The Relationship Between Iranian EFL Teachers’ Self-Efficacy and Students’ Language Achievement

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Abstract: In recent years, teachers’ self-efficacy demonstrated a profound influence on the daily lives of teachers and their students. To gain more insight into this area, this study examined the relationship between 45 male and female EFL teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs in the Iranian EFL context and their students’ language achievement. For data collection two instruments were used: Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and an Evaluation List (EL). Data were analyzed through Pearson correlation. Results of the correlation analysis indicated significant positive correlation between teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and students’ achievement. The findings of this study carry important concepts which are particularly related to the educational policy aimed to improve students’ achievement.

Key words: Teachers · Self-efficacy · Students · Language Achievement · EFL Teachers · Educational Policy

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, Teachers face many new and ongoing needs that are the result of an increased work pressure to make a living, change in policies and expectations. How teachers believe in their capabilities to face these problems plays an important role in their job and as a result their students’ learning [1]. Nowadays more and more people are becoming aware of the fact that the base of all activities, which are done for reforming, should focus on classroom teachers. It’s clear that having a high quality education requires high quality teachers. One of the most important issues among all successful teachers is their self-efficacy [2].

Research on how teachers believe in themselves and its effect on their cognition has been a suitable topic of many educational inquirers over the last four decades. One of the most important beliefs that seem to have a crucial effect on teacher and student outcomes is teachers’ sense of efficacy [3]. In recent years, teachers’ self-efficacy (TSE) has been shown to demonstrate a profound influence on the daily lives of teachers and their students [4]. Teachers’ sense of efficacy has been defined as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” [5] (p. 22). Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more open to new ideas and they are more willing to experiment with new methods at the same time offering students new and different learning opportunities or experiences [1].

School environment as an agency for cultivating students’ cognitive self-efficacy is significant; “the task of creating learning environment conducive to the development of cognitive skills rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers” [6]. Since teachers play an important role in setting the standards and creating the conditions for students’ school results, understanding the key mechanism through which teachers help their students’ academic success is critical.

Self Efficacy: Primarily, the base of self-efficacy comes from Bandura’s theory, which maintains that the belief people have about their capabilities in dealing with difficult situations affects their choices, their wishes, degree of their attempt, perseverance, flexibility in problems, vulnerability to stress and depression and performance outcomes [7]. Specifically, efficacy beliefs influence whether people think optimistically or pessimistically, the goals they set for themselves, their commitment to them, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with the environmental demands and the accomplishments they realize [8]. Perceived
self-efficacy has been defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” [6, p.5]. Since self-efficacy has been shown to predict students’ academic achievements in academic areas, it has received much attention in educational researches [9].

Four main sources of information can be helpful in development of self-efficacy [10, 6]. “Mastery Experience” which refers to the successful completion of a task is said to be the first step towards building strong efficacy; this is the most effective tool for increasing self-efficacy [7]. The second influential factor is to see other people perform a behavior successfully. Seeing other people’s experience strengthens self-efficacy by learning through others or modeling. Others’ social or verbal persuasion is a third source of influence. Receiving realistic encouragement increases their effort and it increases their self-efficacy. It is crucial that people view the process and perform a task successfully rather than only focusing on their specific task [7]. Finally, “psychological states” is the last source of self-efficacy (physical arousal). This feeling of success after reaching a goal is called “physical arousal”. Since people totally rely on their physical and affective states to judge their capabilities, these factors influence their belief of self-efficacy [10]. Teachers with a low level of efficacy are less committed to the teaching profession than those with higher efficacy [11]. Because of their lack of commitment, teachers with a lower sense of efficacy also spend more time on non-academic activities than do highly efficacious teachers. Highly efficacious teachers are more likely to provide assistance to students who have difficulty in learning and praise students for success. In contrast, lower efficacious teachers are more apt to give up on students that do not learn quickly and criticize their failures [12].

Teacher Self Efficacy: Since teachers’ sense of efficacy is based on social cognitive theory, it can be viewed as self-efficacy beliefs directed toward teaching context. These efficacy beliefs can strongly predict choice of task, effort, stamina and the final level of success that can be achieved [13, 14, 7]. If we conceptualize generally, teachers self-efficacy refers to teacher’s belief of their own abilities to cause valuable results of engagement and learning among all students; including unmotivated and difficult ones [13; 5]. Teacher efficacy has proven to play an important role in teacher effectiveness. This is usually related to positive teaching behavior and student results. Perhaps one of the most reliable characteristics of effective teachers is their strong sense of efficacy (5). Teachers with high sense of efficacy have such confidence that even the most difficult students can be reached when given more attention. Then again, teachers with low sense of efficacy may feel helpless when dealing with unmotivated or difficult students [12].

Teacher self-efficacy is highly context-specific, too. Therefore, in making an efficacy judgment, it is necessary to assess one’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to the requirements of the task at hand. One reason teachers’ self-efficacy judgment is so powerful is the cyclical nature of the process. Greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which leads to better performance and in turn leads to greater efficacy. The reverse is also true. Lower efficacy leads to less effort and being easily defeated, which leads to poor teaching results and therefore produce decreased efficacy [15].

Based on three decades of research, teacher efficacy has proven to be an important variable related to educational results [16]. Studies reported in [5] repeatedly demonstrate the importance of teacher self-efficacy and its association with a wide range of teaching and learning results. These results include teachers’ classroom behaviors, effort and goal-setting, openness to new ideas and willingness to try new methods, planning and organizational competence, persistence, resilience, commitment and enthusiasm for teaching and longevity in their chosen career. In addition, teacher self-efficacy has been shown to influence student achievement, attitude and emotional growth and is related to the health of the organization, atmosphere in the school, classroom based decision-making and to student self-efficacy [17].

The results of many studies in the literature have proven effects of teacher self-efficacy on different aspects of teacher performance. For example, an investigation [18] on the relationship between student achievement, teacher efficacy and interaction with assigned coaches revealed that students’ achievement was higher in classrooms with teachers who had more contact with their coaches and in classrooms where teachers had greater confidence in the effectiveness of education. In another study [19] 88 teacher efficacy studies in pre-college settings were reviewed, which identified potential links between teachers’ sense of efficacy and their behaviors. Based on the results of this study, it was suggested that teachers with higher levels of efficacy are more likely to (1) learn and use new approaches and strategies for teaching, (2) use management techniques that enhance student autonomy, (3) provide special assistance to low achieving students, (4) build students’ self-perceptions of their academic
skills, (5) set attainable goals and (6) persist in the face of student failure. Furthermore, three teacher-related variables, including teaching style, teachers’ sense of efficacy and teacher reflectivity were investigated [20] to see how they relate to student achievement gains in an Iranian EFL context. Thirty EFL teachers teaching in Iranian junior and senior high schools participated in this study, with the final-exam score of the participating students serving as the dependent variable of the study. The results showed that the variables of the study significantly predicted student’s achievement. In addition, the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs, their job satisfaction and students’ academic achievement were examined in [21]. The result of structural equation modeling analyses indicated that teachers’ personal efficacy beliefs affected their job satisfaction and students’ academic achievement. Finally self-efficacy beliefs among English Language teachers in selected schools in Venezuela were explored in [3]. Data were collected through a survey administered to 100 teachers. The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale [1] was used to assess efficacy for management, engagement and instructional strategies. Results showed that teachers’ perceived efficacy was correlated with self-reported English proficiency. Results also indicated that teachers’ efficacy for instructional strategies was higher than efficacy for management and engagement.

While the effects of teacher efficacy on their performance in the classroom have been well documented, there have been few researches, if any, describing or correlating the teachers’ sense of efficacy and student’s language achievement among Iranian English language teachers at the university level. The researchers therefore decided to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and students’ language achievement.

The Following Research Question and Null Hypothesis Were Then Formulated: Is there a relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and students’ language achievement?

There is no relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and students’ language achievement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The population of this study consisted of 45 male and female EFL teachers working at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch. The population of the study was 45 teachers and the sample size included all the population. In relation to gender, 51.1% were male and 48.9% were female. In terms of professional aspects, teachers in the sample had from 3 to 50 years of teaching experience with a mean of 11.64 years) and ranged in age from 29 to 70, with a mean of 40.28 years. Within this sample, 33.3% held a Ph.D. degree and 66.7% had a master degree. The teachers showed a wide range of variance with respect to their age and teaching experience.

Instruments: Of the various instruments available for assessing teacher self-efficacy, teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen- Moran and Hoy [1], was used to assess teacher efficacy. It assessed teacher self-efficacy in three areas: Efficacy for (i) instructional strategies, (ii) classroom management and (iii) student engagement. An example for each subscale is: ‘To what extent can you create good questions for your students?’ ‘What can you do to get students to follow classroom rules?’ ‘What can you do to help your students to value learning?’ Respondents were asked to indicate how able they felt in adequately managing each of the 19 typical challenging teaching experiences, using a 9-point Likert Scale, with 1 corresponding to ‘Nothing’ and 9 corresponding to ‘A Great Deal.’ Thus higher scores on the scale are equated with greater efficacy beliefs. In order to test the validity of the scale a pilot study was conducted on a small similar group of teachers consisting of 10 participants (22.2%). Based on their comments, items 3, 13, 15, 19, 22 were omitted. Therefore, the original Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale which contained 24 items was reduced into the existing 19 items. The reliability analysis showed that in considering the whole instrument, Cronbach’s alpha was .88. The reliability values for the three subscales were .69, .71 and .78, respectively.

Another instrument was an evaluation list. The teachers were asked to fill the evaluation list by entering students’ final examination grades.

Procedure: The TSES was administered to 45 participants after receiving voluntary consent. Participants were asked to rate themselves on a 9-point Likert scale of TSES from 1 to 9. Furthermore, the teachers were asked to fill in the evaluation list by entering students’ final examination grades. The participants were assured that their responses to the questionnaire would be held in strict confidence and that they would be used only for academic purposes and have no effect on their professional and educational careers.
Table 1: Descriptive statistics for three facets of teacher efficacy construct and student achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
<th>Classroom management</th>
<th>Student engagement</th>
<th>Teacher efficacy</th>
<th>Job satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>69.0333</td>
<td>66.8333</td>
<td>67.0598</td>
<td>67.4370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.Deviation</td>
<td>11.6369</td>
<td>15.99267</td>
<td>12.68213</td>
<td>15.27779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>-.187</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
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<td>-.927</td>
<td>-.766</td>
<td>-.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>46.88</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>43.45</td>
<td>36.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>89.06</td>
<td>96.00</td>
<td>96.43</td>
<td>96.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Correlation between teacher efficacy and student achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher efficacy</th>
<th>Student achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1 .497(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>45 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.497(**) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>45 45</td>
</tr>
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</table>

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to the analysis of the data, the dependent variable, teacher efficacy and the independent variable, student achievement, were examined using SPSS 11.5. Descriptive statistics for the teacher efficacy variables and students achievement is presented in Table 1.

In order to test the null hypothesis, there is no relationship between Iranian EFL teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and students’ language achievement, Pearson correlation was performed between the total score of teacher efficacy and student achievement. The results as presented in Table 2 indicated a significant positive relationship ($r=.497$, $p=.001, p<0.05$) between these variables, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

In this study, the sense of efficacy of EFL teachers was discussed and the relationship between the teachers’ self-efficacy and students’ achievement was analyzed. The findings indicated that the relationship between these two categories is positive. The result of this study is in line with the prior researches. A wide review of the literature has clearly documented that teachers with strong self-efficacy show high levels of planning and organization [22], readily accept new ideas and are more likely to test new methods to better meet the needs of their students [23; 24]. These teachers also show more enthusiasm for teaching [22], are more engaged with their job and most likely have a positive influence on students’ achievement [2; 1].

As the research literature indicated, teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs may influence students’ achievement in several ways. Teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs are more likely than teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy to implement didactic innovations in the classroom and use classroom management approaches and adequate teaching methods that encourage students’ autonomy and reduce custodial control [23], to take responsibility for students with special learning needs [22] and to manage classroom problems [3]. Teachers with high sense of efficacy have the capacity to accept more challenging tasks, determination, show more stamina facing difficulties and become less anxious [25]. Consistent with Ross’s [19] conclusions, teachers who believe more in the effect of teaching on students’ learning expect higher academic success of their students than those who believe less in this fact. Teacher’s self-efficacy influences their motivation and performance together with students’ results [7].

CONCLUSION

The term Efficacy has a great effect on different parts of our lives and teaching is no exception. Using good teaching skills and strategies help teachers obtain a positive effect when working with students and their coworkers and at the same time feel capable and self-confident that they are able to solve teaching difficulties.

Research has shown that beliefs, once established, appear resistant to change: people tend to interpret reality in accordance with beliefs and to recall belief-congruent information [26].

The implication of this study is that improving levels of teachers’ self-efficacy could improve students’ achievement. As it was mentioned in [27], fostering teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs increases students’
performance. It is hoped that this line of research continues because of the importance of self-efficacy of teachers in teaching. The results of this study indicate that there is a positive relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and students’ achievement. However, much other valuable information remains to be learned about the role of self-efficacy in students’ language achievement. Design of studies to determine if external and contextual factors, such as school climate affect teachers’ self-efficacy and if teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs can be changed by specific administrative actions in in-service training courses can have important practical implications. Furthermore, replication of this study with a large and more homogeneous sample regarding teachers’ gender, age, degree and experience is recommended.

Practically, the above findings carry important concepts which are particularly related to public policy aimed to improve education. All of these concepts seem to be practical if society and policy makers change their view towards teaching and education.

REFERENCES


