

Background Predictors of Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Iranian EFL Teachers Working in English Language Centers

(Peramal Latar Belakang Kepercayaan Efikasi Kendiri oleh Guru EFL Iranian yang Mengajar di Pusat-pusat Bahasa Inggeris)

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ABSTRACT

It has been shown that teachers' self-efficacy influences teachers' actions and student outcomes. The present study explored self-efficacy beliefs of English as Foreign Language teachers in the language centres in one selected middle-east country, Iran. The needed data was collected by administering a survey to 187 teachers. The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale was used to assess efficacy for engagement, management, and instructional strategies. Results show that teachers' perceived efficacy correlate with some of teachers' background characteristics. Results also indicate that teachers' classroom management efficacy was higher than instructional strategies and student engagement efficacy. Employing the multiple regression analysis, it was shown that different sets of background variables were significant in predicting the self-efficacy dimensions of the teachers of this study.

Keywords: Self-efficacy; foreign language education; english as a foreign language; language centre

ABSTRAK

Kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa keberkesanan pengajaran guru mempengaruhi tindakan guru dan pencapaian pelajar. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka kepercayaan efikasi sendiri guru yang mengajar di Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing di pusat-pusat bahasa di negara Iran. Data dikumpul dengan mengedarkan soal selidik kepada 187 orang guru. The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale telah digunakan untuk menilai keberkesanan untuk pertunangan, pengurusan, dan strategi pengajaran. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru berkorelasi dengan beberapa guru dari segi ciri-ciri latar belakang mereka. Keputusan juga menunjukkan bahawa keberkesanan pengurusan bilik darjah guru adalah lebih tinggi daripada strategi pengajaran dan keberkesanan penglibatan pelajar. Dengan menggunakan analisis regresi berganda pula, dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pemboleh ubah latar belakang adalah penting dalam meramalkan dimensi efikasi sendiri guru Bahasa Inggeris dalam kajian ini.

Kata kunci: Efikasi sendiri; pendidikan bahasa asing; English sebagai bahasa asing; pusat bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Over the last four decades, research on teachers' beliefs and their influence on teacher cognition has been a relevant topic for educational inquiry.

It is important to understand teachers' beliefs because teachers are mostly involved in different teaching and learning processes and are practitioners of educational theories and principles (Jia et al. 2006). The results of investigations on teachers' beliefs have indicated that these beliefs influence teacher's instructional practices and classroom behavior and they are also related to their students' achievement (Grossman et al. 1985; Hollon et al. 1991; Johnson 1992; Morine-Dershimer 1983; Prawat & Anderson 1988; Wilson & Wineburg 1988). As a result, if we know the beliefs and perceptions of teachers, we will be able to make predictions about teaching and assessment practices in classrooms. Teachers' sense of efficacy is one important belief that has an important influence on teacher and student outcomes.

Many important instructional decisions have been underlay by teacher efficacy which finally shapes students' educational experiences (Soodak & Podell 1997). Pajares (1992) said that "beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate. The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter". Efficacy is likely such a belief. Teachers' perceptions of their abilities to teach have a direct impact on their teaching practices. Teachers' perceived efficacy influences not only the kind of environment they create for their students but also their judgments about the different tasks they perform to bring about student learning (Bandura 1993, 1997).

This study is based on self-efficacy theory which was proposed by Bandura 1997. Self-efficacy theory, used in the educational context, has revealed valuable result in how self-efficacy beliefs of the teachers are in relation with their actions and to the outcomes they achieve (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998).

Self-efficacy is an element of Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura 1997) and it influences people's

actions, motivation, and thoughts. "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura 1997). We should consider that self-efficacy is a motivational construct which is based on self perception of competence rather than actual level of competence (Barnyak & McNelly 2009).

Bandura (1997) proposed that it is practical once the teachers slightly overestimate their actual teaching skills, because their motivation to put more effort and to persist in the face of difficulties will help them to make the most of the skills and abilities they do possess (Bandura 1977; Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998). A teacher's self-perceived level of competence may be either higher or lower than an external assessment of teaching skill.

Having self-efficacy theory in mind, this study focused on self-efficacy of the teachers working in the English language centers in one Middle-East country, Iran.

To examine the relation between background characteristics and self-efficacy beliefs of the teachers, the next research questions were investigated in the present study:

1. What are the levels of English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs?
2. What is the relationship between English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and background characteristics?
3. What are the significant background predictors of English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs?

The next null hypothesis was also looked into:

HO: There is no interaction effect between English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and background characteristics.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the present study were the English language center teachers in Iran. More than 200 sets of questionnaires were distributed and the questionnaire adopted a convenience sampling method.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive and correlational research methods were included in this study. Descriptive correlational design was used. Descriptive correlational design was used as the study meant to investigate the interaction effect between teachers' sense of efficacy and background characteristics.

INSTRUMENTS

Two questionnaires were used in this study: 1) Teacher's self-efficacy in teaching English and 2) teacher's personal background information. The first questionnaire was Likert-

type scale and the participants provided the information in the space given for the second questionnaire.

Teacher's self-efficacy in teaching English This part measured teachers' self-efficacy in teaching English. To this end, the short form of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) was modified to meet the setting and context of this study. The short form of TSES had 12 items. Efficacy for 1. Instructional strategies, 2. Student engagement, and 3. Classroom management was the three factors identifiable in the TSES. TSES can be considered a reliable measurement of teacher self-efficacy as the original TSES had the reliability of 0.90 with all of the 12 items (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy 2001).

Teachers personal background information This part aimed to get information on teachers' personal background information. Highest level of education, and type of degree achieved, Major of study, gender, age range, getting IELTS or TOEFL, IELTS or TOEFL result, years of teaching English, level of teaching, taught that level before were the 7 questions asked.

PROCEDURE

Validity The validity of the instruments had to be established again as some of the items were newly added and some were modified for the present study. To check for content and face validity, three experts and field testing were made use of. A panel of the experts and 5 English teachers who had the experience of teaching at different levels was requested to check clarity, validity, and suitability. Their comments on general readability of the instruments and appropriateness of expressions were welcomed. The instruments were modified based on the comments given and after that the corrected format was given to the participants. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) checked the construct validity of the TSES. Their results showed that TSES was reliable and valid and it is a useful tool to measure teacher self-efficacy.

Reliability The reliability of the present study was checked by Cronbach alpha coefficient: 0.95 for Student Engagement, 0.96 for Instructional Strategies, and 0.95 for Classroom Management. This showed the reliability of Self-efficacy questionnaire.

FINDINGS

LEVELS OF ENGLISH TEACHER EFFICACY DIMENSIONS

To check English teachers' level of self-efficacy, the mean scores were calculated. The teachers' self-efficacy was rather high in all dimensions of student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies (Table 1). The teachers of this study felt least confident in

their Instructional Strategies ($M = 7.10$) and more confident in Classroom Management ($M = 7.54$).

TABLE 1. Mean and standard deviation of teacher efficacy in teaching English

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student Engagement	7.21	1.558
Classroom Management	7.54	1.550
Instructional Strategies	7.10	1.870

Note: 1 = Nothing/not at all, 3 = Very little, 5 = Some influence, 7 = Quite a bit, and 9 = A great deal

Meanwhile, the correlation among the three sub-categories of self-efficacy was checked. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.956 which is significant and considered high, meaning that the three sub-categories of self-efficacy are highly correlated. This number also supports the reliability of the whole test.

TABLE 2. Correlations among dimensions of self-efficacy

	Student Engagement	Classroom Management	Instructional Strategies
Student Engagement	1		
Classroom Management	.880**	1	
Instructional Strategies	.905**	.883**	1

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY IN TEACHING ENGLISH AND THEIR BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

The correlations of the three dimensions of the teachers' self-efficacy and the background variables are summarized in Table 3. The correlations ranged from low ($r = 0.202$) to very high ($r = 0.844$) and were significant.

Gender: It was shown that male teachers were more efficacious than the female in all the three sub-categories of self-efficacy and they were more confident in managing their classrooms than females. While no correlation was found between gender and teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in Chacon (2002, 2005) and Lee's (2009) study.

Age: it was shown that older teachers were more confident in applying the dimensions of self-efficacy in the English classroom. In Chacon's study (2002, 2005), age did not have any effect on self-efficacy beliefs of Venezuelan EFL teachers. While in Lee's (2009) study a negative relationship was found between instructional efficacy and age.

Highest degree earned: Positive relationships were found between all dimensions of teacher efficacy and the

TABLE 3. Correlation Matrix between teachers' background characteristics and self-efficacy

	SE	CM	IS
Gender	-.273**	-.486**	-.343**
Age range	.668**	.600**	.584**
Degree achieved	.562**	.451**	.584**
Major of study	.474**	.541**	.584**
Experience	.834**	.766**	.757**
Level of teaching	.844**	.769**	.783**
Taught that level before	-.672**	-.627**	-.576**
IELTS or TOEFL	-.531**	-.522**	-.514**
IELTS or TOEFL result	.202**	.204**	.222**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

highest degree earned but the relationship was substantial with Instructional Strategy ($r = 0.584$, $p < .001$). It is rational that the teachers having master or PhD should apply more of the strategies than the others as they are more familiar with Instructional Strategies. Lee (2009) found a very low positive relationship between highest degree earned and self-efficacy and her findings confirmed this study.

Major of study: Based on the findings, we could conclude that those who majored in English, considered themselves more efficacious in all three sub-categories of Instructional Strategy, Classroom Management and Student engagement. Lee's (2009) findings supported the results of the present study.

Teaching experience: More experienced teachers considered themselves more efficacious. Teaching experience had stronger correlation with Student Engagement ($r = 0.834$, $p < .001$), meaning that the teachers who had more experience, engaged students more than the less experienced ones. Lee (2009) found a negative relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and teaching experience. She found that the more experienced teachers were less confident. But in Chacon's (2002, 2005) studies, no relation was found between teaching experience and the teachers' beliefs in their ability to teach English.

Level of teaching: High positive relationships were found between level of teaching and the dimensions of the teacher efficacy. This result was in accord with Lee's (2009) study.

Taught that level before: Teachers reported themselves more efficacious once they were teaching that level before.

IELTS or TOEFL: It had negative correlations with the three sub-categories of self-efficacy. The teachers who had taken any one of the tests reported themselves more efficacious than those who had not taken any one of the tests before and the correlations were substantial.

IELTS or TOEFL result: Although the correlation value was low, IELTS or TOEFL result had a low positive-significant correlation with all aspects of self-efficacy. Those who had higher results in IELTS or TOEFL would have higher self-efficacy.

SIGNIFICANT BACKGROUND PREDICTORS OF ENGLISH
TEACHER'S SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

Multiple regression analysis was performed to find out the background variables which were significant to predict each dimension of the teachers' self-efficacy. Table 4 presents the background variables ($p < .05$) which were significant for each sub-category of the self-efficacy beliefs.

Based on Table 4, various sets of background variables were found to predict the degree of self-efficacy significantly. As an example, teacher's age was a significant predictor for student engagement but not for the other sub-categories. The two background characteristics of taught that level before and gender were significant predictors for all three sub-categories of self-efficacy beliefs.

TABLE 4. Significant background variables of teacher's self-efficacy beliefs

Criterion Variable	Significant Background Variable ($p < .05$)
Student Engagement	Taught that level before ($p < .001$) Grade ($p = .015$) Experience ($p < .001$) Age range ($p < .001$) Gender ($p < .001$)
Classroom management	Taught that level before ($p < .001$) IELTS or TOEFL ($p < .001$) Experience ($p < .001$) Gender ($p < .001$)
Instructional Strategies	Level of teaching ($p < .001$) Grade ($p = .006$) Taught that level before ($p < .001$) Major ($p < .001$) Gender ($p < .001$) Degree ($p < .001$)

It is of attention that the English teachers' self-reported efficacy in this study was higher than the previous studies adopting the TSES. For example, Chacón (2002, 2005) found that her teachers considered their abilities to perform teaching tasks with their self-efficacy at the "quite a bit" level. Taking a non-subject specific approach, Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2007) reported almost the same degrees of self-efficacy beliefs of U.S. teachers. Also, Lee (2009) showed lower results compared to the others.

As the survey responses may reflect cultural biases, we should be cautious to compare the scores reported in different cultures (King et al. 2004). Especially when there is no previously done research in the Middle-East context making use of the same instruments. Such a comparison can give helpful information to explain where the teacher efficacy levels of this study are located compared to other teachers.

Considering the relationship between self-efficacy and background characteristics, the correlations were significant

Regarding the instructional strategies, the six significant background variables (i.e., level of teaching, grade, taught that level before, major, gender, degree) were the predictor variables of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, teachers considered their level of self-efficacy in teaching English rather high. Meaning that the teachers believed they could have some influence in the three dimensions of student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies. The teachers were more confident in managing their classrooms ($M = 7.54$) and least confident in their Instructional Strategies ($M = 7.10$).

and they ranged from low ($r = 0.202$) to very high ($r = 0.844$), so the null hypothesis was rejected. Meanwhile, the findings of the multiple regression analysis showed that not all the background variables were significant predictors of English teacher's self-efficacy beliefs.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Possible direction for future research can be provided as follows:

1. Multiple interviews, teaching techniques, as well as observations of teaching performance should be used to investigate teachers' self-efficacy and the teaching of foreign languages, like English and the others.
2. Self-reported data was used in this study. More investigations are needed to include quantitative data on the relationship between English teachers' self-perceived efficacy and student outcomes such as

ability to speak English. This kind of research will determine if teachers' self-efficacy is in relationship with student learning of English.

3. It is recommended to make use of more independent variables to determine predictors of English teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in EFL context and elsewhere. Self-efficacy for engagement, management, and instructional strategies were measured by the instruments of this study.
4. It is suggested to follow-up teachers to see how their efficacy changes over the years. To this end, longitudinal studies are suggested to check whether EFL teachers' self-perceived efficacy varies across years.

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