The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy and Their Pedagogical Success in Class Environment

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Abstract

This study, in the first place, attempted to consider the relationship between EFL teachers' self-efficacy and their pedagogical success in language class environment. In the second place, the role of teachers' years of teaching experience in their self-efficacy was investigated. Third, the relationship between teachers' age and their self-efficacy was studied. Finally the relationship between teacher's gender and their self-efficacy was considered. For this purpose, 28 EFL teachers were selected according to available sampling from the different high schools in Sarvestan, a city in the south of Iran. Near the end of the term, the teachers were asked to complete the “Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale”. Simultaneously, a questionnaire which is called the “Characteristics of Successful EFL Teachers Questionnaire” was filled in by the teachers’ students (N=280). Through this questionnaire, the teachers' performance was evaluated by their students. The subsequent data analysis and statistical calculations via correlation revealed that there is a significant relationship between teachers' success and their self-efficacy. Furthermore, significant correlations were found between teachers' self-efficacy, their teaching experience, and age. The research showed that female teachers had more self-efficacy than male teachers. The conclusions and implications of the research are further discussed with reference to earlier findings.

Keywords:
Self-Efficacy Teachers, Pedagogical Success, Successful Teachers, Class Environment
Introduction

Efficacy is essentially individuals’ future-oriented judgment about their competence rather than their actual level of competence. This is an important feature because people regularly overestimate or underestimate their actual capabilities, and these estimations may have consequences for the courses of action they choose to follow and the effort they exert in those pursuits (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2000).

Bandura (1982) argued that those students with a higher degree of self-efficacy tend to exert more effort, persevere in difficult situations, choose a course of activities more attentively, and retain more realistic and flexible attributions. While students with low self-efficacy display less persistence and effort expenditure avoid uncertain and challenging tasks, lack intentionality, and possess attributions that are nonrealistic and maladaptive.

Understanding teachers’ perceptions and beliefs is important because teachers, heavily involved in various teaching and learning processes, are practitioners of educational principles and theories (Jia, Eslami & Burlbaw, 2006). Teachers play a primary role in determining what is needed or what would work best with their students. Findings from research on teachers’ perceptions and beliefs indicate that these perceptions and beliefs not only have considerable influence on their instructional practices and classroom behavior but also are related to their students’ achievement (Grossman, Reynolds, Ringstaff & Sykes, 1985; Hollon, Anderson & Roth, 1991; Johnson, 1992; Morine-Dershimer, 1983; Prawat & Anderson, 1988; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). Thus, knowing the perceptions and beliefs of teachers enables one to make predictions about teaching and assessment practices in classrooms.

Similarly, it appears teachers’ beliefs about themselves and their capabilities can be influential in the quality of their performance. Drawing upon the literature on the role of teachers’ sense of efficacy in their instructional behaviors, discussed in the following sections, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers’ sense of efficacy and their
pedagogical success. As far as exploring such a relationship in an Iranian context is concerned, to the researchers’ best knowledge, no such a research has ever been conducted.

**Literature**

In Social Foundations of Thought and Action (1986), Bandura proposed a social cognitive theory that emphasizes the role of self-referent phenomena and adopts an agented view of personality. According to this agented socio-cognitive perspective, the underlying features of personal agency include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Bandura (2001, p. 6) describes intention as "representation of a future course of action to be performed", that can originate actions for given purposes.

Self-mastery, according to Helsin (1997), is best achieved through breaking down complex task into its constituents that are easier to accomplish, in order to ensure a high level of initial success. Building self-efficacy via mastery experience or enactive mastery entails organizing situations that will offer individuals rewarding success and avoid their experiencing repeated failure.

The second prominent influence originates from observing other similar people to perform a behavior successfully. It provides people with ideas about successful manner. In contrast, observing people similar to oneself fail lowers the individual's confidence and subsequently undermines their efforts. An application of this source of efficacy in educational and career settings lies in the relative contribution of simulations for enhancing self-efficacy (Tompson & Dass, 2002). In this regard, Wolfe (1997, p. 443) maintained that "conscious and rational creation of a situation or environment within which the participants can learn by engaging in and reflecting on the activity or process being conducted" does demonstrate an improvement in self-efficacy.

A third source of influence is social or verbal persuasion received from others. Successful persuaders’ foster people's beliefs in their capabilities, while at the same time, ensure that the visualized success is achievable. Negative persuasion, on the other hand, may tend to defeat and lower self-beliefs. The most contributing effect of social persuasion pivots around initiating the task, attempting new strategies, and trying hard to succeed (Pajares, 2002).
Psychological and affective states, such as stress, anxiety, and excitement also provide information about efficacy perception and boost the feeling of proficiency. Hence, trying to reduce individual's stress and anxiety and to modify negative debilitating states to positive facilitator states plays an influential role in amending perceived self-efficacy beliefs. Another important affective factor, according to Pintrich and Schunk (2001), is attribution. If success is attributed to internal or controllable causes such as ability or effort, efficacy will be enhanced. Nevertheless, if success is attributed to external uncontrollable factors such as chance, self-efficacy may be diminished (cited in Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2000).

Besides the aforementioned areas, arrays of studies have demonstrated the role of self-efficacy beliefs in various academic and educational contexts. Academic self-efficacy may be operationalized as "one’s confidence in his ability to successfully perform pro-academic self-regulatory behaviors— the degree to which students metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally regulate their learning process" (Gore, 2006, p. 92).

A substantial body of literature supports the relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs for academic tasks and objectives and their academic performance on such diverse academic behaviors as, mathematics-specific self-efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1977; Pajares & Miller, 1994), computer training (Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen, 1989), exam performance (Vrugt, Langereis, & Hoogstraten, 1997; Yeperen, 2006), essay writing (Pajares & Johnson, 1996), and language learning (Wong, 2005).

Phipps and Borg (2009) maintain that teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning may be positively or negatively influenced by their own experiences as learners; these beliefs are well-established by the time students go to university (Holt Reynolds, 1992; Lortie, 1975). Moreover, Phipps and Borg (2009) mention that beliefs can act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experiences (Pajares, 1992). This point may outweigh the effects of teacher education (Kagan, 1992; Richardson, 1996) in influencing what teachers do in the classroom because teachers’ belief can exert a persistent long-term influence on teachers’ instructional practices (Crawley & Salyer, 1995, Johnson 1992, as cited in Borg, 1999; Cheng, Chan, Tang, & Cheng 2009). At the same time, teachers’ beliefs are not always reflected in what teachers do in
In addition, changing teachers’ curriculum orientation depends heavily on changes in teachers’ beliefs (Beck, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 2000; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & Williams, 2002; Prawat, 1992 as cited in Isikoglu et al., 2009). Research has shown that teachers’ instructional practices are closely influenced by their curricular or pedagogical beliefs (Minor et al., 2002; Pajares, 1992; Hasweh 2003, as cited in Isikoglu et al., 2009).

Based on what was noted about the facilitative role of teachers’ efficacy in their pedagogical behaviors, while taking into account the contribution of teachers’ self-efficacy in students’ achievements and attitudes, investigating the relationship between teachers’ sense of efficacy and their pedagogical success as well as the question of how much teachers’ efficacy contributes to the prediction of their success becomes pertinent. In summary, this study primarily seeks to find such a relationship in various language institutes in Iran.

The questions mentioned below are pursued in the study and listed as follows:

1) Is there any relationship between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their pedagogical success?

2) Is there any relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and years of teaching experience?

3) Is there any relationship between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their age?

4) Is there any relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their gender?

**Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to find the relationship between self-efficacy in teachers and their pedagogical success in educational environment. The population consists of two groups of students and teachers in high schools in Sarvestan schools Fars province. 280 teachers and 28 students were selected with Morgan table and using simple random sampling (SRS) method. The data were collected through administration of two questionnaire; Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (long form) and characteristics of successful Iranian EFL teacher's questionnaire. Reviewing the existing measures on teacher’s self-efficacy (e.g. Webb Efficacy Scale developed by Ashton, et al., 1982 including 7 items; Teacher Efficacy Scale by Gibson and Dembo, 1984 including 30 items on a 6
point Likert scale; and Bandura’s Teacher Efficacy Scale (1997) comprising 30 items on a 5 point scale, the researcher decided to utilize the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale designed by Bandura’s Teacher Efficacy Scale, 1997 comprising 30 items on a 5 point scale, due to its comprehensiveness, integrity, and ease of administration.

The present study consists of three subscales: efficacy in student engagement; efficacy in instructional strategies; and efficacy in classroom management. Each subscale loads equally on eight items, and every item is measured on a 5-point scale anchored with the notations: “nothing, very little, some influence, quite a bit, a great deal.” This scale seeks to capture the multi-faceted nature of teachers’ efficacy beliefs in a concise manner, without becoming too specific or too general. For reliability measurement we use a coefficient named Zero reliability coefficient that shows the unreliability of data measurement, and also another coefficient named one reliability coefficient that shows its complete reliability.

Findings

The results showed that the classes mark from their teachers’ efficiency scale in Sarvestan city ranges from 129 to 197. The average of classes’ grade from the aforementioned scale in Sarvestan is 170, and it is more than the average of scale point 141. So the teachers’ efficiency level was high in Sarvestan. Data distribution of this variable was numerical. Because the data volume was less than 30 un-parametric test was used for testing the hypotheses.

Investigating the respondents’ (teachers’) attitudes towards the state of teachers’ educational success was performed by 32 items. Regarding that the items grades can range from grade 1 (Nothing) to grade 10 (A great Deal). So, the teachers grades from this variable can vary from 32 (the most negative attitude towards educational success) to 320 (the most positive attitude towards educational success). Educational success grade was evaluated by 28 teachers and its average was the same as 28 of the teachers. The results of the Study show that their grade of educational success scale in Sarvestan city ranges from 93 to 172. The teachers’ average grade in Sarvestan for the aforementioned scale is 142/57 that is less than the average of scale’s grade 176. 50 the teachers’ educational success was not so desirable. Because the data volume is less than 30 non-parametric test was used for testing the hypotheses.
1-Is there any relationship between teacher’s sense of self-efficacy and their pedagogical success?  

Table 1 Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient Between Efficiency and Educational Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variable's name: efficacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational success</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.056</td>
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<td>Sig</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>28</td>
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As table 1 shows spearman’s correlation coefficient was used for testing this hypothesis and the results are shown in table .The results of the Spearman’s correlation test showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the degree of teachers’ efficiency and their educational success in Sarvestan city. (S=0/056, sig=0/000). This means that with the increase of the teachers’ efficiency level their educational success also increases. This result is generalized to the whole statistical universe. So in this case, zero hypothesis was rejected and the original research hypothesis was confirmed.

2) Is there any relationship between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their age?

Table 2 Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient Between Efficiency and Age

<table>
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<tr>
<th>variable's name: Efficacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.026</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>N</td>
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As table 2 shows correlation coefficient was used to test this hypothesis and its results are presented in table. The results of Spearman’s correlation test showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the degree of teacher’s efficiency and their age (Sig=0.017, S=0.026). And it means that as the age increases, efficiency level also increases. This result is applicable to the whole statistical universe. So in this case, zero assumption was rejected and the research hypothesis was confirmed.

3) Is there any relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and years of teaching experience?

Table 3 Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient Between Efficiency and Teaching Record

<table>
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<th>variable's name: efficacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching record</td>
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As table 3 shows Sig is 0/033 and S is 0/044, this means that as the teaching record increases, the degree of teachers’ efficiency improves. This result is applicable to the whole statistical universe. So in this case, zero assumption was rejected and research assumption was confirmed.
4) Is there any relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their gender?

Table 4 T-Test Results of Independent Groups About Self-Efficacy Sense Based on Teacher’s Gender variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Critical Value Table P ≤ .5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.522</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>-5.662</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>0.059</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To compare teacher’s self-efficacy difference based on gender alleviation variable it was used independent groups T Test. Obtained result was at 0.05 error level. So, there is significant difference between male and female teachers in self-efficacy sense. So that male teacher’s self-efficacy is higher than female teachers. This result is applicable to the whole statistical universe. So in this case, zero assumption was rejected and research was confirmed.

Discussion

The current study examined the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and their pedagogical success in Language Institutes. In this section responses extracted from data analysis have been summarized and presented in a way that addresses the three research questions posed in this study:

As for the first research question the present study sought to investigate, in the first place, if there is any relationship between teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and their success. The results substantiate the contention that teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs are useful indicators of teachers’ success. That is to say, the stronger the teacher’s belief in his/her capacity to successfully
accomplish a teaching task, the more likely s/he is assessed as successful from the students’ perspective.

This is consistent with previous theoretical and empirical studies, though limited in Institutional L2 settings, and quite sparse in the Iranian context. Woolfolk, Rosoff and Hoy’s (1990) found that students of teachers with a stronger sense of efficiency beliefs granted more positive evaluations to the teacher. Gibson and Dembo (1984); Ashton, et al. (1982); Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) have also shown that teacher self-efficacy is one of the most important variables consistently related to positive and effective teaching and student learning outcomes.

In the domain of the L2 context, especially Language Institutes where pair and group work and interaction are the norm, it seems that attention to the teachers’ sense of efficacy deserves additional considerations, given the fact that one of the subscales of the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale, utilized in this study, measures teachers’ efficacy beliefs in engaging students.

Considering the role of efficacy in teachers’ success, this study has two main distinguishing features. The first distinguishing feature is that this study utilized a questionnaire on teachers’ success constructed unique to EFL teachers in particular as opposed to other types of educators. Thus, an important feature of this questionnaire successful teachers have been considered and defined in accordance to the views of three main elements in the processes of teaching and learning, i.e. EFL learners, EFL teachers and TEFL experts. Regarding EFL learners, Suwandee (1995) stated students appear to be the best source to provide rich information concerning teaching performance. They are in a good position to judge the quality of the classroom teaching. Braskamp, Brandenburg & Ory (1984) also pointed out that students are appropriate sources when they are describing or judging the following areas: the instructor's professional and ethical behavior; student-instructor relationship; workload; what they learned in the course; fairness of grading; and instructor's ability to communicate clearly. In terms of EFL teachers, Crandall (1996) considered the development of teaching competences as the professional responsibility of the teachers. In order to achieve this goal he introduced a wide range of activities such as observation, classroom research, and so on.
One of the activities that he mentioned was discussion with other teaching colleagues and using their collective experiences (cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002). Regarding TEFL experts, definitely their knowledge and experience shed more light on the way of achieving success in EFL teaching. The second distinguishing feature of the study lies in the juxtaposition of two differently oriented judgments on teacher’s success in terms of perception and performance convergence via internal and external evaluations and the finding is interesting since it reveals that teachers’ beliefs in their capabilities are in line with students’ views about their teachers’ performance. In other words, it seems that the teachers’ efficacy beliefs determine in part their effective performance in class.

In spite of the findings of the present study concerning the positive role of teacher efficacy in their success, this role should not be overestimated. For example, in the view of the regression analysis, it was suggested that about 22% of the variation in teachers’ success could be explained by taking self-efficacy into account. This is not unexpected when we take into consideration the wide array of other teacher instructional and affective behaviors and beliefs that may shape students’ judgments of a successful teacher. Indeed, many researches argued that teaching is a complex process that is influenced by the various elements of teacher quality and attributes. For example, Barnes (1999) considered Language teaching as a dynamic process which depends on the application of appropriate theory, the development of careful instructional designs and strategies, and the study of what actually happens in the classroom. Taghilou (2007) also contended that high quality teaching is dependent on the existence of professional expertise, as well as problem-solving and decision making abilities.

Regarding the second research question - the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and years of teaching experience - the results indicate a positive correlation between EFL teachers’ sense of efficacy and years of teaching experience. In other words, teachers’ sense of efficacy tends to increase with additional years of teaching experience. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that mastery and vicarious experiences have been identified as the major sources of efficacy beliefs by Bandura (1997). The abovementioned result confirm Siebert’s (2006) and Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy’s (1990) findings that there are significant differences between
experienced and novice teachers regarding efficacy. Tsui (1995) also noted that "years of teaching experience in a teaching setting is an overriding factor in molding one's feelings of teaching efficacy" (p.372). Furthermore, this finding of the current study verifies Tschannen-Moran et al.’s (1998) contention that part of the value of teacher efficacy lies in its “cyclical nature” (p. 22); i.e., the proficiency of a performance paves the way for a new mastery experience which in turn provides new information that shapes future efficacy beliefs.

Thus, higher efficacy prompts greater perseverance and diligence which leads to better performance, which in turn creates greater efficacy. In summary, it seems that facilitating the development of a sense of efficacy beliefs from the initial phases of teaching practices does yield enduring results.

As for the third research question this one aimed to address the relationship between teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and their age. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between these two variables. This means that the older the teachers, the higher their sense of efficacy beliefs are. It is in contrast to Bandura’s (1995) postulation that age would not correlate with efficacy due to the various routes in life that cause people to vary greatly in how efficaciously they manage their lives. Imants and De Brabander (1996) also contended that among the factors influencing teacher self-efficacy, age does not seem to play any significant role. The contradiction between this study and previous ones can be attributed to this fact that in the present study, the majority of teachers commenced their professions approximately at the same age, i.e., twenty-two, which is considered the typical age of BA graduation in Iranian universities. It means that as they get older, their teaching experience will also increase. This in turn boosts the likelihood of higher sense of efficacy beliefs in teachers.

What I did for fourth research question was to address the relationship between teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and their gender. T Test was used to test this hypothesis and the results showed that there was a negative and significant relationship between teachers’ efficiency and their gender. To compare teacher’s self-efficacy sense difference based on gender alleviation variable it was used independent groups T Test. Obtained results are at 0.05 error level there is significant difference between male and female teachers in self-efficacy sense. So that male teacher’s self-
efficacy is higher than female teachers. This means that male teachers’ efficiency was more than female teachers’ efficiency. This result is applicable to the whole statistical universe. So in this case, zero assumption was rejected and research was confirmed.

The result of this study is in conflict with those Cheung (2006) whose believes that female teachers were shown to be more self-efficacious. Gender played an important role in classroom anxiety. In addition the result of this study support Imants and De Brabander (1996) whose believes that male teachers have self-efficacy than female teachers.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study suffered from some limitations. For example, some of the participants were unwilling to take part in the study and; therefore, they did not answer the questions carefully and cooperatively. Such responses were excluded from the data analysis due to careless coding in order not to endanger the reliability of the data and the generalization of the findings of the study. Besides, the number of the participants was limited in this study, so the findings must be generalized and used with caution. Using this number of participants was due to manageability concerns, though. Concerning time limitations, only the intermediate Iranian EFL learners were investigated in this study.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Since this study was conducted in public educational environments such as high schools only, further research is needed to be done in language institute in order to compare the results.

The findings of the study, nevertheless, must be treated with caution. In this study, teachers’ success was assessed only through questionnaire. In a similar study, researchers can make use of other kinds of evaluative tools such as observation, interviewing students, etc. or a combination of different assessment devices to assess teachers’ success in a classroom setting.

Further studies should look at the personal and environmental factors collectively in explaining teacher efficacy. The notion of teacher efficacy should be more developed to show the standards and competencies that teachers in different settings are expected to do. Longitudinal
studies should follow teachers to determine if personal and environmental factors influence teacher efficacy at different points throughout the teacher development process.

Inspired by the findings, a number of suggestions are put forward which may be beneficial for further research. First, it was suggested to replicate this study in context weather the same results will be obtain. Second, the only instrument which was used in this study was a questionnaire. Researchers should consider that self-report is not just sufficient to gain information in depth of teacher efficacy. Other instrument such as interview, observations, and open-ended questions can be helpful.

Finally, a comparative analysis of the perceived self-efficacy of teachers in different countries and different subject areas is needed. Such a study would make it possible to realize the country and discipline specific factors and might clear how different factors would interact with teacher’s sense of self-efficacy in different conditions.
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