*" (TB-M-Teacher). The participant added that it is sometimes difficult for the teachers to understand the relevance of the policy in their context, but the management imposes the policies on the staff in a top-down approach whereas disseminating the information through face-to-face meetings and discussions would be a better option which the management may not choose. On the other hand, another participant stated the opposite view. In the participant's own words,

*"... whenever there is a Government Order, it goes to the principal of course and when he comes and delivers ... Usually it is a kind of a discussion ... so we do express our feelings ... feedback but most often as you know in the Singapore set-up, nothing could be changed."* (JL-M-Teacher)

This participant's view is slightly different from the others as the words used probably signify policies that are inflexible in Singapore. The "*discussion*" according to the participant is just for the namesake as it is not intended to gather feedback or produce any results. While to some institutions, the policies are not the problem of the teachers and therefore, they do not bother to update teachers clearly on the new policies or changes in existing policies. As mentioned by another

participant, “...most of the time I think ... the way which (teachers) probably see (the policies) is when there's extra paperwork that needs to be done ... when there's extra feedback that you need to give ...” (GM-M-Manager).

#### 5.1.11. Institutional Policies on Teacher Autonomy

Most of the participants agreed that institutions have their policies on TA. Teachers had certain requirements about attendance, teaching processes, work processes such as paperwork, and other administrative matters, work ethics and discipline and professional behaviour. Most of these institutional policies are built on the government and CPE policies which are translated as recommended guidelines that the teachers have to follow. Such policies reach the teachers through the CEO or head of department, or through official public media like newspapers. With regards to institutional policies on TA, two key sub-themes were identified, which were whether teachers should be involved in policy development processes, as well as whether teachers possessed knowledge about TA-related institutional policies.

As seen from Table 5.24 below, many participants felt that the policy development processes involve mostly higher-level management staff, not teachers. In the words of one of the participants, “*usually the head of school will assign different tasks to different teachers ... I'm not sure how it works ... to be honest*” (AI-F-Teacher). Here, a lack of transparency is reflected in the words of the teacher. Another participant (LM-F-Manager) claims that the institution does not impose its policies on the teachers whereas, it will be the result of elaborate discussions and brainstorming sessions while there is also efficient vertical and horizontal communication taking place at the workplace.



Participant NC-F-Manager stated that institutional-level decision-making involves mostly the board of governors, management board and senior management among the staff, whereas teaching staff are privy to the matter. Others also shared similar views pointing to the fact that decision-making at PIHL is mostly at the discretion of higher management and the process excludes teaching staff.

However, some participants of the interview who were teachers were often not clear about the channels through which they would gather information about TA. They were often not sure about the processes and procedures involved in decision-making in their institutions. Participants in management positions claimed that this is a grey area in their institutions as the authorities do not stipulate anything through written policies or guidelines on TA. However, they agreed that each institution would design its guidelines for teaching staff which are formulated based on the guidelines from the MOE and CPE.

It is also noteworthy that in this aspect, the participants did not have much to share, or they were ignorant about the concept of what the government's take on TA is or whether the authorities have any such policies at all. The government's stance is mirrored in the speech of the former minister for education, Heng Swee Kiat to the teaching community in 2012. He encourages teachers to be more reflective learners and positive role models of self-directed learning by making self-evaluations and reflecting on their own learning needs (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012). This is reflective of teacher autonomy as the minister is urging teachers to take ownership of their knowledge and teaching. The Ministry of Education resounds the views of the minister and assures teachers more time for self-reflection on their lessons, sharing lessons with their peers, and developing new teaching approaches for their learners (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2015).

In general, the responses from participants often match as they have similar responses to most of the questions. However, there were instances where there are contrasting responses, especially between teaching staff and management staff. For example, there were opposing opinions concerning teachers having the autonomy to express their views freely during staff meetings, as participants who were involved in management felt that their teaching staff should and do have the freedom to do so, whereas participants involved in teaching felt otherwise as they confided that they were apprehensive of speaking out due to the fear of losing their job, particularly associate teachers, as well as having their opinions and feedback not being taken seriously. However, this is an area that requires a deeper level of research and it will be discussed in more detail in the next part of the qualitative data analysis.

## 5.2. Section 2 – Perceptions of Teachers versus Management

### 5.2.1. Introduction

This section is an analytical discussion of the face-to-face interviews and is linked to the earlier section “*Qualitative Analysis*” while this one specifically looks at the way teachers and people in positions of authority perceive the concept of teacher autonomy in Singapore’s private institutions of higher learning (PIHL). The chapter investigates the similarities and differences in the views of teachers and managers involved in the interview. The teachers in this interview are primarily involved in classroom teaching activities with minor roles in administration while management personnel are those whose primary duties are related to planning and decision making, policy formulation, maintaining the educational standards, meeting business targets and student satisfaction, and budget management.

### 5.2.2. Conceptualization of TA

Both teaching and management participants shared identical, positive views that autonomy referred to creativity and freedom that teachers were allowed to have to exercise their own decisions and choices over matters such as lesson content, teaching methods, and teaching materials. Teacher participants felt that TA refers to a teaching environment that allows them to be "creative, responsible, able to adapt to the requirements of the students' needs, tailor the pace of teaching, and exhibit the (teachers') creative skills and flexibility". However, the teacher-participants added that TA was strongly influenced by the school's management. As one of the teachers put it:

*"(TA) simply means that you have less management or fewer instructions, or ... less instructions and more freedom for teachers and managers to do and exhibit their creative skills in the way that they like". (JL-M-Teacher)*

The teachers were generally of the opinion that TA is tied to the management style of institutions. When there is less micromanaging of teachers' work, they can exercise more autonomy at work. In other words, their autonomous decisions are superseded by the decisions of management that are intrusive into the teachers' decision-making authority. As mentioned by Ozturk & Freidman, TA covers all the roles taken up by teachers, and their say in the teaching-related decisions made by the school, human resources management, materials and finance management and the general working environment of teachers (Ozturk & Freidman, 2011). This indicates that although teachers

believe that TA is important at work, teachers alone are unable to exercise TA, they need strong support from the management too.

Similarly, most management participants also agreed that it was important for teachers to be given autonomy, especially in classroom-level affairs. One of the manager-participants (NC) stated that when teachers have autonomy, they do a better job by recreating what is in the text and make learning more exciting and fun for the students through their own teaching methods and newly created materials. While another manager-participant (LM) defined TA as “*the empowerment to manage the class*”.

Whereas another participant (KS) believes that teachers should have the autonomy to perform better but only “*to have certain level of it*” and to “*certain aspect*”. This participant draws boundaries for TA defining the extent to which teachers are allowed to work. Most management participants did not support teachers being involved in decision-making at the institutional level. This is an area where the teachers' opinion differs from management's views.

Most teaching and management participants also acknowledged some negative aspects of teachers having TA, although different views were shared amongst the two groups. To some teaching participants, having an excessive level of TA could potentially produce negative results on the learning objectives and outcomes of students as mentioned by one of them:

*“too much freedom, too much autonomy also might probably lead them or deviate from the main objective”* (JL-M-Teacher)

Most of the management participants believed that although TA is important for and should be given to teachers, there were still certain guidelines

and regulations which had to be followed, as these regulations had mostly existed for a very long time and were already undergone approval from the institute. Additionally, the same guidelines and regulations were also formulated based on government policies on private higher education institutes, which meant that there were legal obligations for both the institutes and teachers to abide by. There were participants at management levels who seemed to be not comfortable with teachers having total autonomy at work. Therefore, they emphasized the need to have some form of control in the use of language and in what they do in class and how they do it. Some of the participants who are in leadership roles expressed their views:

- (i) *“autonomy for teachers would be within clearly set boundaries” (SN-M-Manager)*
- (ii) *“You need to balance autonomy with certain degree of control ... I think there are set rules and regulations that they need to follow ... 100% TA ... not fair to the students” (KS-F-Manager)*
- (iii) *“you need to make sure that (teachers) don't use any negative language (in class)” (SV-F-Manager)*

A few participants expressed neutral views on having TA. Some teacher participants expressed teachers had their personalities and different audiences, and therefore had to balance between different levels of TA in different circumstances. Management participants concurred with this view, adding that TA was a broad concept which encompassed a multitude of factors, as well as ultimately being based on decisions made by teachers on when, what type of, and how much TA to exercise in class. A broad discussion of specific questions

shows the participants' unwillingness or fear to speak about the topic or discomfort to discuss the topic with a third person.

### 5.2.3. Features of the teaching environment

According to most teacher-participants, an environment which deters TA was one with high levels of regulations and intervention from the higher authorities, with some examples being classroom and lesson monitoring, introduction and enforcement of institutional policies and rules, as well as frequent staff meetings to enforce policies and regulations on the teaching staff. This response was shared by managerial participants as well, who mostly acknowledged that the levels of TA being exercised by teachers were almost entirely dependent on how open-minded the management staff were, as well as whether there is any kind of micro-management involved. Similarly, certain objectives, such as student performance being a criterion to judge teacher performance could also greatly deter TA from being exercised by teachers. This points to the fact that it is not an easy task for teachers to work in an environment that fosters TA to bring out the best in teachers as witnessed in the case of teachers in the UK. In this context, it is not a surprise that research conducted and the report published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in England showed that teachers there have the second-lowest levels of autonomy among the country's professions (Lough, Teachers have second-lowest autonomy of 11 professions, 2020).

On the other hand, features which encourage TA were mostly contrary to those mentioned as deterrence. Again, both groups of participants acknowledged that open-minded management and lesser in-class supervision and monitoring

were critical components in fostering TA among teachers. Moreover, management participants added that the delivery of a well-defined framework to teachers could greatly allow the latter to decide and employ the maximum level of TA within this given set of boundaries, rather than acting as a means of restriction. This view has been emphasized by one of the teacher participants during the interview. IA-F-Teacher mentioned that TA would be effectively employed "*if the guidelines are very clear*" about teaching and administrative matter so that there would not be any cause of possible disputes. The participants mentioned key expressions like "*complete trust, respect, open mind, personalize, adapt, create, flexibility, innovation and ownership*" to refer to a TA-supportive environment.

#### 5.2.4. Teaching methodology

##### 5.2.4.1. *Autonomy in choosing teaching methods.*

With regards to choosing teaching methods, all participants agreed that teachers should have autonomy in following their methods as seen from the words of IA-F-Teacher, "*(teachers) should be able to choose what they want (to teach), (and) how they want to teach (it)*". According to teacher-participants, having autonomy in choosing their teaching method in their lessons is seen as a necessity, as different classes and different students may have different preferences, needs and/or paces of learning. This view is also emphasized by another teacher-participant, TB-M-Teacher who suggests that it is important that teachers be left to decide on their teaching methods in class as different classes have students of various abilities and within the same class, the students vary in their abilities. Having TA, especially in these situations, allows the teachers to

adapt and better handle their different students, which in turn helps these students perform better. As put in the words of one of the participants:

*“Let's say, a class that is uh, weaker and unable to respond to that teaching methodology, then the teacher should be, you know, wise enough to uh, switch stuff (TB-M-Teacher)*

Similarly, management participants agreed that teachers must be given the autonomy to follow the teaching methods of their choice. They stated that as teachers were the first line of response to, and had the highest level of interaction with students, teachers must have the autonomy to decide what is best for the students. It was also acknowledged that their autonomy was ultimately dependent on the methodology to have a sufficient, well-reasoned pedagogical goal and justification behind its use. Supporting this view, one of the managers pointed out that teachers should be given the freedom to follow their teaching methods only if they are trained in doing so (GM-M-Manager). This brings to question whether teachers in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning are trained to manage their classes and choose their teaching methods without following a centralised system.

Both groups of participants also acknowledged the disadvantages of teachers having autonomy in choosing their teaching methods. For teaching participants, some concerns arose regarding how the effectiveness of their chosen teaching methods was evaluated, as student performances could only be evaluated later through assessments and tests, which could be too late for teachers to remedy any likely weaknesses in their teaching methods. Furthermore, the autonomy to choose teaching methods was also highly dependent on trust, and both groups agreed that there was always a possibility of



misuse by some teachers. The idea of 'trust' was a factor that was raised by both teachers and managers. Does this play a major influence in Singapore's teaching environment that needs to be researched further? (external support/references needed)

Management participants in the interview focused on the need for and presence of certain boundaries and limitations within the institutes. The participants noted that although it was important for teachers to exercise TA in choosing the best teaching methods for their students, there were still government and institutional regulations, as well as some challenges, that teachers had to face. In this context, it can be assumed that teachers in PIHL in Singapore have many constraints to deal with from various angles – from direct supervisors, institution's management, students, parents and government authorities.

An equal number of four participants each from teachers and managers expressed neutral views as well. From a neutral standpoint, they claimed that the level of TA that teachers can employ is dependent on several factors, which could be the teachers' personal preferences, age groups of students, as well as the influence of management-level decisions while avoiding a clear answer for the question that was posed to them. Some of the common neutral views by teachers and managers are as follows:

*I think there must be some kind of balance (IA-F-Teacher)*

*But again, having said that, everything else is about comfort level and doing your best for your students (TB-M-Teacher)*

*giving teachers the freedom to achieve their goals, within a certain framework (GM-M-Manager)*

*Again there are certain boundaries (SN-M-Manager)*

*We do encourage uh some variations but again within certain, uh  
sensible, constraints (KS-F-Manager)*

In all the quotes above, the participants show a hesitation to express their views clearly. While teachers are unwilling to criticize their superiors, their institution, or the system due to the fear of being penalised in their professional life, in many developed education systems, the assurance is guaranteed to educators from being penalised for expressing their views that are aimed at improving the system. This idea is emphasized by Smith who states that educators from even private educational institutions in America enjoy protection from suffering any penalty for speaking up (Smith, 2015). Whereas, the managers, would agree that flexibility is needed in exercising autonomy in teaching while they fear losing control over their subordinates, who are the teachers in this context. In this context, the views of teachers and managers are different with the teachers wanting to prefer to have an unobtrusive environment to decide on their teaching methods while the authorities look at this with an element of mistrust. This shows that their views about autonomy differ. The key issue here is the question of distributing authority, the questions about who has the authority, how is it shared and what are its limits.

#### *5.2.4.2. Autonomy in implementing personal learning activities*

Teaching participants expressed generally a positive attitude towards having autonomy in deciding on learning activities in their classes. This was largely due to the reason that teachers knew their students best, and therefore they need the freedom to choose and implement learning activities which they felt could help all

their students learn better (TB-M-Teacher). The same teacher mentioned that it should be up to the teacher to decide how to select appropriate teaching techniques and activities in a class where the learners are of varying skills and abilities and are in large numbers.

There was only one neutral viewpoint towards teachers being allowed to implement their activities, which was made by a management participant (KS-F-Manager) who acknowledged that although teachers were encouraged to do so, there were also some constraints about it. The same management participant also expressed concerns regarding possible issues that may arise from teachers who may abuse their autonomy.

#### 5.2.4.3. *Autonomy on incorporating personal teaching philosophy and beliefs*

Two teacher participants and one management participant spoke in favour of teachers having autonomy in incorporating personal teaching philosophies and beliefs. According to the manager, this is acceptable only if there is sufficient time and the learning objectives are met (NV-M-Manager). While the teacher-participant stated that this is acceptable if it can help learners to reach a higher level of learning (TB-M-Teacher).

On the other hand, one management and one teaching participant expressed negative views towards having autonomy in this area. According to the teaching participant, teachers should always be concerned with the majority of the class as it is not feasible and will be unfair to the majority of students who would be affected by a smaller group of weaker students, who may require more time and attention. Therefore, both participants viewed that teachers don't have to spend time bringing into the classroom their philosophy and beliefs.

As for the management participant, the concerns revolved around the possibility of negative learning outcomes because of teachers having the autonomy to incorporate their teaching philosophies and beliefs. This goes back to the question of the management's trust in the teachers and the professional choices they make.

From a neutral viewpoint, two teachers and one management participant acknowledged that the TA on this matter was highly subjective to different factors, such as time, type of classes, and the individual teacher's capability in achieving a balance within the classroom. While the management participant mentioned that the feasibility of teachers using their personal beliefs and philosophies in their class depends on what works in a class and what does not. This opinion points to the fact that in such situations, flexibility can be exercised by teachers if they believe that a certain class needs a different way of teaching from the other classes.

#### *5.2.4.4. TA on choosing teaching topics and themes*

Three teaching and two management participants shared positive responses towards teachers being given the autonomy on choosing their teaching topics or themes. According to the teaching participants, being able to do so allows them to better plan for the lessons they teach, and it also grants them the flexibility to handle the situation accordingly should any issues arise. One of the teachers stated that "there should be freedom of expression" in this matter and it is the management's responsibility to "come in and support the teacher" as it is done for the benefit of the students. This is also in line with UNESCO's recommendation that teachers at higher education levels should not be forced to instruct against their own best knowledge and conscience (UNESCO, 1997).

As for management participants, teachers being able to share their personal, relevant work experiences could provide many benefits to their students, such as capturing student attention and helping students understand the purpose of learning. One of the managers stated that they do not “standardise their teaching materials”. They stated their positive views as the flexibility in this area allows teachers to feel the ground before deciding on the way to teach and for the learners to understand the reasons behind and importance of learning a particular topic. In addition, it also helps to be flexible in allowing the teacher to choose teaching topics as the learners comprise both full-time and part-time students and they have varying needs and levels of learning.

In contrast, three teaching and two management participants responded negatively towards TA in this area. Both groups of participants argued about the possibility of students misinterpreting the teachers' themes, which could create bigger problems in which management-level personnel may have to intervene. Moreover, there might also be a possibility of students from one class having an advantage over other classes, which might also cause students' dissatisfaction with unequal treatment and outcomes. Therefore, teachers need to make judgement very carefully, taking into consideration the sensitive areas involved in the group of students they are dealing with. One of the teachers stated that this is permissible only if the teacher can complete the areas meant for the final exam as the focus of the learners is to pass the exam. As mentioned by the teacher,

*“... we need to prepare the students for the final exam ... we want them to pass ... that's our main goal ... so, if the teacher gets the freedom to*

*teach whatever (they) want, in the end, the teacher (may not be able to) cover all the topics ... then we are wasting time”*

(IA-F-Teacher)

Two teachers and one management participant expressed neutral views towards having TA in choosing teaching topics and themes. The teaching participants shared a similar response, stating that the decision on exercising TA in this aspect was subjective to the goals of the students, as well as the teachers' understanding of their students' learning needs. As for the management participant, a greater focus was placed on the type of theme introduced, with the participant stating that teachers need to be very mindful of what the theme covered, especially in matters such as religion and race, due to the multiculturalism of students in Singapore private higher education institutes. Both groups did not provide a definitive response to the question.

#### 5.2.5. External teaching materials

##### 5.2.5.1. *TA on choosing teaching methods*

External teaching materials refer to any materials that teachers use and that are not provided by the institution or the department. Almost all participants responded favourably to teachers having TA on using external teaching materials in their lessons. According to most teaching participants, having external materials such as audio-visuals could act as a supplement to the assigned textbooks and stimulate the learning experience, allowing teachers to make classes more interesting and exciting and helping students stay involved and focused during their lessons.

Although the management participants noted numerous benefits of having different sources of external learning materials on students in the classroom, adding to this, they stated that the use of external teaching materials is always encouraged as long as they were course-relevant, not plagiarised, inoffensive, and were approved by management-level personnel beforehand. Here, the next question arises whether the choice is left to the teachers or whether the teachers must cross multiple hurdles before deciding on what they could teach. This questions the academic authority of the teachers who are the experts in their subjects and those who know their students best. Here, it goes against the successful Finnish education system where teachers who are trained make their own decisions and take ownership of their actions. It also defies Littlewood definition of an autonomous person as one who has an autonomous ability to make and execute their choices, which govern his or her actions (Littlewood, 1999).

There were also several responses which were strongly against teachers having autonomy in this matter, with five management participants arguing about the possible adverse effects and/or problems caused. Some of the repeated concerns about external teaching materials were about whether they were truly beneficial for the students, or instead decreasing the effectiveness of learning, as well as the problem of consistency, appropriateness, and quality of these materials which might not have been screened by the management before use. This is contrary to the views of ESL teachers interviewed in Argentina where the teachers showed a higher level of job satisfaction and a higher level of teacher motivation when they had the autonomy to create materials and teach their self-designed materials (Banegas, 2013). However, the management participants in Singapore did not endorse such views as they believe in controlling the choice of materials used in class.

Management participants (four) also spoke out neutrally in response towards TA using external teaching materials compared to teaching participants (two). Similar to teaching methods, participants from both groups stated that there were many factors which needed to be taken into consideration before introducing and using these materials, such as sensitivity towards the different cultures and races of the students in the classroom. Furthermore, trust between the teachers and management and the need to go through numerous check-and-balances about the materials are required for this to be approved before being carried out.

#### 5.2.6. Assessment methods

##### 5.2.6.1. *TA in deciding assessment weightage*

Positive responses to teachers having TA in deciding assessment weightage were made by three teaching participants and only one management participant. Amongst these four participants, the consensus was that if teachers felt that changes should be made to the weightage of certain assessments, their opinions and suggestions should be taken into account, with the management participant adding that if these changes were positive, the institute will consider making them.

There were only two neutral responses on this matter, one from each participant group that did not provide either a positive or a negative view. According to the teaching participant, there were certain grading standards in which the institute should exercise flexibility in allowing for possible changes to be introduced. Similarly, the management participant added that the autonomy to change assessment weightage is highly dependent on the kind of program, as well as the module which teachers taught.



There were also some negative responses mainly towards having autonomy in deciding assessment weightage, with two responses from teaching participants and one from a management participant. Both teaching participants, despite being in favour of having autonomy in this matter, also acknowledged that it was very difficult for changes to be implemented to assessment weightage as these changes could adversely affect the quality of the previous benchmarks, which might have already been rigorously tested to obtain. Furthermore, these changes had to be agreed upon across the board of teachers and management involved in this subject, and it might not be easy to reach a unanimous agreement in a short period. Despite expressing positive views about autonomy in assessment weightage, the management participant also acknowledged that all institutes were regulated by a governing body. As a result, changes could not be easily introduced as they had to be submitted to the governing body for approval before they could take effect, and this might take a long time.

#### 5.2.6.2. *TA on changing assessment methods*

Three participants at the management level responded positively to having the autonomy to change the types of assessment. Among the three management participants, it was agreed that teachers have the autonomy in providing suggestions and being involved in changing assessment methods, with lecturer feedback functions as the channel of communication from teachers to the management. Their voices were strong in this matter:

- *“If there’s anything that needs to be changed, it can always be discussed, it can always be added in”* (NC-F-Manager)

- “*The feedback is actually given by the lecturers and is actually used verbatim in the restructuring of the modules*” (GM-M-Manager)
- “*... from my experience in terms of the university level of teaching, the lecturer is given full freedom before the start of the class to decide the assessment*” (NV-M-Manager)

However, the same three management participants also expressed negative opinions concerning this matter. The most common response provided by these participants was that these changes could not be made within one or two semesters, as they were required to undergo approval processes before they could be implemented into the course. This means the change is a time-consuming process that may take up to a year or more to be implemented.

Two management participants provided neutral responses to teachers having autonomy in changing assessment methods, stating that although teachers should be given the autonomy to provide feedback and suggestions, the management still had the final say on whether any changes would be made.

#### 5.2.6.3. *TA on choosing assessment methods*

Only half of all participants (six; three teaching level, three management level) responded positively to teachers having TA in choosing the type of assessments. Both groups of participants expressed a similar view that teachers should have autonomy over casual and daily/continuous assessment methods, as these assessments are usually low weightage and do not affect students' performances significantly. Teaching participants who were supportive of this stated that autonomy in this area allows them to create and choose assessments which were

more suited to the strengths and weaknesses of the students, which could potentially help them learn and understand better. This supports the views of many teacher participants who stated that teachers know their learners' needs more than anyone else. Adding to this, management participants noted that any changes or discussion on changes to the choice of assessment methods were welcomed, as long as the changes were positive and beneficial to student learning.

There was only an additional, neutral participant response to TA on assessment methods in comparison to positive responses. However, there were significantly more management participants' responses (five) compared to teaching participants' responses (two). Teaching participants expressed neutral views regarding having TA in choosing assessments, acknowledging that not all students were at the same level, and that teaching, learning, and changing assessments were similar yet very different concepts.

On the management side, the participants emphasized that the level of autonomy given to teachers varies, depending on factors such as the type of program, study, and module. They also added that although autonomy might be granted to teachers, full autonomy would never be possible. If the management thinks that complete autonomy is not possible in reality, it is worth thinking about the reasons behind their pessimistic thinking. The question here is whether they do not want the teachers to exercise complete autonomy as they fear losing their power and authority over? the teachers. Or, it could be a matter of lack of trust in the teachers by the authorities as seen in the research among teachers in Mauritius where autonomy is not something that the authorities are concerned about as they do not consider teachers as a main pillar of the system (Payneandy, *Teacher autonomy and the quality of Education in Mauritius*, 1997)

Despite the positive and neutral responses, most of the participants (11) responded negatively towards autonomy in choosing assessment methods. While some (three) management participants acknowledge the importance and benefits of teachers having autonomy over this matter, all six management participants clarified that any changes made needed to be standardized across all levels and classes, as inconsistent changes across classes might produce unfair results and possibly invoke students' dissatisfaction. Additionally, three management participants were adamant about teachers having minimal or zero autonomy in choosing assessment types due to various reasons such as quality control, government regulations, as well as the need for certain standards, requirements, and types of assessment methods to properly assess students' performances, especially in major assessments such as final examinations. From the views of the managers here, it is evident that they are concerned about processes and formalities rather than teachers and students. This could be the result of a system that lacks knowledge about teacher autonomy and its benefits for the learners and the system as in the case of Mauritius. As Crouch mentioned, the Finnish education system produces the best results where the teachers are free of external pressures and a standardised testing system (Crouch, 2015) whereas, in Singapore, the managers in education are feeling hesitant to let go of their control. This sentiment about control was echoed by five teaching participants, who acknowledged the presence of tightly regulated assessment methods. Similarly, these participants also spoke about how assessment methods were regulated by the institutions, which were in turn regulated by the policies of the governing body of their partner universities.

#### 5.2.6.4. *TA on marking*

There was only one positive response on having TA in changing marking, which was made by a teaching participant who stated that as long as sufficient justification was provided as to why these changes were made, teachers should be allowed to do so. The same teaching participant also provided a neutral response regarding TA in marking, stating that teachers should hold discussions with peers in the department about the marking and that changes should be made upon making sufficient justification on awarding or not awarding marks.

This being stated, the same teaching participant also responded negatively to teachers having autonomy in deciding to award or changing marks by stating that *“teachers should adhere to the scheme of work and the marking scheme that is determined by the group of teachers, before conducting the test or before setting the question papers”* (JL-M-Teacher). The participant also expressed concerns that there should not be any changes made to the existing scheme of works and marking schemes which had already been decided beforehand unless there is a need for it and it has been discussed and decided in a department-level meeting.

#### 5.2.7. Planning and decision-making

##### 5.2.7.1. *TA on the expression of teachers' views*

The same number (three) of teaching and management participants spoke in favour of teachers having the freedom in expressing their views. Two teaching participants who had similar views mentioned that they were usually able to enjoy the freedom of speech with their module leaders and fellow teaching colleagues. They were comfortable talking about the shortcomings of the system, areas to improve it and suggestions to make the system work better. Another teaching

participant, on the other hand, provided several responses as to why teachers should be given this autonomy, as well as how it would benefit institutes.

The reasoning provided by management participants, however, was focused on the aspect of professionalism. Generally, all three participants explained the importance of freedom of speech as professional behaviour, stating that this freedom was very much encouraged within their institutes. One of them stated that “*the institution should set up an atmosphere where teachers are free to criticize the syllabus, the assessment as long as it is done constructively*” (SN-M-Manager). A similar view was shared by another manager who said that “(the management) *would like to encourage freedom of speech with a view that they speak responsibly and professionally*” (KS-F-Manager). Here, it is important to highlight the UNESCO statute that stipulates that teachers should be free to criticize the functioning of the institution constructively without any effects on their jobs or promotional prospects (UNESCO, 1997). From the interview, the managers are apparently in support of the freedom that teachers deserve to voice out their concerns freely and openly.

Meanwhile, two teachers and one management participant who responded positively earlier also expressed neutrality towards having TA in expressing teachers' views. Both groups of participants shared a similar view, which was that the autonomy of expressing views is highly dependent on the type of work culture, as well as the size of the organization, with teachers in smaller institutes being more likely to express their views freely than in larger institutes. In other words, this refers to the influence of an institutional culture that shapes the behaviour of employees where teachers in sometimes larger and more popular institutions enjoy more autonomy in their profession than others. However, there was not much data on

cultural influence in general from the participants. Therefore, culture was not reviewed except for institutional culture.

The same three participants also provided negative responses on the same matter. According to the management participant, there are also professional and personal limitations which teachers must consider before expressing their views freely. As for the teaching participants, greater concerns were raised over job security, with one participant explaining that teachers might not speak out due to fears of losing their jobs at the institute and instead, remain quiet about school matters. This situation goes against the UNESCO statute mentioned earlier where teachers deserve the freedom to voice their opinion without any fear. A system works well and produces results only when teachers enjoy autonomy as shown in the findings of the OECD on the Scottish education system (McGowan, 2015) while that is not the case in Singapore as reflected from the data.

#### *5.2.7.2. TA on role in planning and decision-making*

There were many positive responses which were in favour of teachers having TA on playing a role in planning and decision-making at the institutional level. Amongst the four teaching participants who shared this sentiment, the common explanation for having TA was that teachers were the people who spent the longest periods with students (apart from their classmates). As a result, having teachers involved in planning and decision-making, especially for decisions on student affairs and welfare, should improve and contributes to recognizing teachers and considering them as important pillars in education which were what was lacking in the Mauritius education system.

Similarly, the five management participants who responded also agreed that teachers acted as figures of authority for and had the longest interaction with students, and should therefore enjoy autonomy in this matter as they know their students better than anyone else. Apart from this, the management participants also shared situations where they encouraged their teaching staff to partake in planning and decision-making processes, explaining their reasoning behind doing so. As mentioned by one of the managers, they would “*like teachers to be involved together with their student services even if it is non-academic matters because even personal problems can affect academic matters*” (KS-F-Manager). As seen from the literature review, this positive attitude of the management allows teachers to take ownership of their job and enjoys their profession.

Six participants, of which most (four) were teaching level, responded negatively against teachers having TA taking a role in planning and decision-making. These teaching participants were also the same as those who expressed positive views regarding the same matter. While being in favour of having autonomy, they acknowledged that certain variables could affect the extent of teachers' involvement in planning and decision-making processes. Some participants explained that teachers should be more concerned with teaching rather than administrative duties, as greater involvement in these processes negatively affect their teaching which teachers should emphasize on. Furthermore, teacher involvement might become unfeasible and costly, particularly in larger institutes, which could create cluttered, less constructive decision-making processes instead.

Similarly, the two management participants concurred that in larger institutions, it was more difficult for teachers to have autonomy and be involved in planning and decision-making committees as everything from curriculum, teaching



plan and activities would have already been centrally planned for the teachers. Furthermore, there would also be certain limitations in which areas teachers should be involved in, as well as the understanding that any final decision must still go through the management's approval.

Only three neutral views were expressed on this matter, with two from teaching participants and one from a management participant. Generally, all three participants understood that there can always be a level of involvement for teachers in planning and decision-making, but the extent of the involvement is dependent on several factors such as the type and size of the institution, as well as what the decisions entailed.

#### 5.2.7.3. *TA on say in planning and decision-making*

Only one teaching and one management participant responded favourably towards having teachers have autonomy on having a say in planning and decision-making. The response provided by the management participant showed support for taking in teachers' views and acknowledged that teachers exerted great influence over students, especially those in tertiary education and therefore their views matter to the development of the institution.

The teacher participant, on the other hand, expressed a more personal view as to why teachers should have autonomy in this matter, explaining that as long as one feels that something is right or wrong, one should always be able and willing to speak out freely, referring to freedom of speech as discussed earlier.

There were two negative responses regarding teachers having a say in planning and decision-making, which were both given by teaching participants, with one participant having spoken favourably about the same matter. However, the same

participant also provided several negative responses, citing several reasons why teachers in institutes might not speak out during planning and decision-making processes. This view of the teachers can be attributed to their fear about their job stability and career prospects and the possibility of being blacklisted.

There was only one brief, neutral standpoint, which was also provided by the same participant who expressed both positive and negative views towards having a say in planning and decision-making, while the participant also shared that sometimes they might be heard, and other times, their opinions would be ignored. This neutral stand also points to the teachers' general fear of raising their voices and stating their opinion on academic and administrative matters due to the fear related to their career prospects.

#### 5.2.7.4. *TA on say in teacher administrative duties*

Although there were five positive responses which supported teachers having a say in their administrative duties, only one response belonged to a teaching participant, who stated that it would be effective for teachers to be involved in matters about themselves as learning does not necessarily have to be conducted within a classroom environment.

As for the four management participants, the consensus was that teachers should and could have a say about such matters, which included the number of lessons, duration of lessons, and other administrative matters. That being said, the same teaching participant also expressed negative responses regarding autonomy in administrative duties, conceding that such plans needed to be thought through carefully by management-level personnel while acknowledging the possible adverse consequences if such autonomy was granted.

## 5.2.8. Government policies on TA

### 5.2.8.1. *Do not understand or are unsure about policies*

Only one teaching participant replied that teachers think there weren't any government policies which restricted or encouraged TA in private higher education institutes. The reasons given for this opinion were that the participant “*has not done research in this area*” (SE-F-Teacher) and “*not (having) much exposed to MOE norms and terms*” (JL-M-Teacher). Five participants also responded that they were unaware and uncertain of any government policies on TA. Two teaching participants explained that they were not exposed to most government policies on private higher education institutes and that management-level personnel would be more knowledgeable. However, three management participants also expressed uncertainty towards these policies, stating that their knowledge about this matter was mostly vague guesses and assumptions.

### 5.2.8.2. *Understands government policies on TA*

The other participants were aware of TA-related government policies in private higher education institutes. Four management participants provided positive responses about government views on TA, stating that recent policies have been bottom-up, which meant that institutes were encouraged to come up with their policies which would then be reviewed by the governing body for approval or rejection. This notion was supported by a teaching participant, who acknowledged the changes to a bottom-up approach from the government. This signifies that institutions in Singapore are enjoying a higher level of autonomy since the establishment of CPE.

However, a majority of management participants (five out of seven) noted that there were still many restrictive policies placed on private higher education institutes by the government, which had direct or indirect effects on teacher autonomy. According to these participants, heavy emphasis was placed on two main areas, which are student protection and course outcome. In the former, the governing body has introduced many policies to ensure that students are well-protected, especially in terms of finances, whereas many policies were also introduced that focused on students' performances and results. With these policies in place, management participants agreed that it was difficult to grant teachers autonomy in areas which could potentially create student dissatisfaction and poorer academic results. One teaching participant also echoed this sentiment, adding about students' attendance being a focal part which the government was careful about and very protective towards.

While looking at these negative views of management and teacher participants, it is reasonable to doubt if they rightly understand the term autonomy and the value it adds to education, ultimately benefitting the learners. The literature review has pointed out that teacher autonomy is a prerequisite for learner autonomy. It has also been established that institutions with a higher level of teacher autonomy had better working environments and a more satisfied teaching community. Therefore, as in the case study of Mauritius, here too the management and the institutions may not have a clear view of autonomy and its benefits to education.

### 5.2.8.3. *Policy Movement*

#### 5.2.8.3.1. Government to institutes

With regards to policy movement from the government to institutes, there were a total of nine responses, with the majority of them (six) coming from management participants. This was most likely due to management-level personnel being more involved in affairs such as policymaking, planning and decision-making and less teaching, whereas teaching personnel were primarily focused on classroom teaching. Most management participants shared that there were teams and/or entire departments created just to handle government-related policies, which usually consist of board-level members of institutes and management-level staff. One of the participants stated that “*Singapore actually, doesn't have an education framework*” (GM-M-Manager). They shared that they were not totally in the know of how government policies are received and translated for institutions. While this research will be analysing Singapore's Private Education Act, as the participant mentioned, the study is unable to find a private education framework for Singapore's PIHL.

#### 5.2.8.3.2. Institutes to Teachers

With regards to policy movement from institutes to teachers, there was a similar amount of responses from both teaching (five) and management (six) participants. From both groups, most participants spoke about having regular meetings, which may vary from monthly meetings in large groups to smaller, face-to-face scheduled meetings in teams or individuals. Most management participants stated that they received policy information directly from board members, which they in turn disseminate to the teachers who are assigned to them if necessary. The phrase “if necessary” refers to the fact that not all policies are shared with the

teachers. Teaching participants supported this statement, adding that policy introductions or changes usually came from their managers or module leaders through various modes of communication such as electronic or face-to-face verbal communication.

Although teacher-participants acknowledged that they did not have as much knowledge nor were involved in policies, they still possessed some basic understanding of the processes behind the introduction of these regulations in their institutes. One of the participants pointed out that they are informed about government policies only “*through newspapers and the media*” (JL-M-Teacher), not directly from the institutions. It is surprising though to understand that teaching staff are not aware of government policies that the institutions receive from the MOE and CPE periodically. This points to the lack of communication between the government authorities and the institutions, and the institutions and the teachers.

#### 5.2.9. Institutional policies on TA

##### 5.2.9.1. *Involvement in policy development*

Five participants (three managers, and two teachers) responded to involvement in institutional policy development which had contributions from both management and teaching personnel. According to the teaching participants, policy development in their institutes included many processes, and tasks, as well as staff from all levels and all disciplines to account for multiple aspects to produce and implement comprehensive policies aimed at ultimately benefitting students. Management participants also shared that teachers in their institutes were always involved in department-level policy development, if the policy was related to academics and teaching. One management participant added the processes on how

teachers in their institute were involved as well. However, there was no mention of whether teachers or their representatives were involved in institutional-level policy formulation.

However, some participants stated that policy development was mostly limited to management-level personnel. Three teaching participants shared their views about their lack of involvement and having any say in the formulation of institutional policies, with some institutes choosing to employ external consultants to handle these affairs alongside their management instead of involving teaching staff. This sentiment was supported by six management participants, who explained clearly that for the development of most policies, only management-level personnel and directors were involved. In some institutes, only management-level staff were involved in policy development, even if the policies were related to teaching.

#### *5.2.9.2. Understanding of institutional policies on TA*

There were only two responses from management participants on whether there were any institutional policies on TA. Specifically, both participants stated that there were institutional policies which restricted or deterred TA within their institutions, providing explanations and examples as to why these policies were being exercised. This brings to light that there are private institutions of higher learning in Singapore that fear teacher autonomy as they might question the authority of the management. It is also clear that teachers in such institutions are kept out of the government policies as the management does not take initiative to translate such policies to the teachers.

#### 5.2.10. Conclusion

The study highlights that there is a wide range of beliefs and perceptions among teachers and managers about what teacher autonomy refers to and about the function of teacher autonomy in an education system. The face-to-face interviews with teachers and managers have indicated that while both groups agree on some points like the need for some level of autonomy for teachers in the classroom. However, they differ in their opinion about teachers having complete autonomy in making decisions about their classroom teaching and teachers' involvement in administrative decision-making matters which reflects their lack of teacher autonomy at work. This situation could be attributed to the management's ignorance about the benefits of teacher autonomy in the modern education system. While management participants are mostly aware of government policies related to private higher education in Singapore, teacher participants are mostly unaware of the existence of such policies indicating that teachers are generally not welcomed to matters related to policy.



## **Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter consolidates my analyses from the quantitative and qualitative studies and discusses them in light of the literature review. The data analysis highlights five key areas that are relevant to teacher autonomy in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning - teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, professional development, and policy implementation – that will be discussed here. This chapter will connect teacher autonomy with its related themes by explaining how TA influences teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development. The chapter will discuss the key influences namely policies, leadership, politics, culture, and their subsidiaries on teacher autonomy as these influences also impact teacher motivation, perceptions and professional competence which can be themes influencing or are influenced by teacher autonomy. The chapter will also present a theoretical framework that has been developed from the quantitative and qualitative data which is also linked to the key concepts identified from the literature review.

While the data collection questionnaire involves demographic information including country of birth, ethnicity, gender, educational qualifications, place of school education, place of post-secondary education, years of experience, and teaching level, the data collected did not have significant information on these areas. Therefore, they are not discussed in much detail.

## 6.2. Summary of quantitative and qualitative findings

The summary of findings from this research can be summarized in the following table where the key themes and corresponding quantitative and qualitative findings are presented.

### Comparisons of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative (Interviews)</b>
Perceptions towards TA	Participants responded positively about their perceived TA ( $M = 2.3$ , $SD = .48$ ), with <i>agree</i> (2) being the modal response on 59 out of 68 items.	Nearly all participants ( $n = 11$ ) felt that (1) TA contributed positively and was (2) important to teaching.
	Responses towards opinions on TA were positive and did not vary much ( $M = 1.98$ , $SD = 0.44$ ).	In general, TA meant the freedom to exercise creativity, control, responsibility, and freedom to choose teaching methods, styles, and materials.
	Responses towards experienced TA varied greatly ( $M = 2.62$ , $SD = 0.72$ ).	“(TA refers to) teachers having the freedom to design lessons, to adapt materials, to personalize, to individualize lessons to fit their learners better” (Participant: SN-M-Manager)
	This indicated that while some participants <i>agreed</i> that they experienced TA, others were <i>neutral</i> about their experiences.	Most participants ( $n = 10$ ) also held strong neutral views towards the concept of TA, stating that its interpretation and perception are highly subjective.
		“I think teacher autonomy is something that is very broad... the language you use in class, the way you teach in class ... what you teach in class, all are very important.” (Participant SV-F-Management)
		Surprisingly, eight participants shared how TA could negatively affect teaching, such that there is still some control or pre-defined boundaries.

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*“(There is a) need to balance autonomy with a certain degree of control. Therefore, teachers have to follow a set of rules and regulations”. The participant also believes that “if (teachers) have absolute autonomy, most of the time, (they) end up with anarchy, meaning total confusion and chaos. (This is) not fair to the students” (KS-F-Manager).*

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<p>Demographic differences in perceived TA  (<math>M = , SD =</math>)</p>	<p>Statistically sig. differences found for:</p> <p>Ethnicity (<math>p &lt; .001</math>)</p> <p>Post-hoc revealed a difference between Indian (<math>M = 2.13, SD = 0.43</math>) and Chinese participants (<math>M = 2.44, SD = 0.46</math>), <math>p &lt; .05</math>.</p> <p>Years of experience (<math>p &lt; .05</math>)</p> <p>The pos-hoc analysis identified differences between participants who worked 0-5 years (<math>M = 2.56, SD = 0.13</math>) and 11-20 years (<math>M = 2.22, SD = 0.45</math>).</p>	<p>The ability to exercise TA or the amount of TA experienced may differ based on several factors, such as culture (i.e., environment), type of employment, and level of authority, etc.</p> <p><i>"Obviously there may be limitations because it depends on whether you're an associate or a full-timer. Associate lecturers would obviously be, curbed in, in, certain areas there are parameters that they must manage. Yeah, module leaders will have a bit more autonomy" (SV-F-Manager)</i></p>
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<p>Differences in perceived TA across teaching constructs</p>	<p>Statistically sig. differences found between teaching affairs (<math>p &lt; .001</math>).</p> <p>Primary work processes had the highest reported TA (<math>M = 1.98, SD = 0.52</math>), followed by professional development (<math>M = 2.21, SD = 0.65</math>), curriculum-related affairs (<math>M = 2.26, SD = 0.58</math>), assessment-related affairs (<math>M = 2.35, SD = 0.71</math>), and lastly, planning and decision-making (<math>M = 2.87, SD = 0.68</math>).</p>
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	<p>Except for planning and decision-making, responses mostly fell on <i>agree</i> (2) regarding perceived TA.</p>	
Primary work processes (section 2)	<p>Items with the highest perceived TA fell within section 2 (primary work processes).</p> <p>These items asked about opinions on perceived TA, concerning <i>Deciding Their Lesson Activities and Tasks</i> (<math>M = 1.55, SD = 0.61</math>), <i>Deciding Their Teaching Methodology</i> (<math>M = 1.57, SD = 0.6</math>), and <i>Setting Discipline Standards in Their Class</i> (<math>M = 1.67, SD = 0.7</math>).</p> <p>For primary work processes, participants reported higher teacher autonomy for their opinions (<math>M = 1.76</math>) than their experiences (<math>M = 2.21</math>), <math>t(156) = 8.04, p &gt; .001</math>.</p> <p>Participants reported experiencing the lowest perceived TA (<math>M = 3.1</math>) when <i>Selecting the Course Books</i> while experiencing the highest level of perceived TA (<math>M = 1.83</math>) when <i>Deciding the Teaching Methodology</i> (item 9.4).</p> <p><i>Selecting Their Course Books</i> was the item in which teachers reported the poorest opinion on perceived TA (<math>M = 2.2</math>) while perceiving <i>Deciding Their Lesson Activities and Tasks</i> as an area where they enjoyed higher TA (<math>M = 1.55</math>).</p>	<p>All participants (<math>n = 12</math>) felt that teachers should have TA in deciding teaching methods.</p> <p>Teaching participants (<math>n = 5</math>) felt that TA was important for them to choose how they taught their students because they were directly in contact with students.</p> <p>Four sub-themes were identified, which were (1) choosing teaching methods, (2) learning activities, (3) teaching topics/themes, and (4) incorporating their teaching philosophies.</p> <p>View from teacher-manager participants (<math>n = 7</math>) was similar, centring on how teachers have individual teaching styles and having TA allows them to display the necessary creativity and personality in adapting to the diverse learning needs of individual students if main learning objectives were achieved.</p> <p><i>"I think teachers that are creative usually will find a way to exercise autonomy anyway... I think ... giving too much direction and too much support um, comes off often as a crutch to weaker lecturers rather than ... anything else... By all means, give a common goal and say, this is what we're working towards ... You just basically give the lecturer ... an outline of the syllabus and tell them ... do whatever you want and just make sure that the students get there at the end"</i> (GM-M-Manager).</p>

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Curriculum (section 3)	Higher TA was reported for opinions ( $M = 1.97$ ) on implementing and planning curriculums over their experiences ( $M = 2.54$ ), $t(156) = 8.64, p > .001$ .	However, some ( $n = 9$ ) also felt a need to limit TA as it was highly dependent on trust. There was a need for sufficient supervision and control to prevent abuse of autonomy. This could also be due to existing guidelines and frameworks imposed by regulatory bodies.
	Participants experienced the lowest perceived TA ( $M = 2.87$ ) when <i>Selecting My Course Books and Teaching Materials</i> while <i>Deciding on Extra Teaching Materials</i> reflected the highest level of experienced TA ( $M = 2.03$ ).	Almost all participants ( $n = 11$ ) shared a similar view that teachers should be accorded autonomy in doing so.
	On the other hand, participants indicated the lowest opinion of perceived TA ( $M = 2.18$ ) when <i>Selecting Their Course Books and Teaching Materials</i> and the highest when <i>Deciding on Extra Teaching Materials</i> for their <i>Opinion on TA in Planning and Implementing Your Curriculum</i> ( $M = 1.8$ ).	Participants from teaching and management levels generally agreed that as long as external teaching materials were culturally, racially, and ethically appropriate (NC-F-Manager), as well as relevant to the topics being taught, teachers should be given the autonomy to introduce and incorporate them into their lessons.
		<i>“As long as ... the teachers inform the module leader and if they um, show that this is really relevant, there is a goal behind it, I will always support the teachers. We (teachers) must have the freedom to choose different ... techniques because otherwise we simply lose the students that we have and they will get bored, and they will switch off immediately”</i> (IA-F-Teacher).
		However, most teacher-manager participants ( $n = 4$ ) argued about the difficulty in determining the appropriateness of external teaching materials, and that following pre-determined materials provided can ensure standardization, consistency, and fairness.
		<i>“We are not sure uh, whether the students actually understood because uh, just simply watching it, the students may not get the message or truly understand what the video is trying to</i>

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*uh, demonstrate or ... what is the learning objective or the outcomes of watching” (KS-F-Manager).*

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Planning and decision-making (section 4)

Items with the lowest perceived TA fell within section 4 (planning and decision-making).

These items asked about experiences on perceived TA, concerning *Making Decisions on Budget Planning* ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) and *Deciding on Class Timetable Policy* ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ).

Experiences in *Making Decisions on Budget Planning* was highlighted as the lowest perceived TA while *Deciding what My Responsibilities Are* reflected the highest ( $M = 2.93$ ).

Opinions on *Making Decisions on Budget Planning* had the lowest perceived TA ( $M = 2.96$ ), However, *Being a Part of the Decision-Making Body about Matters Related to My Work* had the highest perceived TA ( $M = 1.99$ ).

Almost all participants ( $n = 11$ ) across all levels agreed that teachers should not have the autonomy to decide on assessment methods as these were usually designed based on prerequisites laid out by authorities and have undergone rigorous testing.

While feedback is allowed to suggest changes, only the management should have the final say.

Four discussion sub-themes emerged, centring on (1) changing/choosing assessment weightage, (2) changing assessment types, (3) choosing assessment methods, and (4) deciding the marking of assessments.

*Participant: “I’m afraid we cannot give ... that much of freedom or autonomy to teachers uh, to do the assessment as you know there are different ways to assess at different levels ... so I don’t think, you know, teachers should be given the freedom for the assessment, rather, the school should have established a certain method uh, of assessment” (JL-M-Teacher).*

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Assessment (section 5)

Participants reported experiencing low TA ( $M = 2.92$ ) in *Deciding the Level of Moderation After the Exam* while experiencing high TA ( $M = 2.55$ ) when *Deciding The Type of Questions For the Final Exam*.

Similarly, participants felt the lowest TA in *Deciding the Level of Moderation After the Exam* ( $M = 2.18$ ) and the highest when *Selecting the*

Nine participants ( $n = 5$  for teacher-managers;  $n = 4$  for teachers) were in favour of TA in planning and decision-making processes, as well as expressing their views at work and in meetings with their peers and supervisors.

Four following sub-themes were identified: (1) Expression of teachers' views, (2) playing a role in planning and decision-making processes, (3) having a say in planning and decision-

	<p><i>Type of Questions for the Final Exam (M = 1.89).</i></p>	<p>making processes, and (4) having a say in teacher administrative duties.</p> <p>In a particular institute, the participant stated that their teachers contributed significantly to the planning and decision-making process.</p> <p><i>“Whether you are professional or academic staff, we like everybody to be involved more or less, just a question to what extent ... When we recruit our academic staff ... we would like them to be involved with our student services, for example, in providing advice and counselling to our students. Even if it's (about) non-academic matters” (KS-F-Manager).</i></p> <p>A teaching participant shared similar views, citing how the welfare of teachers was just as important as the students.</p> <p><i>“Yes because ... we want a school that is well run ... from my perspective, the welfare of the students should be ... prioritized, because, uh, if they are comfortable, if they have good, uh, classrooms and learning resources, they will learn better” (SE-F-Teacher).</i></p>
<p>Professional development (section 6)</p>	<p><i>Having My Say about the Duration for the Completion of My Professional Development Activities (M = 2.66) and Question Management Decisions When I Feel They Are Not for The Benefit of The Students</i> were selected by teachers as matters where they experienced the lowest perceived TA (M = 2.66) while <i>Express My Opinion During Staff Meetings Without Any Fear</i> had the highest level of experienced TA (M = 2.38).</p>	<p>While there were no questions directly about professional development, some teacher participants (n = 5) did state that teachers, especially those who were part-time, often refrained from speaking out or criticizing the system for fear of losing their jobs or because they believed that their opinions or suggestions would be ignored.</p> <p><i>“SA (Teaching): Sometimes, teachers want to have a job next term, so sometimes they may think twice ... maybe sometimes they also give up” (IA-F-Teacher).</i></p>

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Three areas shared the lowest opinion on perceived TA ( $M = 1.97$ ), which were (1) *Have a Say about the Time Their Professional Development Activities Need to be Completed*, (2) *Join Any Associations that Help in Their Overall Development*, and (3) *Write and Publish Articles Freely*.

*Being able to Express Their Opinion During Staff Meetings Without Any Fear* had the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 1.73$ ),

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*Note.* Summary of quantitative and qualitative findings on perceived teacher autonomy.

### 6.3. Teaching

In this research, teaching encompasses teaching methods, classroom management, teachers' care, teachers' skills and knowledge and the teaching process in the classroom. As teaching is an act of intellectually involving learners providing equal opportunities for all of them to have a successful learning experience (Dewsbury, 2017), to enable the involvement of learners, teachers must be able to use teaching methods that are engaging for their students comprising individuals of multiple abilities. Here, the element of care plays a vital role. As indicated in the data analysis, teachers generally believe that while teaching skills and content knowledge of the teachers play an important role, being caring teachers would motivate the learners (Guzzardo et al., 2020) and build up trust in their teachers, which consequently benefits the learners from the lessons irrespective of being in a mixed ability class. Teachers in the study were willing to take up the role of being caring teachers, and to them, planning their role of being caring teachers is a part of their autonomy. Therefore, teacher autonomy involves the teachers' ability in making



their choice of teaching methods, decisions on classroom management, choice of specific skills to be imparted and the pace of conducting the lessons as pointed out by Banegas (2013) and Lundstrom (2015) in the literature review.

Teachers in this study expressed their views that the stability of their job depends on the academic results that they produce and the student feedback they receive. The lens of performativity may help to understand teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices that exist in the PIHL of Singapore. Performativity is seen as a phenomenon where managerialism has created a culture of assessing success evidenced by emphasizing performance indicators (Kalfa & Taksa, 2016). The concept of performativity is relevant to Singapore's educational context as Singapore is vying to become an educational hub of the world in the next few years (Lee, Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Opening of Unilever's Four Acres Singapore Campus, 2014). However, grade-focused education makes it a product-focused process that adds stress to teachers and students. As a result, teachers fail to do what they should do in class in an ideal situation, and teachers and learners focus on the results rather than the learning process. In other words, performativity has changed the meaning of learning as the emphasis is no longer on the value of knowledge and the process of learning, but on operational competence (Gallagher, 2001) that were indicated from the data.

The private education sector has been witnessing significant changes since 2000. Since then, Singapore's private higher education sector has been reinventing itself to be more attractive to local and foreign students (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017). To make this happen, it must compete with public universities that have set their standards high making some of them rise to be among the top 20 universities in the world. The authorities like MOE and CPE that has control over

private educational institutions have set stringent measures and criteria to evaluate every institution based on various themes that are published annually through the Graduate Employment Survey (GES). While the graduates from the public universities top the list in GES, PIHL competes among themselves to be highly ranked in the list so that their reputation would be good, and their high rank would be positive marketing for them.

Data collected from the interviews point out issues that are prevalent in the private education sector due to business competition among them. While vying for the top spot in the GES ranking, PIHL brings in new strategies to produce academic results as students' credentials are based solely on academic performance, while all other skills, talents and abilities are ignored. Therefore, to produce academic results, PIHL create a framework that would put extreme pressure on teachers to create more output. Here, teachers are seen as a part of a production line which according to Biesta, is an insult to the integrity of teacher professionalism, not a way to enhance it (Biesta, *Should Teaching be Re(dis)covered?* Introduction to a Symposium, 2019) as it puts pressure on teachers to produce results to attain glory for their institutions. In Singapore's PIHL, this strategy is carried out in a very subtle manner where no bureaucracy or authoritarian behaviour is involved on the part of the management. Here, performativity appears to look good, unlike authoritarianism or bureaucracy with top-down approaches at work that are shunned in most parts of the modern world. In countries with high quality of education, as in the case of Finland the government, management and teachers do not believe in producing results to denote a mark of quality, however, Finland has still been consistently one of the top scorers in the Pisa ranking since 2001. Contrary to Singapore's PIHL, Finnish authorities consider the high world ranking of their education system as a by-product of the

system rather than the central goal (Crouch, 2015). Whereas in Singapore, the system works differently. As mentioned earlier, expectations are set for teachers to follow, and no micro-managing is involved. However, if targets are not met, their jobs might be at stake and no renewal of contracts is made which is a sign of performative practices (Ball, 2010). In a culture of performativity, teachers are subjected to judgments, comparisons, and displays as a means of incentive, control, and change (Ball, 2010). As a result, teachers tend to work towards producing results rather than teaching their students how to enjoy the process of learning. The teachers set their goals based on the pass percentage set as a target for their classes by the management. The result could be students passing the exams at the end of their higher education, but whether they achieve holistic development – which should be one of the prime focuses of higher education – is in doubt due to market accountability of an increasingly globalised education system.

While performativity is claimed to be the way to produce better results, it is a culture that is based on low-trust and centralized forms of employee control. It has yet to have proven results in Singapore's education system as Singapore has not achieved its goal of becoming an education hub of the world by 2015, a goal that was set by the government more than a decade ago (Lee, 2014). While PIHL in Singapore takes the top spot in attracting foreign students, they have not been successful in meeting the government's expectations of standing ahead of its competitors in neighbouring countries like Australia and New Zealand which remain two of the favourite destinations for foreign students (OECD, 2019). This situation makes us consider Singapore's marketization and internationalization of its education for economic goals, ultimately putting more pressure on the teachers who are expected to produce results. Moreover, as mentioned in the literature review,

teachers in PIHL are subjected to various forms of judgments, measures, comparisons, and targets while performance is reviewed through class visits, peer reviews, student feedback and annual performance reviews. Both teachers and managers who participated in the interviews provided evidence that student feedback and performance review are considered important in renewing a contract for teachers. Teachers' salaries, bonuses and even jobs can be impacted because of negative feedback or reviews. When teachers' salaries and benefits are tied to their performance, it affects their performance (Bamberger & Belogolovsky, 2010).

The data analysis indicates the pressures and parameters that teachers in PIHL face in their work because of the marketization and commercialization of education. However, this is not unique to Singapore alone. Many Asian countries share a similar situation. With higher education getting more popularized and marketized for global attention, both public and private higher education sectors in China too are learning from marketing their products in the most enticing matter to attract global learners. Just as in Singapore, private higher education in China depends on the development of the market, and the owners and directors of the institutions are mostly from the business background, so it is more natural to follow the marketing concept in higher education (He, Liu, & Cheng, 2018). This phenomenon is witnessed in Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and South Korea as pointed out by an Asian Development Bank report (Asian Development Bank, 2012). According to the report, selected elite higher education institutions are well-connected to specific labour market niches and industries, and they do well in graduate employment. They also seek internationalization, local and international rankings, and international recognition and legitimacy as well as collaborative partnerships with companies and educational

institutions outside their countries (Asian Development Bank, 2012). As mentioned earlier, these are the institutional or governmental goals that turn out to be stress factors for teachers who work in modern states that have to run their businesses with limited resources, along with the pressures to improve their competitiveness, and adoption of different governance strategies such as decentralization, privatization, marketization, commodification (Mok, 2002). Mok also contrasts and compares the changing higher education governance models in the 'four little dragons' of Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan, and points out that similar ideas and practices along the line of decentralization, marketization and corporatization are adopted in higher education systems in these four areas, to make their education systems more competitive in the global market (Mok, 2002). However, as suggested from the data analysis, these turn out to be stress factors for teachers, affect their teaching, and take the ideal goals of teaching away from the teaching profession instead of enhancing the qualities of teaching and learning. As observed from this research, the belief that marketization will increase efficiency and will help achieve the universally desired outcomes is in line with the neo-liberal ideology that the Singapore authorities adopt by allowing the market principles and practices to manage its private higher education sector (Mok, 2002).

This culture creates a sense of insecurity among teachers, they become less confident about their abilities and tend to think about whether they are fit for the job (Ball, 2010). Teachers eventually become more concerned about GES ranking and Edutrust rating which can affect their teaching in class. Performativity also brings in a culture of individual competition replacing collective responsibility as teachers are made responsible for the balance between the security of their job and their contribution to the institution (Ball, 2010) as observed among the teachers who

preferred to keep their teaching materials to themselves rather than sharing them with their colleagues to safeguard their jobs.

As observed from the qualitative data and as indicated in the literature review, the teacher participants' job security hangs in a balance of student feedback, management review, lesson observation, qualifications, and other monitoring methods in PIHL that goes against teacher autonomy (UNESCO, 1997). Private higher education institutions must meet six criteria – mentioned in the literature review chapter – before renewing their Edutrust certification, and to achieve this, PIHL is always on the move to keep their records up to date by updating their teacher performance record through lesson observation, student feedback and management review. However, these assessment results may not be reliable as they are often conducted by those who are not qualified to do it. For example, in one of the institutions, lesson observations are carried out by administrative staff who are often not qualified to perform lesson observations, but they are doing this task to meet CPE documentation, the process may not benefit the teachers or the learners. Rather, it can add to the pressure on teachers. From the interview data, it can be suggested that many PIHLs function by pressurizing teachers to their limits to produce results at any cost except a few PIHLs where the teachers felt respected and valued. However, this is a minority group. Even teachers who are trained and with many years of experience in teaching can find the culture of performativity discouraging as they are assessed not based on their skills and ability, but on the examination results of their students. To these teachers, their commitment involves looking into various aspects of their students' development like self-discipline, career counselling and many more responsibilities that contribute to the overall development of the learners. However, the data from this study indicate that the

management authorities who insist on performativity hold a different view. To them, teachers' performance is solely based on their students' academic output which is reflected in the GES as mentioned earlier. The study explores the views that exist in the traditionally accepted meaning of commitment and the new meaning of commitment according to advocates of performativity as observed from the qualitative data where the managers are focused on holding control rather than teachers taking on tasks with more autonomy.

### 6.3.1. Teaching Methods and Classroom Management

The first part of this study was on classroom and teaching-related activities, such as participants' perception of TA about choosing their teaching methodology, planning their objectives for teaching, and deciding on extra teaching materials that they might need to use on top of the regular materials. The data analysis indicates that TA is important in the planning and implementation of curricula, and teacher-participants stated that they enjoy TA in this area of their work. For example, the survey participants agreed on the importance of TA in all areas of responsibilities about their job as teachers while they reported the need to have a higher level of autonomy at work while they experience a much lower level of autonomy in their real experience. In other words, the participants believed they needed more TA than what they were currently having in their job. In general, participants reported higher teacher autonomy for their opinions ( $M = 1.98$ ) on perceived teacher autonomy in private higher education institutions in Singapore compared to their experiences ( $M = 2.62$ ). The survey participants supported the view that TA is crucial in choosing what they teach and how they teach it, and the interview data endorsed the opinion of the survey as implied in the words of most of the interview participants as mirrored

in the following quotes from three of the participants who stated that s/he “*would like that flexibility to look out for extra teaching materials to teach my students*”. (AP-F-T), (TA provides) “*teachers the freedom to adapt, design and create lessons and materials to best suit their learners. There are different types of teachers, there are different pedagogies, there are different methodologies that teachers can use, and I think teachers ideally should be able to use different methodologies to fit certain classes, certain individuals*”. (SN-M-M), and that “*teachers should be given the freedom to choose their teaching methods*”. (LM-F-M). Most interview responses to questions on choosing teaching methods and choosing external teaching materials were largely in support of teachers having TA regarding these matters. The data analysis suggests that there is a wide gap between teachers’ expectations of autonomy and their current experience with autonomy in Singapore. Teachers are not experiencing the degree of autonomy that they think they needed. This can be attributed to restrictions from institutional policies and expectations from teachers to produce academic results.

It was also observed that while the management was not willing to let the teachers have total freedom to make decisions about their teaching-related matters, one of the managerial level staff expressed his support for teachers if they can make the right decisions that benefit the students, the department, and the institution. In his own words:

“Each institution has certain pedagogical culture ... Teachers ideally should be able to use different methodologies to fit certain classes, certain individuals. I think (if) it is done well, it could be very productive (SN-M-M)



In these words, there is a presence of strong managerial support for the teachers who make their own decisions about the use of teaching methods in a class. However, he points to each institution having its own "pedagogical culture" that determines the level of autonomy teachers should have. The manager is agreeable to teachers using different teaching methods for different classes if such decisions benefit the learners. However, there is a hidden threat to the teacher as the quote states "if it is done well, it could be very productive". Some teachers might naturally fear the potential consequences of their decisions proved wrong. This might discourage the teachers – especially part-time teachers who depend on their superiors for the renewal of their contracts – from making such bold choices that might otherwise benefit the learners and the institutions. This also brings to light management that is not willing to tolerate mistakes in teachers' decision-making. As a result, institutions are likely to get less motivated teachers, and less creative teachers who are not motivated to experiment in teaching, ultimately making them professionally less competent.

Contrary to the views of teachers during the interview, the survey results provide slightly different information. In the survey, teachers share different opinions among various age groups. Their views were based on the years of experience as shown in the post-hoc analysis that found significant differences between participants who worked 0-5 years ( $M = 2.56$ ) and 11-20 years ( $M = 2.21$ ) ( $p = .018$ ). This signifies those younger teachers are looking for clearer and more teaching guidelines, as they had lesser experience in teaching while more experienced teachers tend to be more independent.

### 6.3.2. Care as a Teaching Quality

The concept of 'care' is an inseparable part of teaching for many participants. Being caring teachers is an ideology that they strongly believed in and therefore, it is important to investigate the trail of thought of the teachers on being caring teachers. In Singapore's private higher education sector, the job of teachers is to teach their students based on a fixed syllabus that is provided by either the institution or university partner. It is always a safe choice for teachers to stick to the syllabus and materials stipulated by the department or school as observed in the case of the Korean teachers mentioned in the literature review (Ng & Hargreaves, 2013). Selecting extra materials entails teachers having trouble going through the level heads or department heads for approval before using them in their classes. However, many of the teachers were willing to take the challenge of gathering extra materials for teaching and expressed their aspiration to do more than what is provided by their institutions to help their students achieve success. The rationale for them to take such levels of struggle is often personal, internalized and set the care of the self against duty towards their students (Ball, 2010). The interviews reflected the positive attitude of teachers who are not willing to give up on a minority of their students who are weak learners and might need more attention and a different set of learning materials that had to be tailored for them. By doing so, teachers believe that they become autonomous by being decision-makers when the situation warrants them to choose the benefit of their learners as seen from the words of TB-M-T who believed that every learner deserves a teacher's attention irrespective of their learning abilities.

An interesting point raised by many teachers is that they do not believe in "one size fits all" teaching methods as such a concept would cause a disadvantage to a minority group of students who may not be able to learn at the same pace as other

learners. All the respondents have expressed their views about the need for autonomy in planning and designing their lessons and using the methodology of teaching that suits their students who are made up of learners of mixed abilities in the same class. They indicated that teachers need autonomy in deciding their teaching methods as they teach learners of different abilities. TA enhances creativity, on the other hand, too many restrictions stifle the creativity, motivation, and professional competence of teachers. The respondents also felt that granting more autonomy to teachers makes them more independent teachers who can make the lessons more interesting. All these views support the findings by Albedaiwi who is quoted in the literature review that teachers need autonomy to remain competent in their profession (Albedaiwi, 2011) and teachers need to be autonomous to build up autonomous learners (Sinclair, McGrath, & Lamb, 2000). The teachers' views are also reflected in the study of Banegas who found teachers enjoyed a higher level of satisfaction and increased level of motivation when they had the autonomy to design materials and teach their self-designed materials (Banegas, 2013).

It is also a key aspect that autonomy is an influencing factor on teacher retention that is discussed in the literature (Lough, 2020). Teachers would remain in their jobs when they have autonomy in their profession as this would enable them to enjoy job satisfaction that motivates them to stay in their profession (Lough, 2020) as stated in the research framework diagram. It is suggested from the interviews that teachers are willing to make decisions in class about providing additional academic support to their students who need it more to perform better which is generally not questioned by the management. However, from the interview data from teacher-participants, I observed that in Singapore's PIHL, opportunities to decide on and design teaching materials are limited for the part-time teaching faculty while the full-

time teaching staff are involved in the task with the participation from part-timers, when necessary, which takes us to the role of trust.

### 6.3.3. Role of Trust

Trust from management and colleagues is considered an essential supportive factor for teachers as expressed by expatriate teachers in a college in the UAE (Degazon, 2019). Similarly, in my study, trust has been indicated as a factor that the participants wished to have at the workplace. A key observation that was made from the interview data is the contradictory views provided by the same interviewees at different stages of the interview on the aspect of ‘trust’. Some of the interview participants corrected their views that they had expressed earlier in support of granting autonomy to teachers as shown in the examples of IA and SN below. For example, during the interview, some of the participants – who are teachers themselves – said that although teachers must be given autonomy, later they said that the autonomy should be within limitations or boundaries and with conditions as mentioned below in their own words:

- (a) *Some teachers cannot have a lot of freedom (in teaching). Otherwise, you know what happens. (IA-F-T)*
- (b) *Within those boundaries, teachers have the freedom to design lessons, adapt materials, and personalize and individualize lessons to fit the learners better. (SN-M-M)*

In the quotes above, the speaker called IA, who is a level coordinator refers to a known danger if some teachers are given too much freedom. While the

coordinator believes in giving freedom to some teachers, he/she believes that giving too much freedom to some teachers can be damaging. This is reflective of a lack of trust in teachers by the leaders of an institution. It also suggests that leaders are suspicious of some teachers and that they might abuse the freedom that they are granted thereby losing their trust in them. The expression of IA, "*Otherwise, you know what happens*" conveys the distrust of the speaker on some teachers about whether they would do their job diligently or need to be closely monitored. IA is concerned also because the coordinators report to the head of school, and in this context, IA is answerable to the head of school on what the teachers do or do not do.

The second quote also refers to a need to control teachers' autonomy by stating that teachers should work within a framework or boundary which is shaped by the institutional policies and leadership which are stated as external influencing factors in the theoretical framework. This boundary can be various kinds of monitoring that are employed by the management like class visits, lesson observation, lesson plans, student feedback or peer review of lessons. Looking back at the literature review, Fraser & Sorenson warn that some educators may use TA as an excuse to avoid their duties and responsibilities (Fraser & Sorenson, 1992) and therefore they need to be monitored closely. It is this type of teacher that the supervisors are more concerned about. As a result, such teachers are monitored more frequently than others. Some from the management and supervisory role seem to agree with O'Hara who warns that teacher autonomy is a double-edged sword, and he warns that leaders need to be cautious and constantly monitor if teachers use this freedom for the benefit of their students or if they are hiding behind the autonomy and misuse it (O'Hara, 2006) which is the same view that the participants in leadership positions have stated during the interviews. As a by-product of this study,

the quotes from IA and SN suggest that part-timers and full-timers in some PHIL work in a different spectrum as the data highlight a vast difference in the level of autonomy enjoyed by part-time and full-time teaching faculty. From the qualitative data, the following observations were inferred that question the trust that the institutions and the managers had in their part-time teachers:

- (i) Part-timers must please their managers to be continuously employed whereas full-timers have stable jobs. Therefore, part-timers tend to avoid risky decision-making. [Institutional policies and Leadership]
- (ii) The institutional policies are enforced more on part-timers while the full-timers have opportunities to work around the policies as they are not monitored as closely as part-timers. [Institutional policies, Leadership and Cultural landscape]
- (iii) Part-timers do not enjoy essential access to test papers and assessment materials whereas full-timers are involved in designing them and have access to them. [Institutional policies, Leadership and Cultural landscape]

While the teacher-participants stated that their institutions keep the part-time faculty from certain crucial responsibilities like designing extra teaching materials for a particular ability group of students, setting exam papers, vetting questions, and making decisions on exam moderation, the interview participants from some institutions had different views. They were involved in most of these tasks although they were part-timers. This indicates that institutional culture decides the trends that they set at work, while institutional culture and policies are determined by its leadership and government policies as suggested in the theoretical framework.

Looking at the views of the participants during the interviews, also raise different views. One group claim that teachers need autonomy as they can make

independent judgments to suit the needs of individual learners. This group is willing to go beyond the call of their duty to make sure that their students achieve success, and they practise it in their teaching profession despite what their colleagues think or do. To this group of teachers, their students' performance and achievement in the exams are of ultimate importance. Another group who are mostly in the supervisory and management levels express their views that are different from that of the teachers. While the teachers need autonomy without conditions and caveats attached to it as they believe in their skills and ability to help their students, the management wants to have autonomy within a framework. This is to regulate the work of teachers that requires them to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators or evaluations (Ball, 2010) in various forms that may arise from governmental and institutional policies, leadership, and the political and cultural landscape of the country as suggested in the framework of this study. This culture of performativity leads to digression from the ethically noble cause of education which is to take the learners through the process of learning rather than to produce results. One of the manager participants stated, *"I think at the end of the day, what is most important is to deliver the learning objective and the outcomes that are set out. That is the most important. I think at the end of the day, you look at the product"*. In this quote, the views of the manager are clearly stated when she says that it is the result of the learning that is important, not the process of learning. This is how performativity comes in the form of teacher expectations to produce results no matter what experience the learners go through during the learning process.

There is a third group that initially stated that teachers need teacher autonomy but later stated that too much TA should not be given. This group of interviewees can be called "safe players" at work as they do not want to venture out of the

framework set by their managers so that they would be safe by not making any major mistakes in their decision-making. They believe that their autonomy must be within certain restrictions by the management, and they voluntarily accept the situation without question.

#### 6.3.4. Teaching as an Act of Collegial Collaboration

Teacher autonomy and collaboration among themselves are considered vital in shaping effective teaching practices (Guo & Jian, 2021) based on research among teachers in four countries including Singapore. A similar view was indicated among expatriate teachers in a UAE college where the teachers believed that collaboration was pivotal in encouraging their students to group work (Degazon, 2019). Similarly, teachers in my research also believed that teaching goes hand in hand with teamwork for the success of all the teachers which will be translated to the success of their learners. They generally expressed their satisfaction in sharing their teaching materials with their colleagues and developing new materials together as a team of teachers teaching the same modules. Such collegial collaboration is a healthy sign of a progressive education system which could be observed in Singapore's selected PIHL.

However, some teachers believed that the materials that they developed belonged to them and are not meant to be shared as they did not want to lose the competitive edge to others teaching the same subject. This is the result of performativity where the system makes teachers believe that they must stand out as teachers or else lose out in their profession. This perceived job insecurity can make teachers selfish and isolated and as a result, they would prefer to be in their cocoon of comfort. For example, during the interview, some of the teacher-participants



reported the absence of teamwork. There, teachers preferred to work independently, and they considered their ideas and teaching materials as their intellectual property. While the other group of teachers, although they were also teachers in the private education sector, they believed in collaboration, not competition. By being open to their peers in sharing and developing teaching materials, teachers enhance their professional growth and play a major role in the development of institutional quality and student performance (Shah, 2012). This can be suggested as the institutional character – that is shaped by various factors like government policies, leadership, politics, and cultural landscape – that shapes teachers' perceptions about their rights and responsibilities. Some of the institutions were successful in making the teachers believers in collegial collaboration while some other institutions failed in doing so as there was a lack of mutual trust, and there was a sense of insecurity among teachers about their jobs. This study indicates the lack of trust that management has in the teachers during the interviews. One of the managers stated that “(the private higher education system should) move to a direction where the lecturer, whether it is a full-time staff member or an associate staff member, never actually sees the final assessment (GM-M-M). This is a statement that questions the trust between the leadership and the teachers in higher education (Payneandy, 1998). It is an unusual statement as higher education is often an academic experience where the teacher is expected to take ownership of the course and take the students through the whole journey from planning the curriculum to the grading of the exams. The teachers need to see the question papers as they need to make sure that the learning outcomes are achieved through the assessment. However, the management of PIHLs tend to minimise exposure of exam questions to teachers, more so if they are part-time teachers who are on short contracts mostly out of fear of corruption that has been

reported in the past (Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau Singapore, 2016). While teachers in the public higher education sector collaborate in preparing exam and assessment questions and take joint decisions on the passing rate of their students, teachers in PHIL face different situations that happen due to a lack of trust or fear of exam questions being leaked out of fear of favouritism.

#### 6.4. Planning and decision-making

Planning and decision-making is a significant parts of a pre-and post-teaching segment. In this study, planning and decision-making refer to lesson planning, materials design, selection of teaching content and supplementary materials, and decisions about conducting needs-based teaching in class or individualising the lessons to suit learners of different abilities.

##### 6.4.1. Lesson planning

Planning lessons and making crucial decisions related to teaching are important tasks that can be influenced by institutional policies and leadership (OECD, 2017). Planning lessons is an important task that precedes classroom teaching as a lesson plan charts the path of a teaching session. It is also a guide for the teacher and a record for the institution about what has been covered and what has not. While teachers tend to give high importance to planning their lessons in public sector teaching, the private sector seems to be very different. Pre-lesson decisions comprise lesson objectives, teaching content, methods, and teaching materials (Bishop & Whitfield, 1972). However, participants from the interviews generally share the view that they do not have a regular written record of lesson planning as they often teach according to the coursebook, and study materials given to them.

This means many of them do not plan their lessons before their contract is given, rather, they tend to follow the course outline and coursebook that comes as part of their module documents.

One of the reasons for teachers in PIHL not attributing significance to planning their lessons is their lack of time and training which determines the professional competence of teachers which is a factor that affects teacher autonomy. Teachers in many PIHLs are usually given their contracts only a few days before the commencement of their classes making them tight for time for adequate lesson planning and preparation. In addition, they are not obliged to undertake any formal training in lesson planning, materials design, classroom management or assessment skills which can make them poor planners. Providing them with sufficient training would make them aware of the importance of planning a lesson before implementing it and reflecting on their lesson after carrying it out so that any shortcomings could be filled in the following lesson. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on teachers' professional development. Borko, Roberts and Shavelson write about the importance of teachers being able to foresee potential problems before going to class, which is possible only through reflective lesson planning (Borko, Roberts, & Shavelson, 2008). Such skills can be developed in teachers only through training which is what teachers are lacking in the PIHL. In the private higher education sector, training is not a criterion for selection as individual institutions have their criteria for appointments.

#### 6.4.2. Materials Development

Materials design is one of the primary activities at the pre-teaching stage where teachers have expressed mixed views. It involves the in-depth study of the

curriculum or syllabus and the design of materials that are aligned with the curriculum. At the same time, it is also important for teachers to design materials that are engaging and are pitched at the right level for the learners so that the lessons will be interesting and enjoyable for the students. When they enjoy the lessons, the learners will be attentive and there would be a minimal level of disruptions in class and the teachers will not have to spend their lesson time on discipline matters.

However, what is observed from the participant data is different in Singapore's PIHL. In most of the institutions, either a teaching framework or teaching materials are provided thereby leaving the teachers with very little room for designing materials using their creative ideas. In places where the materials are provided, the teachers do not have the decision-making capacity to change the materials even if they think that the materials provided do not suit the level of learning in their class. In other words, they do not have the freedom to digress from the track that is mapped for them by the management.

Research has shown that teachers' ability to design their teaching materials is an integral sign of teacher autonomy. As discussed in the literature review, Albedaiwi indicates that teachers must become materials developers to be able to exercise autonomy in classroom teaching (Albedaiwi, 2011). This is one method in which teachers can take ownership of their teaching. However, in Singapore's private higher education context, this is not the case now and it is unlikely to happen unless the institutional policies, teaching contract and working environment undergo a massive change. Currently, in Singapore's private institutions, most of the modules are taught mainly by part-time teaching faculty who dedicate their contractually agreed time to teaching the modules. In most cases, they follow the existing teaching materials as mentioned by the participants. However, developing new ones is a time-

consuming process. Moreover, not many institutions pay for developing their materials which makes the task less appealing to part-time teaching faculty. When institutions do not commit to payments for the laborious task of designing materials and as a result, teaching faculty shun opportunities to take up such unpaid tasks, many of the private institutions end up using outdated materials or materials developed by in-house staff who are not qualified or trained for such tasks. As one of the manager participants pointed out “... *obviously, associate lecturers may not have, much involvement (in designing the teaching materials), on the other hand, they may not want that involvement*” (SV-F-M). The words of the manager show that institutions do not want to spend their financial resources on designing the materials and part-time teaching faculty are not committed to taking up the tasks as it is not monetarily rewarding.

#### 6.4.3. Selection of materials and supplementary materials

Selecting teaching materials and supplementary materials are some of the key responsibilities of teachers. Teachers in PIHL are observed to be happy to do their part in developing supplementary materials if they remain their property. As one of the interviewees said, *I would like that flexibility to look out for extra teaching materials to teach my students.* (AP-F-T). Another teacher who coordinates a module stated, “...*teachers are allowed to use any extra materials as long as they inform the module leader and if they can prove that the supplementary materials are relevant and that there is a goal behind it, I will always support the teachers*” (IA-F-T).

While the words of IA-F-T sound very comforting to teachers, there is still a hidden element of lack of trust in the teachers. The speaker expects the teachers to report the materials to the coordinator and get consent to use them and at the same time,

consent would be granted only if the teacher can prove that the materials are relevant and that there is a purpose behind using them. The result from the survey is also similar. In section 3.1, teachers experienced the lowest level ( $M = 2.87$ ) of perceived TA for item 11.4 (Selecting My Course Books and Teaching Materials).

The situation here questions the professional decision-making skills of the teacher as the coordinator wants to have more control over the decision-making process, another sign of performativity (Biesta et al., 2015). Although basic materials for teaching a particular module are generally provided by the department or school, sometimes this may not be the case as teachers might be asked to develop their materials or update the existing ones, in some cases, teachers are expected to develop materials as a team. From the quantitative and qualitative data, it can be observed that while teachers generally perceive themselves to be autonomous in what teaching materials they use and to what extent they depend on additional materials to make their students perform better in the exams, this can also pose challenges when some teachers choose to operate a "closed-door policy" and are not keen to engage actively with their colleagues, a situation observed among a minority group of teachers in Finland and Ireland as mentioned in a study on teacher autonomy (Salokangas & Wermke, Teachers' autonomy deconstructed: Irish and Finnish teachers' perceptions of decision-making and control, 2020). However, Salokangas and Wermke suggest that teachers in these countries feel that they have autonomy in their work. This is different from the teacher-participants in the interview who shared that many decisions were not made by them or that they are not involved in the decision-making processes on educational and developmental issues of their learners.

The participants in this research expressed their opinion that both working independently and working in teams are effective, sometimes, too much dependency

on teamwork affects their autonomy in decision-making on selecting supplementary materials for teaching as suggested during the interviews. There was also a lack of evidence from the data about any teacher speaking about the necessity of sharing their teaching materials or developing them together as a team as everyone is looking to be competitive in their profession and successful in continuously receiving their teaching contracts. This attitude suggests a unique teacher perception or thinking pattern of teachers who consider individual freedom to select materials as autonomy. As mentioned in the literature review, teachers in Singapore's PIHL avail themselves of the following options for their teaching materials:

- (a) Use materials that are supplied by the department
- (b) Design their materials for teaching and teach them
- (c) Develop their materials for teaching and get approval before teaching them
- (d) Design materials as a team of teachers from the same department and use the materials for their lessons

However, sharing of individually developed materials is not common among teachers in PIHL. This can be attributed to the fact that teachers are contracted to teach, and their continued contract depends mainly on their student feedback, making teachers compete among themselves. To get a high score in student feedback, there is always competition among teachers. It is this sense of competition that leads to a culture of performativity that discourages teachers from collaborating with others and sharing their materials with their colleagues (Ball, 2010). This is also an effect of the marketization of education that has made education a commodity in the last few years following globalization and the internationalization of higher education in Singapore. As a result, the academic result becomes the primary

objective, and the process towards achieving it – the learning journey – takes lower priority.

#### 6.4.4. Needs-based teaching in class

Lesson planning and materials development go together with a selection of suitable materials that make lessons interesting and engaging. Selection of common materials is usually made at the department level and teachers are expected to follow these materials to teach. In some institutions, individual teachers are given the task of selecting materials for their classes. However, in some situations, the common materials may not suit the needs of all learners as their learning abilities vary. In such situations, teachers look for individualised materials that meet their learners' needs which is strongly highlighted as an important need in teaching by TB-M-T who stated that teachers must be given the autonomy to teach in a way that suits the learning needs of the class or a particular group of students in a class. He stated, “...there will be situations whereby a certain methodology that a teacher always employs may not work for some students. (In such situations), if the teacher feels hampered and is not able to give their best then, it creates another set of problems” (TB-M-T).

However, there are various controlling factors like institutional policies that regulate the use of supplementary materials in class. Some of the institutions leave it to the teachers' discretion to select supplementary materials for the weaker learners. Some other institutions generate such materials as a team within the department. Yet other institutions allow their teachers to select the materials, but the teachers must seek the approval of their supervisors before using them in class.



The research also observed how teachers feel about selecting materials and developing supplementary materials for learners with special needs. The interviews suggested that teachers generally felt happy committing to the additional tasks for their learners who need additional help. Similarly, the surveys helped to gather similar opinions from the participants – participants' both current experience and their opinion about "*Deciding on Extra Teaching Materials*" reflected the highest level of perceived TA ( $M = 1.8$ ). As stated by Tomlinson, most teachers would be happy to develop proficiency in a variety of ways to teach depending on the learners' needs, rather than teaching every student according to one mandated approach (Tomlinson, 2019). According to her, these teachers who do not simply conform to the norms of the structure by going with the flow of the system would rather be propelled by a sense of personal responsibility by helping their needy learners than by a system of external accountability to their supervisors and their institutions. In other words, these teachers are driven by a sense of motivation to fulfil their responsibilities.

## 6.5. Assessment

Assessment is a key area of learning that involves any form of valuation like class tests, quizzes, oral presentations, individual and group projects, exhibitions, class participation and many more. Teachers must be able to assess their students' learning. Assessment guides teachers' work, it is transparent, and teachers take the assessment as a part of their professional practice (Salokangas & Wermke, Teachers' autonomy deconstructed: Irish and Finnish teachers' perceptions of decision-making and control, 2020). This study is also looking at the role of teachers in formative and summative assessments, setting of exam papers and exam moderation process in

Singapore's PIHL. Both formative and summative assessments are used in private institutions of higher learning in Singapore although in most cases, such assessments closely follow the procedures followed by the collaborating partners of the PIHL which are often foreign universities mainly from the UK and Australia and in some cases, universities from the US, New Zealand and parts of Europe. In the survey data, there was a higher perceived teacher autonomy in opinions ( $M = 2.00$ ) on assessment against participants' experiences ( $M = 2.70$ ). The participants in the interviews while acknowledging the benefit of TA highlights the importance of a 'criterion' for it which is tied to student performance. This exerts pressure on teachers to produce results. This situation is different from the TA experienced by the teachers in Finland where they are free from external pressures such as inspection, standardized testing, and government control (Crouch, 2015). The interview responses point out that Singapore's situation is different where teachers follow the syllabus, lesson plan, and assessment structure – according to what has been provided by their respective heads of department, head of school or level coordinators which the participants often refer to as “framework” that regulates their autonomy which can be put under the three regulating factors – government policies, institutional policies and leadership as reflected in the theoretical framework.

#### 6.5.1. Formative assessments and summative assessments

In the case of formative assessments, teachers are given more freedom and flexibility to conduct them at their own pace as they are meant mainly for providing feedback to the students and are not included in the final score that determines students' pass or fails grades. However, summative assessments are more formalised and are conducted under strict supervision by the heads of department, and exam unit

and may include external examiners hired from outside the institution who are not familiar with or known to the students and teachers. Such arrangements are made at an extra effort – manpower-wise and monetarily – to make the assessment more reliable and to strengthen the trustworthiness of the institution to conduct courses in collaboration with foreign university partners.

It is noteworthy that teachers generally shared their experience that they did not have a serious role in the formative and summative assessments. As stated in the words of a part-time lecturer, “... *as of now we have no say in the assessment methods. It has been set at management level. We simply have to apply that to teaching*” (SE-F-T). A sense of frustration is clearly expressed through the words as the teacher is unable to be a part of the assessment process. The same teacher also states, “...*continuous assessment over the weeks should be left to the teachers because they know their students best but the need for a final level-based assessment such as an exam that (can be) common to all students*” (SE-F-T). She felt that as the teacher she knew how or how not to assess the learners as she knew her students best whereas the leadership does not consider this view. The situation reflects the helplessness of the teacher in a situation where she wishes to be a part of the decision-making on the assessment of her learners, and she is aware of the situation where she does not have the autonomy to choose what she wants for her students. This is especially true in the case of part-time lecturers who are not privy to what has been going on as far as assessment components are concerned although they are allowed to conduct formative assessments based on common instruction from the department. In most cases, the assessment components are set by the foreign university partners or the local school or department, or the local full-time academic staff. While the summative assessment is handled exclusively by the department

personnel or the exam unit directly to keep the secrecy and confidentiality of the questions. Here, institutions often make a clear distinction between full-time and part-time academic staff. While the full-timers are sometimes able to access the assessment content, the part-timers are entirely kept out of the scene although they may be the ones teaching or in charge of the module.

#### 6.5.2. The setting of Exam Paper

The setting of exam papers is considered an integral part of teaching. This includes selecting the type of questions, the time allocation, and the weighting for each question. To maintain the validity of the tests, the test or exam questions must be designed based on what has been taught in class. In this context, teachers are the most reliable sources who should decide on what can be tested for their students. However, in the Singapore context, a private higher education operator may work with multiple university partners. Each university has its question papers for the ongoing and end-of-term tests and exams. These question papers are often not accessible to the part-time teachers who form most of the teaching force while the question papers are kept confidential by the head of the department or level coordinator. In some cases, the overseas university partners would not release the question paper until the exam date to maintain secrecy. Unless the teachers who teach the subject are involved as part of the team that sets the questions, this gap cannot be filled. As observed from the interview data, part-time teachers are not involved in the team for assessment, and this sheds light on the processes involved in assessment in PIHL.

The interviews also suggested that teachers in some PIHL also face issues with access to learning resources. In Singapore's PIHL, full-time teaching faculty

have access to critical teaching and learning resources including exam resources, which are generally not open to part-time faculty. This is often because part-time teachers work for multiple institutions and therefore, some institutions may not trust the teachers having free access to their resources as they fear that the teachers may use the institute's materials to teach for a competing institution. This is a question of management's trust in their teachers and the integrity of teachers in their profession. Eventually, the result is that the students will be at a disadvantage as they do not benefit from proper training using the materials that are meant for their use. Contrary to the results of the interviews, survey result has shown that teachers' current experience and their opinion about having a say in the type of questions for the final exam is high. For current experience, the highest perceived TA scores were reflected by item 15.3 ( $M = 2.55$ ) - Deciding the Type of Questions for Final Exam and teachers' opinion, the highest level of perceived TA was attributed to item 16.3 ( $M = 1.89$ ) - The Type of Questions for Final Exam.

This section highlights the shares the state of teachers from the views of teacher participants where part-time lecturers not being a part of setting question papers, whereas full-time lecturers may get selective access to the exam questions. As one of the manager-participants stated during the interview, *"I would like to move to a direction where the lecturer, whether it's a full-time staff member or an associate staff member, never actually sees the final assessment"* (GM-M-M). This would minimise the possible bias or corruption that might otherwise take place. This suggests that there is a suspicion of a lack of secrecy about the exams or a possibility of examination questions being leaked to the students (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, 2018) as a favour or for monetary rewards.

### 6.5.3. Exam Moderation Process

Moderation after tests or exams determines the pass or fail rate of a class and it will determine if students in general and those on the borderline should be awarded a pass or fail based on a set of criteria that are generally developed by the exam board. These criteria include portfolio records, past assessments conducted during that term, and open-ended answers by the student to name a few. Moderation is an important part of the assessment as it ensures the grades awarded are fair, valid and reliable, that the grading is done based on the assessment criteria and above all, that any differences among individual graders are addressed to ensure consistency across the cohort of students at any given time (The University of Edinburgh, 2020). This suggests the importance attributed to moderation in the assessment of higher education subjects by universities.

Although the course coordinators are generally in charge of conducting moderation exercises with the help and support from the teachers who taught the modules, in the Singapore context, this is not always the case as seen from the qualitative data. While it is acceptable for the teacher to be the first marker, it is important that the subsequent markers and moderators need to consult the teacher for an expert opinion before making significant alterations to the marks. This process is important as students' grades can be dependent on multiple factors. For example, students who have been doing extremely well in the internal assessments and assignments are unlikely to get a very low grade in the summative assessment at the end of the term.

In the Singapore context, the involvement of teachers in the moderation process is not common. The survey results also support the interview data. Looking

at item 5.1, teachers' *Current Experience on TA in Assessment*, participants reported the lowest level of perceived TA ( $M = 2.92$ ) for item 15.5 - Deciding the Level of Moderation After Exam, while a similar trend is seen in section 5.2, teachers' *Opinion on TA in Assessment*, where participants reported the least perceived TA for item 16.5 ( $M = 2.18$ ) - Deciding the Level of Moderation After Exam. Exploring deeper into the teachers' roles and involvement, the following situations came into my view:

- (a) Most PIHL do not wish to pay part-time teachers for the time they spend on moderation. Therefore, they choose to exclude part-time teachers from the process.
- (b) Part-time teachers are generally not interested to spend many hours of their time involved in the moderation exercise as it requires many hours of unpaid effort.
- (c) The full-time teaching faculty is a stable team that will remain with the institution over many years while part-timers are committed only for that particular term.

While the PIHL has their point in being thrifty about their decision of not involving part-time teaching staff in the moderation process, this would question the validity of the grades as part-timers who form the majority of the teachers and who are more knowledgeable about their students' performance are excluded from an important exercise in their students' learning journey.

## 6.6. Professional Development

The data analysis indicates the teachers' wish to participate in professional development activities. However, PIHL does not have opportunities or funding for

teachers to get involved in self-development. A strong interest and an active involvement in professional development among teachers are considered characteristics of a strong teaching profession, a feature that is prevalent among Finnish teachers (Salokangas & Wermke, Teachers' autonomy deconstructed: Irish and Finnish teachers' perceptions of decision-making and control, 2020). Teachers in Singapore's public education system are encouraged and supported by the Ministry of Education in achieving their goals of lifelong learning. For example, The Teacher Education Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TE21) focuses on improving teacher training programs and teachers' lifelong professional development (Rajandiran, 2021). However, PIHL in Singapore generally does not show support for such activities as they do not see any financial benefit from them which is always their priority. Professional development of teachers – one of the themes in the research framework – involves action research, teachers' study groups, ongoing training programs, academic conferences, formal higher education, and involvement in research and publications that are aimed at improving teachers' professional competence and autonomy at work. Although decisions regarding professional development are supposed to be made by individual teachers or teachers collectively the approving authority is the dean/head of the institution/school/department or human resources department or in some cases, actors outside the institution. This situation questions the extent of teachers' decision-making capacity in determining or charting their professional development. In this regard, Tomlinson stated that many people don't realize how little autonomy most teachers have, and how little their perspectives are considered (Tomlinson, 2019) makes sense in this context.

During the survey, the participants also expressed that they had a low level of autonomy in the choice of their professional development activities. In section 6.2,



teachers' *Opinion on TA in Professional Development* varied significantly with them perceiving to have the lowest TA for item 18.3 ( $M = 1.97$ ) which is "Have a Say about the Time Their Professional Development Activities Need to be Completed", 18.6, "Join Any Associations that Help in Their Overall Development" ( $M = 1.97$ ), and 18.7 "Write and Publish Articles Freely" ( $M = 1.97$ ). This data suggest that teachers did not have a major role in deciding on their professional development path or the duration of the courses that they undertake.

#### 6.6.1. Ongoing training programs

The research suggests a possibility that private institutions of higher learning in Singapore tend to be profit-oriented and therefore, they do not invest in teachers' professional development through ongoing training programs. However, teachers have the option to suggest training programs to their heads of department who may approve their request if the programs fall within the allocated budget which is very rare as observed from the data. As one of the manager participants at the interview put it, "... *financial support for training depends on the institute, but generally very difficult (to get it approved)* (NC-F-M). These words show how passive PIHL are towards staff training and development. However, if teachers are willing to take up training at their own expense, institutions may approve their request for leave to attend the training and they may be granted study leave. However, this is on a case-by-case basis it is not common that teachers in PIHL to attend such training programs as the cost is often very high for the teachers to afford and it involves a time commitment of a few days to weeks without being able to earn for their living, as evidenced from the views of teacher-participants and teacher-managers during the interview.

It is important to state that even when there is an opportunity available for teachers to attend ongoing training programs, the priority is for full-time academic staff and part-time teaching staff hardly get a chance to attend any training programs – free or sponsored. As a result, generally, there would be some professional growth among the full-time faculty in PIHL while the part-time teachers remain the same. This means unless part-timers decide to chart their professional development, they will soon be redundant and outdated in their profession.

However, teachers in popular PIHL in Singapore enjoy more opportunities to attend ongoing in-house training programs that are conducted internally by their human resources department or external vendors. They are encouraged to attend training programs that improve their professional competence which would translate to successful lessons and higher student achievement. These institutions have a clear vision for their teachers' development and as a result, teachers there are more competent, confident, and professionally outstanding.

#### 6.6.2. Higher studies

The face-to-face interviews also explored professional development opportunities for teachers in PIHL. Taking up higher studies is not something that teachers in Singapore's PIHL usually do unless they decide to self-sponsor their learning program as such studies are often way beyond the budget allocated for staff training. This is a huge contrast to the study opportunities offered by public institutions of higher learning where teaching faculty are offered full sponsorship for their training and granted leave of absence from work. Lundstrom (2015) suggests that teacher autonomy involves the freedom for teachers to decide on their choices of professional development that are aimed at enhancing their teaching which includes

higher studies. However, as private institutions are more business-focused, they are not willing to sponsor their staff at such a high cost as they do not see staff training as a worthy investment. The data supports this view where a teacher-manager admits that funding opportunities are limited for part-time faculty while most of the teachers are part-timers.

The data also pointed out that PIHL does not often have a professional growth plan charted for their academic staff for various reasons as stated by teacher-managers during the interview. First, they do not see it as a requirement to have their teaching faculty attain higher degrees. Next, private institutions do not want to commit to offering their academic staff huge increments based on the higher degrees that they might earn while working. Finally, unlike public educational institutions, PIHL attributes low priority to staff development and training as they look at such activities as a drain on their financial resources.

### 6.6.3. Research and Publication

In Singapore's private institutions of higher learning, teaching faculty spending their time and effort in research and publication is uncommon. The institutional control and character are not supportive of such intellectual activities at their expense, and teachers do not have the time to get themselves involved in research and publications as they are often given heavy academic workloads as informed by the qualitative interviews. Those who still get involved in such intellectual activities are those who are willing to commit their after-work hours and their financial resources to research and attend academic conferences and make paper presentations.

Lundstrom (2015) suggests that teacher autonomy involves the freedom for teachers to decide on their choices for professional development including research and publication. While the participants in the interview and survey support the important role played by research and publications among academic staff. As mentioned by one of the managers, “... *doing research and publications may help to some degree. (They) not only benefit the teachers, but they also benefit the students as well as the institute itself*” (NC-F-M). These words are evidence that the management is aware of the benefits that research and publications of their faculty can bring to the institutions.

Discussion of this topic brought about the schema of three stakeholders – individual teachers, management staff and institutions. Teaching staff are aware of the benefits of research and are interested to do it, but they do not have the luxury of the time for it. Management staff are aware of the benefits that research and publications can bring to their institution, but they do not have the power or authority to approve it for their faculty. The interviews indicated that while the institution's top management is aware of the benefits, they do not want to spend their financial resources on funding research and publications for their part-time employees. This can be assumed as the management does not view such spending as a wise investment.

## 6.7. Policy and leadership

Policies are factors that shape the education landscape. Policies mainly refer to national government regulations as generally, policies formulated at lower levels such as state or local government level guidelines and institutional regulations are shaped by or influenced by central-level government policies that are generally

meant for the whole country. However, in Singapore, due to the comparatively smaller size of the country, national-level policies apply to all the private institutions of higher learning through CPE and MOE regulations as seen from the documents that stipulate rules and regulations for PIHL in Singapore. Teacher autonomy is connected to policies at various levels and institutional leadership with whom teachers liaise regularly. Thomas (2011) suggests that TA involves a set of capabilities and knowledge of teachers, their role in shaping and leading changes in education, and their relationship with policymakers.

#### 6.7.1. Government policies and regulations (Eg: MOE and CPE)

The interview data highlights that government policies in Singapore shape institutional policies determine the type of leadership, and shape teacher perceptions and teacher motivation thereby playing a major role in the functioning of PIHL. However, the data shows that there is hardly anything that the government authorities suggest about teacher autonomy in PIHL. The interviewees agree that there are no specific policies about TA that they are aware of or updated by the institution. One of the participants stated, "*I don't think there have been very explicit policies on TA*" (KS-F-M) which is the same view expressed by others.

While most of the interviewees stated the lack of policies on TA, one of the teachers highlighted her awareness of a recent government policy aimed at recognizing part-time teachers as a major part of the Singapore workforce and mandating compulsory benefits for them. These benefits include paid medical leave and contributions to the provident fund by the employers (Central Provident Fund Board, 2021). The teacher felt that this government policy is in line with recognizing

part-time teachers and makes them motivated about their work by bringing more stable financial security to their lives.

Singapore's private higher education sector has gone through major changes in the last two decades. Until the mid-2000s, all private educational institutions used to be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. However, since 2009, an independent body called CPE was installed to oversee and regulate the functioning of private educational institutions. While this organisation does not have any regulations specifically on TA, its circulars and publications provide insight into what they expect institutions to do to continue their smooth operations in Singapore. These expectations include making appointments of teachers, recruiting agents, academic expectations on the number of hours of teaching, minimum durations of courses and so on. While TA is not explicitly discussed in any of the policy documents, it is expected that the institutions make their best discretion to make appointments of teachers and expectations on PHIL to participate in CPE-led activities.

Looking at Singapore's Private Education Act (SPEA) is also relevant in gathering information about the research topic as all PIHL in Singapore fall under the jurisdiction of SPEA. The Private Education Act, enacted in 2009 is a legal document that is aimed at promoting and facilitating the development of the private education sector in Singapore. During the interview, many participants including teachers and managers stated that they were not aware of the existence of any government policy or legal document on teacher autonomy. As one of the teachers mentioned when asked if she know about any such policies, "*Offhand, I would say no*" (SE-F-T). Another teacher stated, "*I am not much exposed, to MOE norms and the terms*" (JL-M-T). These views show that teachers are in the dark or kept in the

dark about the policies that they should be aware of to be professionally competent. The PHIL that receive the government policies through government circulars may not be updating the teachers with the new policies, reforms or directions of the government. In other words, the situation makes it possible for PHIL to translate the policy for the teachers in a way that favours the institutions.

A similar view was expressed by some of the manager participants as well. They tried to guess by giving their opinion rather than sharing the facts, as seen from the replies of some of them. One of the managers said, "*I don't think there have been very explicit policies on (TA)*" (KS-F-M) while another manager said, "*To be honest, I would only be guessing, I'm only assuming that (the authorities) can't be really specific about things*" (SN-M-M). These views are an indication that even the managerial level staff are not clear about the government policies regarding teacher autonomy and their roles. It is possible that the top-level management are the ones who are privy to such information and they keep everyone else away from any information from the authorities like CPE and MOE.

#### 6.7.2. Institutional policies

PIHL in Singapore has different policies that are formulated based on government policies. However, government policies do not stipulate any demands or make recommendations on teacher autonomy in private institutions. From the teachers' views, I acknowledge that most of the teachers are not clear about institutional policies or the process of formulating them or the influencing themes of the policies. As one of the teachers said, "*...usually the head of school will assign different tasks to different teachers (following certain) process, but I am not sure how it works*" (IA-F-T). It is a serious situation when a full-time teacher working for

many years is not aware of the policymaking process of her institution and her department. This opinion is supported by another teacher who laments over the lack of academic representation in the policymaking committee in his institution. He stated his opinion, "*...not sure about the policies ... (if) everybody comes together (to formulate policies), we will be able to (formulate) better policies that can actually survive scrutiny and then be able to be implemented*" (TB-M-T). These words also highlight the concerns of the teachers that they do not know much about the existence of any policies in their institution and that they are not involved in policymaking.

On the other hand, listening to a manager-participant, she held an entirely different opinion from that of the teaching faculty. In her own words, "*...the way we (formulate and implement) policies is not like managers impose policies on the (teachers). We have a lot of discussions that are done*" (LM-F-M). Here, the manager claims that teachers are involved in the policy-making process and that they are not coerced into accepting the policies formulated by the authorities. There is an obvious discrepancy between the views of the teachers and managers. While the teachers claim that they are not sure about having any policies on TA or that they are not sure how the policies work, the leadership believes that teachers are sufficiently consulted before making the policies for the institution. While another manager held a slightly different view. According to her, "*...we use the guideline from the government ... we try to mirror that. We just want to adopt the policy so (we) design the processes to make sure that, we can adhere to those policies and practices*" (KS-F-M). Here, the manager has not specifically mentioned any involvement of teachers. She only emphasized that they hold their policies as close to the government policies as possible so that they would be able to operate smoothly with



continued CPE accreditation. The views of the teachers and managers highlight that there is inadequate representation of teachers in the policy-making process in Singapore's PIHL. We have seen that taking part in the decision-making process is a sign of teacher autonomy, which is lacking in this context. As seen from the literature review, only when teachers are recognized for their work and feel secure about their job, do they become more motivated and perform better.

It was also observed during the interview that PIHL in Singapore tends to view their students as customers rather than students or learners. This is openly stated by one of the managers who stated, "There has to be a certain level of trust ... of course, (but) everything is based on feedback, and especially with private education, a lot of it hinges obviously on the students, and to put it bluntly, (they are our) customers (NC-F-M). This view of managers viewing their learners as customers and teachers expected to provide quality service defies the values of teaching in an Asian context where teaching is considered an act of commitment and care, and teachers are entrusted with having those qualities. While school education is highly subsidized, higher education is expensive in Singapore. University education is often paid for by students or their parents giving students the status of "customers" rather than "students" in its conventional sense. When this happens, the poor performance of the learners becomes the fault of the teacher (or service provider) (Clayson & Haley, 2005). However, in this kind of a marketized culture of higher education, the changes threaten the quality of 'higher' learning in relationship with educators, at the same time increase the likelihood of dissatisfaction caused by the effects of massified and marketized higher education sector on customer's (student's) inflated need to feel special (Nixon, Scullion, & Hearn, 2018) as they are the fund-providers of private institutions. This idea is also suggested in the

Bangladesh context, where there is a lack of focus on quality education, research and innovation, and philanthropic contribution to society unlike the situation in public universities, whereas, in Bangladesh, business-minded people are in the leading or ownership roles of the higher education institutions, revenue and profit are their top priorities rather than education (Ahmed, 2016). These are similar to the views that were shared by the participants in the interviews in this research where the priorities of the PIHL are profit, name and fame instead of quality. As a result of such levels of marketization, teachers are expected to teach to produce academic results and enable their students to get jobs which are becoming the key foci for Singapore's PIHL.

The Singapore government is looking forward to a globally recognized sector for its education landscape making it an education hub of the world, the government encourages competition and transparency in the private higher education sector, making it perform better. The question here is whether the culture of performativity makes the education system more flexible for teachers and students, or whether it is giving a free hand to the managers and owners of PIHL to run the institutions. Although the new policies are presented as giving the owners, management, directors, and operators more freedom and flexibility, it is not a de-regulation of old practices and governmental control on the institutions. Rather, the state establishes a new form of control on the PIHL by the introduction of new policies which are a form of less visible regulation or "a more hands-off, self-regulating regulation" (Du Gay, 1996). In other words, the authorities in Singapore use the approach of performativity as a way of control even as it implements an educational policy of decentralization (Tan C. , 2009). The educational policy of the government requiring all PIHL to participate in the annual GES is a good example of the government

letting the system run by itself without being directly involved in the administration, a hands-off approach.

### 6.7.3. Leadership

Two levels of leadership are going to be discussed here. The first is the government leadership including those from the regulatory authorities like CPE and MOE. The next level of leadership comprises the level coordinators, Heads of departments, academic directors, deans, and chief executive officers from the institutions. The data tells that leadership in Singapore's PIHL generally follows the government policies as closely as possible for their survival which is made possible through regular checks, audits, comparisons, and publishing of the employment rates of students from each of the institutions.

The leaders of private higher education institutions make every effort to formulate policies that are aligned with government policies and that benefit their students as suggested by teacher-managers during the interviews. While none of the interviewees – teachers and managers – made any mention of the management making any policies beneficial to teachers. The words of one of the senior managerial staff echo the importance that they attribute to following government policies. According to her, "we use the guidelines from the government ... we try to mirror that. We just want to adopt the policy. We design the processes to make sure that we can adhere to those policies and practices (in our institution)" (KS-F-M).

However, the interviews also show that the institutional policies do not focus on any benefits for teachers unless such benefits are mandated by the government as in the case of approving sick leave and contributing provident funds for part-time teaching staff which were historic changes in the private higher education context in

Singapore. As stated in the words of one of the teacher-interviewees, "...as contract teachers, (we) are now entitled to medical leave as a change in the labour law" (SE-F-T). While the teacher-participant was happy to share this information about the benefits that they can enjoy, she states specifically that this benefit is due to a government regulation favouring teachers, not a decision that the leadership in the private education sector made on their own. The view that institutional policies are focused only on their customers (students) for the benefit of earning profit by buying their students' trust, is also expressed in the words of one of the teachers who stated that PIHL develops policies (in order) to put students first, it's student focus (AP-F-T). Here, the speaker emphasizes the importance of "student-focused policies", with no mention of any focus on teachers.

#### 6.7.4. Political and Cultural Landscape

It is also important to note that Singapore's political and cultural landscape is very different from other countries, even its close neighbours like Malaysia and Indonesia. While Singapore claims to have one of the most successful education systems in the world from PISA rankings, for example, its success can be attributed to its stable political landscape that keeps the same political party in power for more than half a century, and the party's policies are therefore not altered or diluted by political changes or upheavals in the country. Also, the cultural outlook of the people that values education as one of the top priorities adds to Singapore having a successful education system. Singapore is vastly different from the rest of the Southeast Asian countries. Singapore with its unique cultural traits with a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multireligious society, while looking at the popular educational policies in countries like Finland and Sweden, it must develop its

policies to suit its culture to be successful rather than copying the policies of countries from an entirely different culture. While Singapore was preparing to be an educational hub in early 2000, the minister in charge stated the government's vision for Singapore to become "the Boston of the East". This is possible, provided Singapore adopts policies from the US that are viable in the local context, but not through a wholesale adoption. As mentioned in a study of educational leadership in the GCC cultures by Bailey et. al., "policy borrowing" from educationally successful countries is not an option for GCC countries (Bailey, Purinton, Al-Mahdi, & Al-Khalifa, 2021) as GCC countries have a unique political landscape. Likewise, "policy borrowing" from successful countries like Finland or Sweden is also not an option for Singapore to take its success further and to carry on with the newly implemented educational reforms as those countries have a unique political and cultural landscape that makes their educational policies function smoothly.

## 6.8. The Teacher Autonomy Framework

The private higher education sector is becoming a key sector of growth in many parts of the world (Buckner, 2017). While only 20 per cent of U.S. enrolments are at private colleges and universities, about 80% of students study at private institutions in many Asian countries (Altbach, 2005). The situation is not different in Singapore. As mentioned in my literature review, PIHL are growing fast in the last two centuries in Singapore as the public universities are not able to meet the increasing demand. Therefore, massification becomes a reality when a huge percentage of the population relies on private education. While access to higher education for the masses is a positive social phenomenon, it also has its share of issues. Private institutions are generally funded by the fees paid by the students as

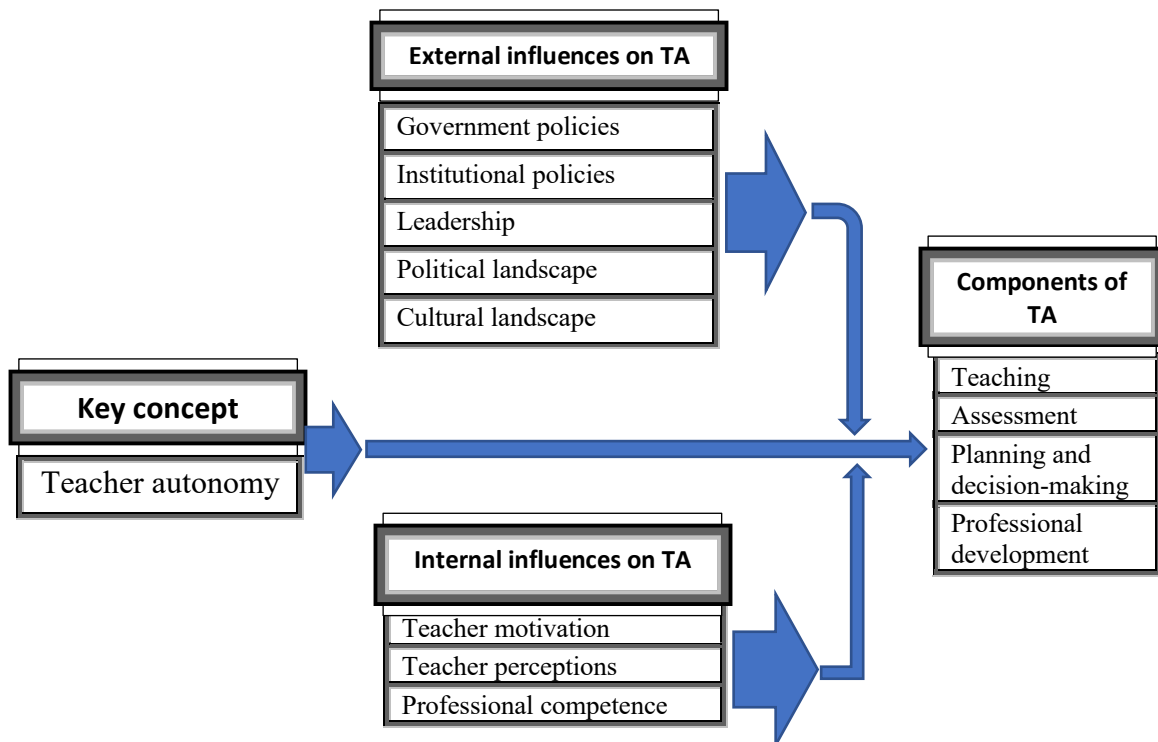
they receive little public funding, and they have no tradition of private philanthropy unlike public universities (Yat, 2014). Therefore, they are unable to vie for the best students. Nevertheless, the private higher education sector plays a key role by providing education to students who would otherwise be unable to obtain academic degrees in Singapore (Altbach, 2005). However, many economically stronger countries in the region like Brunei and Singapore are concerned with developing highly skilled graduates with lifelong learning skills. These countries have their higher education regulated by the state by written law as seen in the earlier chapters believe in linking the number of graduates of a certain field to the number of workers it will need in the future rather than letting the number of graduates grow uncontrolled (Songkhaeo & Loke, 2016). Generally, there is an emphasis on the massification of higher education in many countries and an increased focus on the enhancement of graduate employment outcomes-related skills and competencies (Alves & Tomlinson, 2021). Yat (2017) suggests that within this context, HE institutions in different countries have both been given and assumed a pivotal role in fostering the knowledge economy in the 21st century. Yat highlights Singapore's strategy that is focused on responding positively to globalisation, making the development of higher education aligned with the needs of the economy (Yat, 2017).

This study investigates how the concept of teacher autonomy is understood by teachers and academic leaders in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning (PIHL) and the extent to which they can employ teacher autonomy in their classroom practice and as a teacher in their institution. TA is observed as an essential component of a successful education system that contributes to student achievement which is the prime goal of any education system using teacher performance, both of which were observed in the educational system in Finland (Crouch, 2015) as

mentioned in the literature review. Therefore, in Singapore's private higher education context which is one of the key areas of development that the Singapore government focuses on to make Singapore an international hub of education (Lee, Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Opening of Unilever's Four Acres Singapore Campus, 2014).

A diagrammatic representation of the teacher autonomy framework was developed based on the data that was collected for this research and the key concepts from the literature review. This framework functions as a scaffold for my research as it identifies the key concepts that inform and drive the research questions (Wisker, 2005). The themes in this framework were identified as they are the dominant ones that emerged from the data. The links and relationships among the themes are displayed in the diagram below:

### Teacher autonomy framework



The flowchart represents the theoretical framework that I have developed from the literature review. The chart indicates the influence of teacher autonomy on

teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development of teachers. The literature review also suggested that the role of TA can be influenced by public policies, institutional regulations, leadership, political landscape, or cultural setting. Not only that, TA can also be influenced by internal stimuli like teacher motivation, teacher perceptions or professional competence.

The chart indicates that teacher autonomy influences teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development of teachers. For this research, I adapted these four themes – also shown in the table below – that arise from the data and are used for analysis. The data also suggests three themes as seen in the table below, which are teacher motivation, teacher perceptions and teachers’ professional competence that are shaped by TA. The themes comprise multiple sub-themes that also emerged from the literature review chapter and the interview data, which are presented in the table that follows:

**Themes emerged from the data**

No.	Premises that are influenced by TA	What do they involve?
1	Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching methodology</li> <li>• Classroom management</li> <li>• Care</li> <li>• Skills and knowledge</li> <li>• Teaching content</li> <li>• Teaching process</li> <li>• Other themes (not identified earlier) emerging from the data</li> </ul>
2	Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formative and summative assessments including tests, quizzes, oral tests, presentations, projects, exhibitions and class participation</li> <li>• Designing rubrics</li> <li>• assessment deadlines,</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The setting of exams, selecting the type of questions and weighing for questions</li> <li>• Exam moderation process</li> <li>• Other themes (not identified earlier) emerging from the data</li> </ul>
3	Planning and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson planning</li> <li>• Materials development</li> <li>• Selection of materials and supplementary materials</li> <li>• Needs-based teaching in class</li> <li>• Other themes (not identified earlier) emerging from the data</li> </ul>
4	Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Publication</li> <li>• Higher studies</li> <li>• Ongoing training programs</li> <li>• Other themes (not identified earlier) emerging from the data</li> </ul>
<b>No.</b>	<b>Teacher qualities influenced by TA</b>	<b>What do they involve?</b>
1	Teacher motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love of teaching</li> <li>• Enthusiasm at work</li> <li>• Wish to stay in the teaching profession</li> </ul>
2	Teacher perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views on the concept of TA</li> <li>• Beliefs about the level of TA that they have at work</li> <li>• Views about the level of TA that they should have at work</li> <li>• Belief about their place in the education system</li> <li>• Their belief in their role in the system</li> </ul>
3	Teachers' professional competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and knowledge that make them successful teachers</li> <li>• Their ability to manage to learn</li> <li>• Planning, implementation and evaluation of learning outcomes</li> </ul>

As observed from the data and as stated in the literature review, the four premises that are influenced by TA in the table above are influenced mainly by five areas of influence (as given in the framework) that I have identified from the literature review as government policies, institutional policies, leadership, and political and cultural landscape of the country. These five themes also exercise an influence on teacher autonomy in various ways – directly and indirectly. Among the

external influences on TA, government policies take the focus here as they influence many other themes presented here. Among the government policies, the research takes into consideration only those policies and regulations that impact private institutions of higher learning. For example, Singapore's Private Education Act and the government's policies on teacher selection criteria to name a few. Institutional policies comprise the expectations of the institution from the teachers including but not limited to working hours, evaluations, lesson observation, and benefits and penalties. Leadership investigates the type of governance at the governmental and institutional levels and their expectations from teachers. Political landscape looks at the type of political environment where the institution is located, and policies are formulated while cultural landscape refers to the society and its expectations from teachers that directly or indirectly become part of demands on teachers which are also closely linked to performativity.

The three concepts in the framework – teacher motivation, teacher perceptions and professional competence – link teacher autonomy with the four areas (teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making, and professional development) and as seen from the literature review, they also exercise a strong influence on these areas. Teacher motivation refers to teachers' enthusiasm to teach and stay in their profession while professional competence refers to their ability to remain successful teachers who can meet their stipulated goals as teachers. Teacher perceptions refer to the way teachers view themselves as a part of the education system, their role in their institution, and the level of confidence in their role as teachers. It also refers to how they view TA and its role in their teaching.

## 6.9. Teacher autonomy in Singapore context

Reflecting on the research question in the light of data analysis, teacher autonomy is defined differently by participants in this study. The participants' individual views differed based on their experience, type of institution or status of employment. Their views are reflected in a recent study by Grant et al. (2020) on the effects of teacher autonomy. The study defines teacher autonomy as the freedom enjoyed by a teacher, along with independence, authority, and decision-making capacity over curriculum, teaching, and assessment in their classroom and in the operations of the institution, and their professional development (Grant et al., 2020). These definitions were also shared by the participants in my research. While I agree with the definitions of TA in this study, a more comprehensive definition of TA according to "UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel" which was adopted by the United Nations on 11 November 1997 refers to the ability of a teacher to teach the subject without any unfair external pressures that are deemed to be not supportive in the practice of teaching. According to these recommendations, teachers should be able to express views related to their jobs openly without any fear of their jobs or promotional prospects being affected. Also, they should have working conditions that best promotes effective learning and enable teachers to concentrate on their professional tasks. In short, the recommendations cover policy, curriculum, teaching, teaching materials and assessment (UNESCO, 1997), the areas that were studied in my research.

While this research is set in Singapore's private higher education context, information is scanty about teacher autonomy. Therefore, information on TA based on *birthplace, ethnicity, gender, academic qualifications, place of education,*

*teaching experience, and teaching level are extremely limited.* However, this research indicates that TA is one of the key factors for the success of an education system. This is supported by recent research studies on teacher autonomy conducted in Singapore's secondary school context as seen from the study of Lu & Wang who indicated that TA and collaboration among teachers are considered vital in shaping effective teaching practices in Singapore's secondary schools (Guo & Jian, 2021). The need for TA is also highlighted in a report by OECD that indicates that Singapore is below the average level of OECD countries in the level of teacher autonomy (OECD, 2020).

The literature on TA also indicates other characteristics of TA. While being more specific to teaching, teacher autonomy is more teacher-centred, and pertains to classroom-related matters and pedagogy. It is teacher-centred unlike in the case of academic freedom that involves teachers and students. Teacher autonomy mostly comprises internal factors in which teachers directly get involved like in institutional level policies, department-level decisions and other matters that fall within the framework of the teachers' work environment at the institution. TA is mostly restricted within the institution, unlike academic freedom, which involves national level law, ministry-level policies, and social, religious, and cultural influences. Researchers restrict TA within teachers' work and their institutional environment. As defined by Pearson & Hall (1993), teacher autonomy is the perception that the teachers have regarding whether they control themselves and their work environment (Pearson & Hall, 1993). Benson (2000) holds a similar view that TA is the right to freedom from control by others. This is also the view raised by Macbeath who defines teacher autonomy as a state where workers maintain their control over their activities and theoretical knowledge (Macbeath, 2012). However, this is very

difficult to attain as in most teaching contexts, teachers are under the control of institutional and government authorities, local laws, colleagues, and in some cases, parents of the students many of which as observed from the data. There is always a certain level of regulation – like having a common syllabus, teaching plan, lesson observation, supervisor’s feedback – that is expected in most teaching contexts. In a student-centred educational setting, this boundary is determined by the level at which teachers can work uninterruptedly, in other words, without their teaching and administrative duties being interrupted that might affect the students’ performance.

#### 6.10. Summary

In short, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data highlights that there is a wide range of beliefs and perceptions among teachers and teacher managers about what teacher autonomy means and about the function of teacher autonomy in an education system. The face-to-face interviews have indicated that while both teachers and teacher-managers agree on some points like the need for autonomy in teaching, they differ in their opinion about teachers having complete autonomy in making decisions about their classroom teaching and teachers' involvement in administrative matters. While teacher participants are generally optimistic about having more TA, managers expressed a need to have more control. While management participants are mostly aware of government policies related to private higher education in Singapore, teacher participants are generally not updated about the existence of such policies. The survey results from an analysis of differences in participants' current experiences and opinions found higher levels of perceived TA in the latter, indicating that participants wished to have a higher degree

of TA in their teaching while they generally expressed their view that they experienced a much lower level of autonomy at work.

The information from the interviews draws a picture of Singapore's higher education system which has a global representation of students and has been undergoing many changes in the last two decades. Singapore's education system believes in elements of Confucian values which are rooted in acts like the government heavily investing in education and getting families committed to the educational achievement of children (Yat W. L., Think global, think local: The changing landscape of higher education and the role of quality assurance in Singapore, 2017) – mostly evidenced by academic results and successful job placement as seen from the past research studies and the data analysis. It is also suggested that this is not a feature of just Singapore, but the other geographical areas featured in this research Hong Kong, Thailand and China also display a similar trend. Last, the concept of teacher autonomy is understood differently by participants in Singapore. While teacher autonomy has direct impacts on teaching, assessment, teachers' decision-making, and their professional development (Lundstrom, 2015), teacher autonomy is influenced or shaped by policies, management style, and the cultural landscape of the country.

The findings can be summarized in the teacher autonomy framework (with a diagrammatic representation) that was developed following the data analysis which is also linked to the key concepts in the literature review. The framework reflects the key external and internal influences on teacher autonomy. The external influences comprise government and institutional policies, leadership, local politics and the cultural landscape of the country and the region. Whereas internal influences comprise teacher motivation, perceptions, and teacher professional competence.

These two sets of influences shape teacher autonomy in their tasks – teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making and professional development.

Lastly, the objective of this research was to find out teachers' views on teacher autonomy which has been achieved. The research questions were answered through the data which indicated that teachers had individual differences in their views about autonomy while teacher managers and teachers had vast differences in their views about the degree of autonomy that should be granted to teachers.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusion**

### 7.1. Introduction

The conclusion chapter provides an overview of this research, and the methods used and revisits the answers to the research question. The key findings will be stated in the light of the teacher autonomy framework that was developed based on the data analysis where the key components of teaching were identified and the internal and external influences on teacher autonomy were stated. The chapter will also discuss the significance of this study and the implications that it has on Singapore's education sector, followed by stating the limitations of this research and the prospects for future research. This chapter summarises the answers to the research questions of this study and states the summary of the findings from the data followed by a discussion of the significance of this study and the implications that it has on Singapore's private higher education sector.

### 7.2. Overview of the research

This research was an examination of teacher perceptions about the concept of teacher autonomy in Singapore's private higher education sector. The research explored teachers' understanding of the term teacher autonomy, the factors that shape their perceptions of TA, the level of TA the teachers can exercise at work, their expectations of teacher autonomy at work, and whether the views of teachers on TA are similar or differ from that of the views of teachers in a managerial capacity. The research answered the research question by exploring the perceptions of teachers through face-to-face interviews and questionnaire surveys.



As indicated by many research studies, teacher autonomy is a crucial factor for a successful education system, and they also suggest that there is no student autonomy in a system where there is no teacher autonomy (Benson & Voller, 2013; Lier, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Studies of successful education systems like those in Finland and Sweden have indicated the success rate of teachers being autonomous in their profession and how their belief in their autonomy leads to their professional success (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019). If teachers do not believe in being autonomous, they would not be able to make their learners independent (Cardenas, 2006) as both teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are interdependent. This situation also indicated the need to explore the ways teachers perceive teacher autonomy. Consequently, the literature review examined the concept of teacher autonomy and explored its presence in various educational contexts in various countries before arriving at my working definition of teacher autonomy. The literature review initiated a framework for the research study which was later developed into a research framework after the data collection.

This research used a mixed methods approach where questionnaire surveys and face-to-face interviews were used for data collection. The choice of instruments for data collection followed Creswell's Concurrent Triangulation Design where the qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time (Creswell, 2009) for data analysis. To strengthen the results, the data were triangulated - the conclusions drawn from the qualitative and quantitative studies were cross verified to find similarities and differences in the data (Phothongsunan, 2010). In this research, it is the data that shaped the processes rather than a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). It is through gathering and analyzing relevant data that a theoretical framework was developed (Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry &*

Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, 2018) that connects teacher autonomy, concepts that shape TA, teacher perceptions of TA, and the key components of teaching.

### 7.3. RQ: How do teachers in Singapore's PIHL view teacher autonomy?

This research was focused on one research question (How do teachers in Singapore's PIHL view teacher autonomy?) which was subdivided into five sub-questions as stated in the following paragraphs. The five sub-questions further elaborate my research question. Teachers perceive autonomy as an essential factor that enhances their teaching. To them, teacher autonomy involves their ability to make decisions in their teaching, materials selection, assessment, and professional development. While they believe that teacher autonomy is necessary, they are more concerned about their freedom to make decisions on matters that take place in their classroom rather than out-of-classroom matters. Nevertheless, the research indicated that the teachers in this study had individual views on their views of what teacher autonomy is and how it manifests.

#### 7.3.1. What do teachers understand by the term TA?

Teachers understood TA in different ways with variations among the views of participants. However, they generally considered TA to be an opportunity to be caring teachers to their learners. They believed that as teaching should provide equal opportunities for all learners to have a successful learning experience (Dewsbury, 2017), it becomes the teachers' responsibility to have engaging lessons. Therefore, teachers use teaching methods that are engaging for their students who are individuals of different abilities. From the data analysis, the teacher-participants

generally believe that while teaching skills and content knowledge of the teachers play an important role, being caring teachers would motivate the learners (Guzzardo et al., 2020) and build up trust in their teachers, which consequently benefits the learners from the lessons irrespective of being in a mixed ability class. Teachers, therefore, believe in bringing equity to the classroom through their caring attitude. In short, teachers were generally of the view that TA involved the teachers' ability to make decisions about their choice of teaching methods, making decisions on classroom management, making the choice of specific skills to be imparted and the pace of conducting the lessons as pointed out by Banegas (2013) and Lundstrom (2015) in the literature review.

There were also common areas in which the participants shared similar views. Although the term 'teacher autonomy' was understood by different participants in different ways with slight variations in their interpretations and definitions, almost all participants felt that TA contributed positively to teaching and agreed that it refers to a level of "*freedom given to them to work within a framework*" where "*framework*" refers to a set of expectations to achieve a common goal for the benefit of the students. To them, TA meant having the freedom to exercise creativity, control, responsibility, and freedom of choosing teaching methods, styles, and materials in their teaching. Most of them, however, agreed that such freedom should be within a framework that has been agreed upon with the management.

7.3.2. What do teachers perceive to be the factors encouraging or discouraging their autonomy?

The participants felt that the teaching environment plays a major role in teacher autonomy where mutual trust and respect are valued, and superiors who are

relatable and flexible are encouraging to them at work. Concerning teaching methodology, all participants agreed that teachers should have autonomy in deciding their methods of teaching their students. Concerning planning and decision-making processes in PEIs, participants mostly agreed that teachers should have the autonomy to play a role in contributing to these processes as they are the individuals having primary contact with the learners and that they can assess the needs of their learners better than others.

However, many participants expressed their concern about their teaching environment. They were uneasy that the stability of their job often depends on the academic results that they produce and the student feedback they receive at the end of the term. Teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices that exist in the PIHL of Singapore can be understood through the lens of performativity. Performativity is seen as a phenomenon where managerialism has created a culture of assessing success evidenced by emphasizing performance indicators (Kalfa & Taksa, 2016). In Singapore's PIHLs, performativity has changed the meaning of learning as the emphasis of education is no longer on the value of knowledge and the process of learning, but on operational competence (Gallagher, 2001) that were indicated from the data. As a result, teachers are seen as a part of a production line which is an insult to the integrity of teacher professionalism, not a way to enhance it (Biesta, *Should Teaching be Re(dis)covered? Introduction to a Symposium*, 2019) as it puts pressure on teachers to produce results to attain glory for their institutions. When their salaries and benefits are tied to their performance to produce results, it affects their teaching (Bamberger & Belogolovsky, 2010). This culture causes insecurity among teachers, affects their confidence in their abilities and they tend to think if they are fit for the job (Ball, 2010), causing demoralization among teachers.

In addition, as observed from teachers' views and as suggested in the literature review, an environment where teachers' job security depends on student feedback, management review, lesson observation, qualifications, and other monitoring methods in the institution, such an environment goes against teacher autonomy (UNESCO, 1997). Added to these stress factors are the expectations from the regulatory authorities that require teachers to be observed and student feedback to be collected regularly to improve the quality of education. However, teachers expressed their concern that such measures cause anxiety and they feel less valued.

### 7.3.3. What is the degree of TA experienced by the teachers?

According to the data, there is a wide gap between teachers' expectations of autonomy and their current experience with autonomy in Singapore. Teachers are not experiencing the degree of autonomy that they think they needed. This can be attributed to restrictions from institutional policies and expectations from teachers to produce academic results. The results from an analysis of participants' current experiences and opinions found higher levels of perceived TA in the latter, indicating that participants did not experience the same perceived TA that they believed they had or should have. The survey results indicate that participants reported having the lowest level of current experience and opinions on perceived TA were similar across all sections, except in autonomy on professional development, where participants reported differences between the autonomy they experienced and their perceived autonomy at their workplace.

The data also indicated that the degree of autonomy experienced by teachers also depends on the institutional culture as institutions vary in their policies, rules, and ethos. While there is a presence of managerial support for the teachers who

make their own decisions about the use of teaching methods in a class, each institution has its own "pedagogical culture" that determines the level of autonomy for teachers. There is also a wide gap in the degree of autonomy experienced by full-time teachers and part-timers where the former enjoys more autonomy at work while the latter need to please their managers to get approvals.

#### 7.3.4. What are the teachers' expectations of TA?

The research indicates that TA is important in the planning and implementation of curricula, and teacher participants stated that they enjoy TA in this area of their work. For example, the survey participants agreed on the importance of TA in all areas of responsibilities about their job as teachers while they reported the need to have a higher level of autonomy at work while they experience a much lower level of autonomy in their real experience. In other words, the participants believed they needed more TA than what they were currently having in their job.

The data indicated that teachers wanted to be caring educators in their teaching roles as they believed being caring teachers would motivate learners (Guzzardo et al., 2020). To the teachers, planning their role as caring teachers is a part of their autonomy. The data reflected the positive attitude of teachers who are not willing to give up on a minority of their students who are weak learners and might need more attention and a different set of learning materials that had to be tailored for them. By making their lessons inclusive in this way, teachers believe that they become autonomous as they can make decisions when the situation warrants them to choose the benefit of their learners over anything else. In such situations, tasks involved in teaching with autonomy also comprise teachers' ability to select

their teaching methods, decisions on classroom management, choice of specific skills to be imparted and the pace of conducting the lessons as pointed out by Banegas (2013) and Lundstrom (2015) in the literature review.

Teachers expressed their wish that their performance should not be tied to students' academic results and graduate employability as this affects their motivation to teach. When teachers' salaries and benefits are tied to their performance, it also affects their performance (Bamberger & Belogolovsky, 2010). Teachers wanted their learners to benefit from the process of learning rather than focusing on the academic result.

In short, the study indicated that while the teachers need autonomy without conditions and caveats attached to it as they believe in their skills and ability to help their students, the management wants to have autonomy within a framework or with conditions to regulate the work of teachers that requires them to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators or evaluations (Ball, 2010) in various forms that may arise from governmental and institutional policies, leadership, and political and cultural landscape of the country as suggested in the framework of this study and classified as external influences. Teachers wished to work in an environment where the supervisors are understanding and flexible, and their job as teachers is based on trust.

7.3.5. How do the views of teachers in a non-managerial capacity differ from teachers in a managerial capacity?

While the responses from teacher participants were generally similar for most of the questions, their responses were often contrary to the views of the teacher managers. For example, there were opposing views about teachers having the

autonomy to express their views freely during staff meetings, as participants who were involved in management felt that their teaching staff should and do have the freedom to do so, whereas participants involved in teaching felt otherwise as they confided that they were apprehensive of speaking out due to the fear of losing their job, particularly associate teachers, as well as having their opinions and feedback not being taken seriously. This indicates the teachers' view that they wanted their voices to be heard.

A comparison between the responses of managers and teachers indicates that while both groups agree on some points like the need for some level of autonomy for teachers in the classroom, they differ in their opinion about teachers having complete autonomy in making decisions in their classroom teaching and teachers' involvement in administrative decision-making matters. While some management participants are aware of government policies related to private higher education in Singapore, none of the teacher participants is aware of the existence of such policies. The teacher participants were neither aware of the points of contact to learn about essential policies, nor who formulated the policies within their institution.

The study highlights that there is a wide range of beliefs and perceptions among teachers and managers about what teacher autonomy refers to and about the function of teacher autonomy in an education system. The face-to-face interviews with teachers and managers have indicated that while both groups agree on points like the need for having some level of autonomy for teachers in the classroom, they differ in their opinion about teachers having complete autonomy in making decisions about their classroom teaching and teachers' involvement in administrative decision-making matters. Here, while teachers expected autonomy in their classroom practices, supervisors and managers wanted to have some control over what the



teachers do in class. As mentioned earlier, there was also an indication of a lack of knowledge among the teachers on essential policies that are related to their employment. While some supervisory-level participants were aware of some government policies related to private higher education in Singapore, teacher participants were ignorant of the existence of such policies in Singapore.

There were also instances where there are contrasting responses between teachers and teacher-managers. For instance, there were opposing voices about teachers having the autonomy to express their views freely during staff meetings. Teacher managers and supervisors felt that teachers should and do have the freedom to do so, whereas teachers felt otherwise as they were hesitant of speaking out due to the fear of losing their job, particularly part-time teachers. They did not trust having their opinions and feedback taken seriously although the supervisory level staff assured them that teachers are free to do so.

#### 7.4. Significance of the study

As indicated by the data, this research has reflected the views of teachers in Singapore's private higher education sector about teacher autonomy. The research has also indicated how their views are like or different from those of their superiors.

Studies among the private higher education sector in Singapore are extremely limited while the sector is growing at a faster pace since 2000. As this is the first of its kind of a study that is focused on teacher autonomy in Singapore's private institutions of higher learning, it is an asset to the body of knowledge on Singapore's private education sector as this sector is marked for significant growth in the future as the government is focused on making Singapore an education hub of the world.

This research is also significant to government policymakers and management of private institutions of higher learning as it provides an insight into the teachers' views on how their external environment influences their perceptions that affects their work, and how the institutional policies shape teacher perceptions and influence their work. In other words, this study will help those in authority to formulate policies that are in alignment with teachers' expectations as reflected in the data, while safeguarding their business interests. As the study provides an unbiased view of the private higher education sector, the government authorities and private higher education operators can use this as an expert opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of policy and leadership in Singapore's private education sector. Looking at this research as a reflection of Singapore's PIHL sector will enable them to improvise their policies on teacher autonomy to make teaching more attractive and create a better environment for private higher education to thrive and thereby achieve the government's goal of making Singapore a hub of education for the world. It will also help institutions to shift the focus of education from academic results to the process of learning.

#### 7.5. Limitations to the study

As with any study, there are limitations to this research as well. First, the selection of the sample was on a volunteer basis, so the research might limit information from potential participants who might be able to contribute other relevant information for the research.

Next, each institution has its character, which is dependent on its management's vision and the priorities that they set. To explain further, institutions involved in this research may have different levels of autonomy depending on the

institutional culture. Larger institutions differ from smaller ones in the level or degree of autonomy that their teachers can execute. Each institution has its own culture, and therefore, the more the number of schools in the research, the richer the data would be.

Further, the sensitivity of the research topic led to hesitancy among participants to provide information to questions that they consider were 'unsafe' to disclose. In addition, as private institutions of higher learning are generally not inclined to support research in any form, getting participation or support from institutions was also a challenge as they did not have policies to support research and development that did not benefit them. Furthermore, much key personnel – mainly from CPE and MOE – who could provide valuable information for this research declined to be interviewed because they were not comfortable airing their views and did not want their views to be a part of a study that was meant for publication.

Last, due to the limitations of time, I have not considered other factors that might also have a potential impact on teacher perceptions of TA. For instance, I have not studied religious, political, and social factors which are also areas that could be investigated as factors shaping teachers' perceptions.

## 7.6. Future research recommendations

As this study was conducted with a focus on teacher autonomy, it has only looked at the specific factors that influence teacher autonomy and the areas in that teacher autonomy exerts an influence in the private higher education sector. There are many other factors which could not be covered in this study, but that could be explored further in future studies. For example, this study can be extended to the public higher education sector and compare the teacher autonomy among teachers in

public and private higher education sectors in Singapore. It is also meant to extend this study based on ethnicity. As Singapore is a multi-ethnic country, it is valuable to study how teachers belonging to different ethnicities view teacher autonomy.

While Singapore is one of the top-rated countries in the PISA ranking, a study can be conducted by incorporating other countries like Finland and Sweden which are also ranked high in the PISA ranking. While Singapore's institutions focus on international rankings, academic results, and graduate employability, contrary to Singapore, Finnish authorities consider the high world ranking of their education system as a by-product of the system rather than the central goal (Crouch, 2015). In this context, teacher autonomy could be studied in the public higher education context in Singapore and those of other successful regions or countries that can be an interesting agenda for future researchers.

In addition, based on the data, the study also indicated how institutional policies are aligned with national policies in Singapore. Looking at the institutional level, the interview data has revealed that institutional policies are formulated closely in alignment with national policies. However, data analysis indicates that there is limited information available from teacher participants on national policies on teacher autonomy except for the information disseminated through circulars and newsletters from MOE and CPE. While the institutional leadership has their views about teacher autonomy which they enact on the teachers, the leadership itself is not aware of policies related to TA that exists at the national level which is an area that can be researched further.

The study has also indicated the perceptions of teachers who believe that teacher autonomy is an essential component that contributes to effective teaching. Teachers believe so because TA gives them the freedom to choose their teaching

materials and follow their teaching methods even to the extent of individualizing their teaching to cater to learners of different abilities. While the government policies focus on student performance and employment after the completion of the academic course, teachers too believe in and work towards helping their learners achieve their potential whereas institutions have their agenda of financially benefitting from students rather than focusing on the future employment prospects of their graduates. In this regard, the goals of both the government and the teachers are similar while that of institutions differ. This is an area that can be researched further.

Teachers have also expressed their view that institutional policies and decisions are not always in alignment with teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy. While teachers believe that they need more autonomy in deciding on the choice of materials and methods for their teaching, supervisors and managerial staff feel the need to have some form of control over the teachers' decisions rather than allowing teachers to have autonomy in making their choices. It was also noted that teachers were not generally involved in formulating policies in their institutions thereby leaving the academics' work in isolation from the rest of the staff who are involved in policymaking at the institution.

Lastly, the private higher education sector has been an area that was hugely neglected in research studies despite its significant contributions to Singapore. The novelty of this research is that this is the first one on teacher autonomy that involved teachers from PIHL at a large scale. The research has also identified potential issues that can be rectified in the relationship between teachers and management that can in turn improve the quality of education in the private sector. The research has indicated significant findings on the importance of teacher satisfaction at work. Teacher autonomy improves teacher satisfaction which leads to teacher motivation,

and this, in turn, enhances the quality of education. Therefore, this research can also be a guide for the CPE to consider some of the factors identified here to be incorporated into their criteria before granting recognitions like 'Edutrust' and 'Edutrust Star' to private institutions.

### 7.7. Summary

The research indicates that there exists a wide range of beliefs and perceptions among teachers and teaching managers about what teacher autonomy means and about the function of teacher autonomy in Singapore's private higher education system. While teachers and teacher-managers agree on some points like the need for autonomy in teaching, they differ in their opinion about teachers having complete autonomy in making decisions about their classroom teaching and teachers' involvement in administrative matters. While teacher participants were generally optimistic about having more TA, managers wanted to have more control over the teachers. In addition, management participants were mostly aware of government policies related to private higher education in Singapore, teacher participants were generally not updated about the existence of policies related to TA. The survey results from an analysis of differences in participants' current experiences and opinions found higher levels of perceived TA in the latter, indicating that participants wished to have a higher degree of TA in their teaching while they generally expressed their view that they experienced a much lower level of autonomy at work.

The research also draws a picture of Singapore's private higher education system which has a global representation of students and has been undergoing many

changes in the last two decades. Singapore's education system believes in elements of Confucian values which are rooted in acts like the government heavily investing in education and getting families committed to the educational achievement of children (Yat W. L., Think global, think local: The changing landscape of higher education and the role of quality assurance in Singapore, 2017) – mostly evidenced by Singapore's reliance on academic results and successful job placement as key elements of success. These views were also evidenced in past research studies as in the data analysis. This is not a feature of just Singapore, but the other geographical areas featured in this research like Hong Kong, Thailand and China also display a similar trend. Last, the concept of teacher autonomy is understood differently by participants in Singapore.

This research also indicated that while teacher autonomy has direct impacts on teaching, assessment, teachers' decision-making, and their professional development (Lundstrom, 2015), teacher autonomy is influenced or shaped by policies, management style, and the cultural landscape of the country. The findings can be summarized in the teacher autonomy framework that was developed following the data analysis which is also linked to the key concepts in the literature review. The framework reflects the key external and internal influences on teacher autonomy. The external influences comprise government and institutional policies, leadership, local politics and the cultural landscape of the country and the region while the internal influences comprise teacher motivation, their perceptions and teacher professional competence. These two sets of influences shape the perceptions of teachers on teacher autonomy in their tasks – teaching, assessment, planning and decision-making and professional development – the major areas of teaching-related activities discussed in this research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: General Information Sheet

#### **Teacher Autonomy in Singapore's Private Higher Education Institutions: A Study of the Influence of Policy, Leadership and Perception**

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You are invited to take part in a research study that will be carried out at University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus. Before you agree to take part in this study, it is important to understand the purpose and procedure of this study.

Please take time to read the following information and feel free to ask me for any clarification or further information. Please think about it carefully and then decide whether you would like to take part in this study or not.

#### **What are the aims of this research?**

The research is aimed at exploring the views of teachers on teacher autonomy in Singapore's private higher educational institutions. Also, it will investigate the impacts of institutional and government policies on teachers' perceptions of autonomy.

#### **Who else is and can be involved?**

The research involves teachers currently teaching in Singapore's private higher education sector and leaders in Singapore's private higher educational institutions.

#### **What are the methods used?**

The study involves online questionnaire survey for participating teachers and face-to-face interviews for leaders in education. It also involved document analysis in order to explore the views of the government on teacher autonomy.

#### **Why have you been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you work in Singapore's private higher education sector and therefore, your answers to the survey or face-to-face interview would add value and reliability to this research.

#### **What are you being asked to do?**

You are requested to indicate your agreement to take part in the survey and complete an online survey questionnaire if you are a teacher, or sign the consent form to be an interviewee and take part in an interview if you are in a leading role at your institution.

#### **Will my participation be confidential?**

Your participation is confidential, and under no circumstances, your name would be disclosed. The data we collect will be kept confidentially, and only the researcher will have access to the raw data. All information collected will be stored in a database that is password protected. The digital and textual data will be kept in a secure and confidential location. Your real name will not appear on any database or



on any information that is published. Instead, codes or numbers will be used to mask your identity. The master copy of the names associated with each number will be kept in a separate, secure and confidential location. The identity of the participating institutions also will not be disclosed. Therefore, neither you nor your institution will be identified.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

I plan to publish the results of the research and present the results at professional presentations and seminars besides writing about it in academic journals.

**Do you have to take part?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. Please be aware that you do not have to participate in this research study at all. However, if you choose to take part in the study, you are always free to stop at any time and without giving any reason for your decision.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

Some participants may find completing the questionnaire a tiring task. For some others, the questions may remind them about their moments of anxiety, discomfort or stress at work. Other than that, there are no significant risks or damages to the participants.

**What are the possible benefits to me when I take part?**

Your views and beliefs would help the researcher analyse the data and formulate suggestions for government authorities and future researchers. This might therefore help us in having more beneficial policies in Singapore's private higher education sector.

**Who is paying for this research and who is carrying it out?**

The research is funded mostly by the researcher, with some financial support by SkillsFuture Singapore, and is carried out solely by the researcher who is supervised by two faculty members from the School of Education, University of Nottingham. The contact details are provided below:

Researcher: Bobby Sebastian [Kappen](#)  
Email: [kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my)  
Tel: +0065-90295175

Principal Supervisor: Professor Ganakumaran Subramaniam  
Email: [Ganakumaran.subra@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:Ganakumaran.subra@nottingham.edu.my)

Co-supervisor: Associate Professor Lucy Bailey  
Email: [Lucy.Bailey@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:Lucy.Bailey@nottingham.edu.my)

Should you have any issues, you may also raise them with the Research Ethics Committee, University of Nottingham at [FASSResearchEthics@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:FASSResearchEthics@nottingham.edu.my)

## Appendix B: Information for Survey Participants

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Dear Colleague

I am currently doing my doctoral studies at University of Nottingham, School of Education. I am conducting an exploratory study about the perceptions of teachers about teacher autonomy and how their perceptions are shaped or influenced by various factors in Singapore's private higher educational institutions.

I wish to include you as a respondent because your response based on your experience in education would add value to my research. I am carrying out this survey using Qualtrics and the link is provided for you to open the survey form. You need to spend only 10-15 minutes of your time to complete this survey and submit it online using your mobile phone or computer.

Please click the link below to begin the survey:

<https://tinyurl.com/TeacherAutonomy2019>

I would be very grateful to you for your participation in this survey and for submitting it at the earliest.

Thank you.

Sincerely

Boby S. Kappen (PhD Candidate)  
University of Nottingham  
School of Education  
Jln Broga, 43500 Semenyih  
Selangor Darul Ehsan  
Malaysia  
Email: [kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my)  
Telephone: 0065-90295175

## Appendix C: Information for Interview Participants

University of Nottingham  
School of Education  
Jln Broga, 43500 Semenyih  
Selangor Darul Ehsan  
Malaysia  
Email: [kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my)  
Telephone: 90295175

---

Dear Colleague

I am currently doing my doctoral studies at University of Nottingham, School of Education. I am conducting an exploratory study about the perceptions of teachers about teacher autonomy and how their perceptions are shaped or influenced by various factors in Singapore's private higher educational institutions.

I wish to include you, as a respondent because as an experienced member of the teaching faculty or who has been in leadership roles in education, your response based on your management experience would add value to my research. I will be carrying out a face-to-face interview in the weeks in Feb-March 2019. I will inform you the schedule closer to the date. Besides taking notes during the interview, I will also do an audio recording of the interview for transcription and for further analysis. You need to spend only about 15 minutes of your time to share your thoughts on my questions.

I would be very grateful to you for your participation in this interview and for spending your time for this research.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Boby S. Kappen  
PhD Candidate  
University of Nottingham  
School of Education

## Appendix D: Consent Form for Interview

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my doctoral research. All the information collected from you will be treated with strict confidentiality. Every attempt would be made to ensure your anonymity, and under no circumstances will your real names be used.

In addition, I will send you a transcript of our interview. I welcome your comments and suggestions on any further improvement of the transcript.

I look forward to a mutually beneficial study.

Signature .....

Boby S. Kappen

University of Nottingham

School of Education

Jln Broga, 43500 Semenyih

Selangor Darul Ehsan

Malaysia

Email: [kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my)

Telephone: 90295175

---

### Statement of Consent

I hereby give consent to be interviewed by Mr. Bobby S. Kappen who has assured me that my anonymity will be guaranteed and that my confidentiality will be maintained. I also understand that the information that I give him will be used for his studies including publication of articles or for presentations.

Signature: .....

Name: .....

Date : .....

## Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Questions

### A. Introduction

1. Please share with me something interesting about your role in this institution.
2. Share with me some information about this institution.

### B. Perceptions of the concept of teacher autonomy:

3. How would you define teacher autonomy?
  - a. *What do you see as the features of an environment that foster teacher autonomy?*
  - b. *What do you see as the features of an environment that deter teacher autonomy?*

### C. Teaching (Kinds of autonomy teachers have and what they should have)

4. Do you think teachers should be granted freedom to choose their own teaching methods? Why / Why not?
  - a. *Should they be granted freedom to have their own learning activities?*
  - b. *Should they be granted freedom to have their own teaching topics/themes?*
  - c. *Should they be granted freedom to decide their own learning outcomes?*
  - d. *Should they be granted freedom to have their own choice of external teaching materials (eg: audio-visuals)?*
  - e. *Should they be granted freedom to follow their own their own teaching philosophy and beliefs? (Prompts: Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive skills)*
5. How do the teachers at your institution exercise or do not exercise their freedom to choose their own teaching methods? Why/ why not?
  - a. *Do they have the freedom to have their own learning activities?*
  - b. *Do they have the freedom to have their own teaching topics/themes?*
  - c. *Do they have the freedom to decide their own learning outcomes?*

- d. *Do they have the freedom to have their own choice of external teaching materials (eg: audio-visuals)?*
- e. *Do they have the freedom to follow their own their own teaching philosophy and beliefs? (Prompts: Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive skills)*

#### **D. Assessment (What sort of autonomy do teachers have in the institution and what they think they should have?)**

##### **6. Should teachers be granted the freedom to decide on their own assessment methods?**

- a. *Should teachers be allowed to give weighting for various assessment components based on their own discretion?*
- b. *Should teachers be allowed to take their own decisions about the type of questions (Prompts: open/close ended, structured, fill the blanks)?*
- c. *Should teachers be allowed to accept answers for the test-questions at their own choice?*

##### **7. How do the teachers at your institution have or do not have the freedom to decide their own assessment methods?**

- a. *Do the teachers have the freedom to give weighting for various assessment components based on their own discretion?*
- b. *Do the teachers have the freedom to take their own decisions about the type of questions (Prompts: open/close ended, structured, fill the blanks)?*
- c. *Do the teachers have the freedom to accept answers for the test-questions at their own choice?*

#### **E. Planning and Decision Making**

##### **8. Should teachers be a part of the planning and decision making committee?**

- a. *Should teachers be allowed to express their views freely at meetings and otherwise?*
- b. *Should teachers be allowed to participate in decision-making pertaining to their teaching environment?*

- c. *Should teachers be allowed to have their say about administrative matters that affect their teaching?*

**9. How do the teachers at your institution play or do not play any role in the planning and decision-making?**

- a. *Do the teachers express their views freely during staff meetings and on other occasions?*
- b. *Do the teachers participate in decision making pertaining to their teaching environment?*
- c. *Do the teachers have a say about administrative matters that affect their teaching?*

**F. Professional Development**

**10. Should teachers be encouraged in their professional development? (Eg:**

*publish their research, make presentations at conferences and seminars, take up advanced academic and professional qualifications)*

**11. Are the teachers at your institution encouraged in their professional development? Any examples?**

**12. What are some of the key parameters for your teacher appraisal?**

**13. What would the management consider as the key indicator of a good/poor teacher during the appraisal?**

**14. What is the professional behaviour etiquette of the institution?**

**G. Policy implementation**

**15. Do you have a clear idea about the Ministry of Education's views on teacher autonomy in PHEI?**

**16. How are you informed about government decisions on TA?**

**17. How do you adopt or adapt the policies for your institution?**

**18. How do you inform your teachers about new government policies that matter to their teaching?**

**19. How do you develop institutional policies that are in line with the government policies?**

**20. Who are involved in institutional-level policy development?**

## Appendix F: Consent Form for Survey

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey for my doctoral research. All the information collected from you will be treated with strict confidentiality. Every attempt would be made to ensure your anonymity, and under no circumstances will your real names be used.

I always welcome your comments and suggestions or clarifications on this survey.

I look forward to a mutually beneficial study.

Boby S. Kappen

### Statement of Consent

I hereby give consent to be surveyed by Mr. Boby S. Kappen who has assured me that my anonymity will be guaranteed and that my confidentiality will be maintained. I also understand that the information that I give him will be used for his studies including publication of articles or for presentations.

The survey begins with an informed consent.

To begin the survey, click on the link below.

[www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)

AGREE	
DISAGREE	

## Appendix G: Survey Questionnaire

### Teacher Autonomy in Singapore's Private Higher Education Institutions: A Study of the Influence of Policy and Perception

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Welcome to the research study!

I am interested in understanding about the influence of policy, leadership and perceptions on teachers' views on *Teacher Autonomy in Singapore's Private Higher Education Institutions*. You will be presented with information relevant to Teacher Autonomy and asked to answer some questions about it. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The study should take you around 10-15 minutes. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail [kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my).



By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)

This questionnaire is part of my doctoral study that I am undertaking at the University of Nottingham School of Education. This research aims to examine teachers' perceptions on teacher autonomy and the influencing factors that influence their perceptions in Singapore's private educational institutions. As a faculty, your responses based on your teaching experience would add value to my research. You need to spend only about 10 minutes of your time to complete this survey and submit it online using your mobile phone or computer. All information will be kept strictly confidential. Please take note that your responses will be used for presentations in conferences and in academic articles. . However, your names will not be used under any circumstances. I would be very grateful to you for taking time to do this survey. Should you have any enquiries, please contact me: Bobby S. Kappen, University of Nottingham School of Education, Jln Broga, 43500 Semenyih Selangor Darul Ehsan Malaysia, Email: [kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:kabx6bsk@nottingham.edu.my), Telephone: 601136466638

**Q1 Country of birth**

- Singapore (1)
- Other country (2)

**Q2 Ethnicity**

- Chinese (1)
- Malay (2)
- Indian (3)
- Eurasian (4)
- Others (5)

**Q3 Gender**

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

**Q4 Educational qualifications**

- Secondary (1)
- Diploma (2)
- Degree (3)
- Masters (4)
- Doctorate (5)

**Q5 Place of school education**

- Asia (1)
- Europe (2)
- USA / Canada (3)
- Middle East (4)
- Africa (5)
- More than one region (6)

**Q6 Place of post-secondary education**

- Asia (1)
- Europe (2)
- USA / Canada (3)
- Middle East (4)
- Africa (5)
- More than one region (6)

**Q7 Years of teaching experience?**

- 0-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-20 years (3)
- Above 20 years (4)

**Q8 Teaching level (predominantly)**

- Foundation (1)
- Diploma (2)
- Degree (3)
- Postgraduate (4)

**Q09 In this section, you will be asked about your current experience on teacher autonomy that you exercise at various stages of your work. For each statement, please indicate which of the following statements apply to you as a teacher.**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
9.1. Planning my syllabus (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.2. Pacing my work (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.3. Deciding the lesson activities and tasks (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.4. Deciding the teaching methodology (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.5. Selecting the course books (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.6. Deciding on the choice of extra teaching materials (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.7. Having control over the use of classroom space (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.8. Setting discipline standards in my class (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 In this section, you will be asked about your opinion on teacher autonomy in undertaking primary work processes. For each of the statements, please indicate which of the following you consider to be a part of teacher autonomy, and the importance you ascribe to each one.

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Neutral (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
10.1. Planning their syllabus (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.2. Pacing their work (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.3. Deciding their lesson activities and tasks (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.4. Deciding their teaching methodology (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.5. Selecting their course books (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.6. Deciding on the choice of extra teaching materials (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.7. Having control over the use of classroom space (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.8. Setting discipline standards in their class (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q11 In this section, you will be asked about your current experience on teacher autonomy that you exercise in planning and implementation of your curriculum. For each statement, please indicate which of the following statements are relevant to your teaching.**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
11.1. Having my own guidelines and procedures (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.2. Selecting my own objectives for teaching (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.3. Choosing what I teach in class (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.4. Selecting my course books and teaching materials (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.5. Deciding on extra teaching materials (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.6. Deciding the educational content for my class (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q12 In this section, you will be asked about your opinion on teacher autonomy in planning and implementation of curriculum. For each of the statements, please indicate which of the following you consider to be a part of teacher autonomy, and the importance you ascribe to each one.**

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Neutral (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
12.1. Having their own guidelines and procedures (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.2. Selecting their own objectives for teaching (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.3. What they teach in class (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.4. Selecting their course books and teaching materials (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.5. Deciding on extra teaching materials (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.6. The educational content taught in class (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q13 In this section, you will be asked about your current experience in planning and decision making at the workplace. For each statement, please indicate which of the following statements are relevant to your teaching.**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
13.1. Making decisions on budget planning (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.2. Deciding on class timetable policy (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.3. Participating in decision making at the institution (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.4. Being a part of the decision making body about matters related to my work (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.5. Deciding what my responsibilities are (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.6. Having a say in decisions of the school (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q14 In this section, you will be asked about your opinion on teacher autonomy in planning and decision making at the workplace. For each of the statements, please indicate which of the following you consider to be a part of teacher autonomy, and the importance you ascribe to each one.**

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Neutral (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
14.1. Make decisions on budget planning (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.2. Decide on class timetable policy (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.3. Participate in decision making at the institution (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.4. Be a part of the decision making body about matters related to my work (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.5. Have a say in what my responsibilities are (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.6. Have a say in decisions of the school (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q15 In this section, you will be asked about your current experience on teacher autonomy in assessment. For each statement, please indicate which of the following statements are relevant to your teaching.**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
15.1. Deciding the type of ongoing tests that assess the student progress (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.2. Deciding the type of assignments for students (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.3. Deciding the type of questions for final exam (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.4. Deciding the allocation of marks for each section (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.5. Deciding the level of moderation after exam (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q16 In this section, you will be asked about your opinion on teacher autonomy in assessment. For each of the statements, please indicate which of the following you consider to be a part of teacher autonomy, and the importance you ascribe to each one.**

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Neutral (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
16.1. Deciding the type of ongoing tests that assess the student progress (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.2. The type of assignments for students (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.3. The type of questions for final exam (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.4. The allocation of marks for each section (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.5. Deciding the level of moderation after exam (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Q17 In this section, you will be asked about your current experience on teacher autonomy in your professional development. For each statement, please indicate which of the following statements are relevant to your teaching.**

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
17.1. Having my say in the planning of my professional development activities (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.2. Having a voice in my professional development activities (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.3. Having my say about the duration for the completion of my professional development activities (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.4. Having my say in the amount of time I spend for professional development activities (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.5. Pursuing training programs that are aimed at my professional development (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.6. Joining any associations that help in my overall development (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.7. Writing and publishing articles that are meant for my professional development (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.8. Express my opinion during staff meetings without any fear (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.9. Question management decisions when I feel they are not for the benefit of the students (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q18 In this section, you will be asked about your opinion on teacher autonomy in professional development. For each of the statements, please indicate which of the following you consider to be a part of teacher autonomy, and the importance you ascribe to each one.**

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Neutral (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
18.1. Have a say in the planning of their professional development activities (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.2. Have a say in the pace of their professional development activities (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.3. Have a say about the time their professional development activities need to be completed (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.4. Have a say in the amount of time teachers spend for professional development activities (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.5. Pursue training programs that are aimed at the professional development of teachers (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.6. Join any associations that help in their overall development (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.7. Write and publish articles freely (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.8. Express their opinion during staff meetings without any fear (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.9. Question management decisions when teachers feel they do not benefit the students (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19 If you wish to share any other information about teacher autonomy, please state below:

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Thank you Thank you very much for taking part in this survey. Your valuable responses make up an important part of this research which will contribute in shaping the education landscape of the future.

## Appendix H Cronbach's alpha

### Cronbach's alpha

Overall

#### *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.953	.953	68

Section 2

#### *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.874	.880	16

Section 3

#### *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.872	.873	12

Section 4

#### *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.863	.857	12

Section 5

*Reliability Statistics*

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Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.879	.884	10

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Section 6

*Reliability Statistics*

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Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.928	.928	18

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