Experienced versus Inexperienced EFL Teachers` Beliefs of Self-Efficacy: The Case of Public and Private Sectors

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Abstract: *Teacher self-efficacy is the confidence in one`s ability to motivate and promote positive outcomes in students. It can be influenced by contextual and demographic factors. The present study is an attempt to analyze the role of factors such as teachers` working environment, experience, and gender on teachers` beliefs about self-efficacy. For this purpose, 40 Iranian English as Foreign Language teachers (20 form public setting, and 20 from private setting) with different gender and work experience were chosen. A teacher self efficacy scale and three open-ended questions were used to investigate the possible differences of teachers` beliefs with respect to the variables mentioned. The results indicated that working environment, experience, and gender can effect teachers` beliefs of self-efficacy significantly. The findings have pedagogical implications for teacher education programs.*

Key words: self-efficacy, contextual and demographic factors, public setting, private setting

1. Introduction

Teacher efficacy has been defined as teachers` beliefs and confidence in bringing about positive outcomes to students` performance (Berman et al., 1977). Since 1970s, teacher efficacy has been introduced as a central issue for advancing teacher education and maintaining educational reforms (Ross, 1995; Wheatley, 2002). According to Ross (1995) and Henson (2001) teacher efficacy is a prominent factor related to promoting constructive teaching behavior. Ideas such as teachers applying innovatory practices, risk taking, and even consistency in a task are closely linked to degrees of efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Social cognitive theory is the theoretical base of efficacy which is developed by Albert Bandura (1977, 1997). According to this theory our future behavior is related to our human agency which is in turn the function of environmental influences, behavior, and intrinsic factors (such as cognition, affection, and biology). According to Bandura (1986) dynamic interactions amongst external, internal, current, and past behavior construct human beings. Bandura (1986) noted 'dualistic doctrines that regard mind and body as separate entities do not provide much enlightenment on the nature of the disembodied mental state or on how an immaterial mind and bodily events act on each other' (p. 17).

Idea of self-efficacy can be traced to Bandura (1977) in which it is claimed that 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (p. 3). Feelings of self-efficacy are seen as a medium for transformation in our actions that influence our motivation, and as a result can override our success of failure (Bandura, 1998).

When it comes to the academic setting, teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' mentality with respect to their dexterity in motivating and advancing students` achievement (Wheately, 2005). There are so many factors which may influence this psychological construct, but they can be classified under two broad categories; contextual and demographic factors.

As for the contextual category, it is said that teacher self-efficacy is a kind of context-specific conception (Dellinger et al., 2008) which is structured within a specific environment (Friedman & Kass, 2002). It is influenced by such factors as the principal leadership and school conditions (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teachers having access to more facilities in the school, being subject to the principal's constructive behavior, and having supervision of their colleagues are therefore more likely to have heavier beliefs of self-efficacy (Deemer, 2004). Students' characteristics is another factor e.g., teachers working with younger students are more efficacious (Herman, 2000). Likewise, considering students' social class, it has been suggested that more efficacious teachers have students who come from the high socioeconomic levels of the society (Lee et al. 1991). To sum up, it might be inferred that the context in which teachers work, including the principal, the colleagues, and the students' characteristics can affect their self-efficacy beliefs to a great extent.

Variables such as gender, age, experience, and academic degree are included in the second category (demographic factors). Considering gender, for example, available research indicates that male and female teachers are

not different with respect to their self-efficacy beliefs (Lee et al., 1991; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). One of the few studies that found a difference between female and male teachers` self-efficacy conceptions was conducted by Raudenbush et al. (1992). In this study, female teachers had stronger beliefs of self-efficacy but this difference was not that much great.

Studies that have considered the role of experience in self-efficacy beliefs have mostly found that teachers advanced their beliefs of efficacy with experience (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1993; Cambel, 1996). Self-efficacy has been reported to be correlated with age but teachers who changed schools or experienced disruptive events tended to decrease efficacy (Deemer, 2004). Public orprivate work environment can be another variable affecting beliefs of teachers. When we see that the outcome of private institutes is different to that of public schools, many reasons such as teachers` beliefs of self-efficacy can be amongst the influential factors. Teachers' perception about their professional responsibility should be considered deeply to increase our understanding of how teacher efficacy affects teaching especially in different contexts and settings.

Researchers have recognized the need to extend efficacy research in order deepen our understanding of the construct of teacher efficacy. Teachers` gender, experience, and work environment are amongst the important criteria that can affect teacher`s beliefs of self-efficacy. It is important to investigate how these factors influence teacher`s beliefs of self-efficacy. Based on what has been mentioned so far, the following research questions were posed to be answered in this study:

1- Is there any significant difference between self-efficacy beliefs of male and female Iranian EFL teachers?
2- Is there any significant difference between self-efficacy beliefs of more experienced and less experienced Iranian EFL teachers?
3- Is there any significant difference between self-efficacy beliefs of Iranian EFL school teachers and institute teachers?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The sample of this study consisted of forty English language teachers in Iran. They were chosen from a public high school (twenty) and a private language institute (twenty). These participants were chosen because the researcher had access to them. Institute language teachers taught courses at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. Public school teachers taught the textbooks assigned by the ministry of education; while the private school teachers taught Interchange Courses. They were consisted of twenty male and twenty female teachers. Their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 20 years. Following Chan (2008) I chose five years of teaching as the cut-off point between experienced and inexperienced teachers. Again twenty of the sample had teaching experience of five years and above, twenty other had teaching experience of less than five years.

For answering to the open ended question four volunteer teachers were chosen. Two from public school and the other two form the institute. These teachers were different in work experience (two experienced, two inexperienced) and gender (two males, two females).

2.2 Instruments

Teacher Self-efficacy scale (TSES) developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) was used to assess teachers` self-efficacy beliefs since its validity has been proved in different contexts. This questionnaire consists of 24 questions answered on a 5 likert scale ranging from 1-nothing to 5-a great deal. An open-ended question consisting of three parts was also distributed among four volunteer teachers. The researcher devised the questions. The three questions were related to three main parts of the practice of language teaching that is lesson planning, dealing with students` disruptive behavior, and instructional practices.

2.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed among the institute and public school teachers. Teachers took the questionnaire either before or after class time and marked the response that best described their beliefs. As for the open-ended question, the four volunteer teachers took the sheet home and returned it on their next appearance.

2.4 Data analysis

SPSS software was used in analyzing the data. T-test was used to determine if the differences between the groups were significant. The groups were male and female teachers, more experienced and less experienced teachers, and school teachers and institute teachers. To compare the means independent T-test was used for each group. For the open ended question qualitative analysis was used.

3. Results

3.1 Gender and self-efficacy beliefs

The first comparison was on male and female English language teachers to see if they have different views. Table 1 shows that the difference between the means of these two group was significant (p = .009).

Table 1. Mean, Standard deviation, and P value for male and female teachers

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
Female	20	75.450	8.738	.009
Male	20	68.900	5.981	

3.2 Experience and self-efficacy beliefs

The second comparison was on experienced and inexperienced language teachers to see their beliefs are different. Table 2 shows that the difference between the means of the two groups was significant (p = .008)

Table 2. Mean, Standard deviation, and P value for experienced and inexperienced teachers

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
Experienced	20	74.900	8.181	.008
Inexperienced	20	67.750	7.986	

3.3 Work environment and self-efficacy beliefs

The third comparison was between teachers who taught at public schools and those at institutes. Table 3 shows that the difference between the means of these two groups was significant (p = .000).

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation, and P value for public school and private institutes

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
School teacher	20	66.950	4.773	.000
Institute teacher	20	75.450	7.816	

In sum, the results of the three comparisons of the self-efficacy beliefs indicated that the difference between the groups were significant.

4. Discussion

4.1 Gender differences and self efficacy beliefs

As it was shown in the previous part the differences between male and female language teachers when it comes to self-efficacy beliefs was significant. In EFL context in Iran there are obvious differences between male and female teachers. In Iran teaching is not a job that males choose voluntarily. Usually when they cannot find any other profession they come to be teachers. Even sometimes this profession is seen as a temporary job until they can find better professions. The reasons can be the low payment and social degradation of teachers. As a profession teaching is not seen as prestigious job. Mostly this is true for males who are bread winners of their families. As for females this is not the case since teaching for them is one of the jobs available and also socially speaking they usually are not seen as bread winners of their families. Because of the mentioned reasons males are not that interested in teaching, they have negative beliefs towards teaching, these beliefs affect their attitudes and as a result their behavior in the classroom.

In answering to the open-ended question one of the male teachers contended 'When it comes to lesson planning what I do is to see the objective of the lesson from the teacher guide and this objective would be my lesson plan'. They seem to teach on the basis of these objectives and not care even if they have completed the whole content or not. In my view, lesson planning can be considered as a skill; now if teachers are not interested in teaching and see it as a temporary profession they would not be careful in dealing with these skills, they cannot develop these skills because they are not interested in teaching. On the other hand a female teacher wrote 'I am successful on the way I plan my lesson as I elaborate on the lesson objectives'. So it seems because they are interested in what they are doing they are concerned about students understanding and involvement. It is obvious that lesson planning is something interactive; teachers should not have a product oriented approach in the lesson plan. It is based on the needs of students.

In answering another part of the question a female teacher contended 'I believe that I am successful in instructional practices because I use varying teaching techniques to teach a topic, it is helpful in getting students` understanding. Some students may not understand through using explanation and if other techniques were used such as audio lingual methods, or images they can learn better'. Females seem to be doing this job whole-heartedly. It seems that due to sociological reasons mentioned above females are better-informed and are more concerned with teaching skills. It has been said that variety is the spice of life, when it comes to teaching, teachers must use these instructional strategies and teaching methods as weapons in their arsenal. Maybe in teaching one single content or subject different strategies must be used. It all seems to happen for female teachers. Males stick to one instructional strategy or technique but as we all know it would not be sufficient. Of course when males are not interested in teaching they will be careless in all these matters and capturing these goals.

4.2 Gender differences and experienced and inexperienced teachers

The results showed that the difference between self-efficacy beliefs of experienced and inexperienced teachers were in fact significant. Inexperienced language teachers are more concerned with 'textbook knowledge delivery'. It seems that they have the syllabus from a well-known publication, also the content, objective, as well as instructional practices and follow the line of that publication. They believe it is something from their masters; those who printed the book or designed the syllabus. They stick to that as they believe that is good teaching. But this is not the case with experienced teachers. They do not stick to what is being put in the syllabus. They focus on the content but as one said they see success in language teaching as 'having informal knowledge or their own variety of techniques'. Inexperienced teachers see success as 'classroom management and class control'; while focus of more experienced teachers seem to be on students` learning. 'I arrange the class based on the activity that is done, based on student needs I choose whether to have groups, pair work, or tasks' one experienced teacher contended. Another teacher believed 'I see myself competent since I go to supplementary materials to reinforce what has been taught to ensure student learning'. On the other hand, naïve teachers are not that much concerned with student learning. They see success in controlling the classroom; they are concerned with 'who they are as teachers'.

When it comes to students` disruptive behavior, inexperienced teachers see disruptive behavior as a major problem they are concerned with it. They see 'misbehavior as something inherited genetically that not much can be done about it'. On the other hand, experienced teachers do not see disruptive behavior as a problem they see it as 'something educational not genetically inherited'. More experienced teachers have an indirect approach when it comes to misbehavior. They see success in dealing with these students as raising their interest, naughty students must feel that the teacher has a positive attitude towards them. As an example on teacher said 'If I am doing pair work or group work I will give disruptive students some activities to make them leader of their groups, I will give feeling of responsibility'.

Experienced teachers see themselves successful in lesson planning when they see the lesson plan as a cognitive process. They are focused on choosing what is appropriate based on student needs, levels, and leaning styles. One experienced teacher gave an example 'I had planned a group work activity but during the class I came to the understanding that it does not go well because of the number of students and the way of teaching (teacher-centered methods) that the students were accustomed to. So I changed the activity to pair work'. So success in accomplishing lesson planning is dependent upon how the teacher is prepared and based on understanding of the environment and student needs. Lesson planning is an interactive decision not like what some naïve teachers thought as 'something fixed and predetermined'.

4.3 Public school teachers and private institute teachers and self-efficacy beliefs

In public schools teachers are not interested in teaching, acquiring of knowledge, and self-developing. Teachers` role here is that of knowledge transmitters from the textbook to the student; students are passive recipients. An institute

teacher said 'I see myself successful because in private schools resources are available that make me interested in selection of supplementary materials, how to plan for a lesson, and to discover the new techniques that are to be used'. Teachers in public schools do not have the aid system such as library or computer system, as a result teaching will not be reinforced. Teachers are demotivated and confined to the teaching practice. An institute teacher believed 'I love teaching in the private sector because I see myself successful since everything I need is there from activity books to dictionaries', 'my techniques of lesson planning is more effective due to availability of resources', 'we can prepare supplementary material to reinforce the learning process.

Classes are less crowded in private institutes and students seem to be more interested in private institutes. One private institute teacher believed 'she is successful because she finds students more interested and motivated'. Another teacher believed 'disruptive behavior is much less when it comes to private institutes'. The reason is that students are there voluntarily and are paying for being there.

One public school teacher did not think he is successful because 'the focus of the textbook in public schools is just the matter of knowledge to be transmitted to students without much consideration of how to deal or teach textbooks or how to develop teachers` skills of how to teach the topic'. Teachers seem to be demotivated in the public sector. On the other hand, a private teacher believed 'I understand that I am teaching with a different style and on a different textbook'. Private teachers are more concerned with interaction with students. They are more concerned with students` learning styles, problems, classroom management, and teaching strategies.

Cooperation between teachers in private and public schools is different, in public sector teachers are heavy loaded with different practices and different classroom hours. One public teacher believes 'I do not have interaction with my colleagues at school; I do not see my colleagues so much'. In the public sector teachers do not reflect or ask about what went wrong or right due to time limitedness. But in private sectors this is not the case, as one teacher said 'we are concerned about our colleagues. Even we have good constructive relation with the institute principle.' They can ask their colleagues to help them; even private institutes hold training sessions in which teachers can report problematic situations in a way that can be solved in the future.

5. Conclusion

The study examined whether variables such as teachers` gender, experience, and work environment affect EFL teachers` self-efficacy beliefs. The findings revealed that the three mentioned variables make a difference in affecting teachers` self-efficacy beliefs. Considering the first variable; gender, the study showed that female teachers had higher self-efficacy beliefs. This is attributed to males not being interested in this profession due to socioeconomic factors.

When it comes to second variable which is experience, the findings showed that it makes a significant difference in teachers` self-efficacy beliefs. The reason can be the fact that for experienced teachers what is important is knowledge and mental preparation not a pre-determined lesson plan, experienced teachers` focus on students` learning styles and techniques that suit their students. While inexperienced teachers are more concerned about knowledge delivery, classroom management, and classroom control. As a result experienced teachers righteously feel they are more successful language teachers.

The third variable also played a significant role in teachers` self-efficacy beliefs. Teachers contend that students in private institutes are more interested in the lesson and the fact that they are of higher social class compared to public school students can be affective factors. Also the air of private institutes is different to that of public schools. There teachers are more cooperative. Another important factor is different textbooks. While in public schools textbooks are prepared by the science ministry, in private institutes courses like Interchange are taught that have a stronger regard for communicative skills which make students much more interested. Another factor that increases private institutes` self-efficacy beliefs is availability of resources by which teachers can reinforce the subjects taught and provide students with supplementary material.

Self efficacy has been linked to demographic factors (in this study gender and experience) and contextual factors (work environment in this study). For the context variable the results of the study are in parallel with previous research; context has a huge effect on teachers` self-efficacy beliefs. (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Role of collegial support and school climate are key in teachers` beliefs.

Also for the experience factor which is a demographic factor we see that the findings of the study are in line with previous research. Experience has a significant effect on teacher`s efficacy beliefs (Campbel, 1996). But when it comes to the gender variable we see that the results of this study are different to previous ones. While in almost all previous research gender had no effect on teachers` self-efficacy beliefs (Herman, 2000; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007), in this study its impact was significant. The reasons might be the low income of Iranian teachers and the fact that sadly males are not

oriented to getting a job in the teaching profession. Maybe this is something that happens only in Iran and this may be why the results are in contradiction to previous studies.

The findings have implications for teacher education programs in order to promote understanding of EFL teachers` beliefs of self-efficacy by including theories, models, techniques, procedures, and skills that are well supported by theoreticians and research findings in this area. In this study teachers` action in the class was not observed. The study can be enhanced by observing teachers in real contexts which can also lead to further qualitative evidence with respect to findings of the study. Also it seems appropriate to conduct studies in teachers of other courses such as scientific streams. It can help us understand how teacher efficacy affects teaching in different contexts and settings.

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