

Exploring Iranian High School Teachers' English Language Proficiency and their Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Abstract

Teachers' beliefs are of crucial importance in guiding them to adopt their teaching strategies for coping with their challenges, motivation, language ability, and shaping language learners' learning environment. The current literature is aimed at investigating the level of efficacy perceptions of EFL teachers working at high schools in Iran. The study also investigated the presences of any differences existing among the 3 dimensions of teacher efficacy as described by by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, effectiveness in student engagement, effectiveness in instructional strategy, and effectiveness in instructional management. Moreover, it it payed more attenytion to the socio-demographic factors and the relationship existing among the mentioned and teacher efficacy of EFL teachers. Data was collected through a survey administered to 40 Iranian High School teachers from Yazd province. A modified version of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale [17] was employed in assessing the effectiveness of classroom management, student engagement, and teaching strategies. Results showed that perceived effectiveness of teachers was positively correlated with self-reported English proficiency.

Keywords: *English language proficiency, English as a foreign language, High school, Self-efficacy.*

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1. Introduction

The foundation of English teachers' professional confidence is their language skills. A good teacher is thought to be one who is fluent in more than one language [12]. According to Doff, inadequate English competence may undermine teachers' confidence in the classroom [5]. In turn, Poor language proficiency can affect a teacher's confidence and professional status and interfere with an easy educational process. In addition, it can further hinder the instructor from attaining the academic requirements of a more communicative approach to language teaching. According to s study, language proficiency is a significant factor for high school instructors and affects their professional self-esteem and confidence [10]. Language ability is undoubtedly a feature that seems to be connected to EFL teachers' self-efficacy. Many researchers have extensively dealt with the topic of teacher competence. Butler studied teachers in her three countries, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, to find out what language skills teachers self-perceived and what they perceived as the minimum required to be an effective teacher at the elementary school level. identified language proficiency gaps in Butler's study compares teachers' self-assessed language proficiency levels with the proficiency levels that teachers feel enable them to teach English most effectively in primary school in all three of her countries above. It shows that there is a gap in between. [3]. In Iran it has also been less worked on, especially related to school teachers, language proficiency has been listed as an interesting area in studies of NNEST. Medgyes has shown in his research that language proficiency is a vital and necessary issue for non-native English-speaking teachers and affects their confidence as well as self-esteem [13]. According to this study, language ability is a significant determinant in the sentiments of self-efficacy experienced by EFL teachers. Consequently, the goal of this study is to ascertain how Iranian EFL school teachers' levels of self-efficacy and language competence relate to one another.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher's Belief

Beliefs are "mental states that are thought to drive a person's actions" and are "the permeable and dynamic structures that act as a filter through which new knowledge and experience are screened for meaning" [19]. Since the 1980s, there have been several significant changes made to the concept of belief. Meaning that opinions are now viewed as fluid, socially conscious, and contradictory theories concerning language learning and teaching [2] On the other hand, it used to be seen as a stable, spiritual and personal idea about language learning and teaching. Teachers' beliefs are also important in evaluating education, as teachers bring many variables, such as expectations and attitudes, into the classroom to guide behavior [18]. In a similar vein, Miheala and Oana assert that teachers' attitudes, deeds, and behaviors might influence students' learning as a

result of social, academic, and individual experiences [14].

2.2 Teacher's Efficacy

Considering the effect of identity on individuals, a close relationship can be observed between teacher identity and efficacy. Besides, the positive and reciprocal relationship between identity and efficacy beliefs on the development of teachers has been validated and emphasized by several researchers [17]. It has been claimed that the teachers' beliefs of themselves, their practice, and their efficacy deeply influence their education delivery. Various definitions of teacher efficacy have been offered by different researchers. Efficacy can be described as a self-belief in an individual in the perceived capability to organize and execute tasks necessary to achieve successful outcomes [1]. Similarly, teacher efficacy can be described as "the confidence teachers hold about their individual and collective capability to influence student learning" [11]; which is significant for student achievement [9], attitudes towards curriculum innovation [7], and beliefs regarding coping with teaching changes [16].

2.3 The EFL context in Iran

In Iranian schools English is taught as a foreign language officially beginning from the initial year of junior high school over the course of 3 years, this continues for another 3 years in the senior classes and likewise or extra year at the pre-university level. Commonly, they have three hours a week for English class. The present EFL books at school are CLT based. As a result, the orientation is in favor of a mixture of grammar-translation and audiolingual methods in large number of schools [6]. According to the Ministry of Education's instructions, the Iranian curriculum is mostly top-down and product-oriented and is monitored by "educational groups" at various organizational levels. Iranian EFL students rarely come into contact with English outside of their classes. A greater breakthrough in English language learning has been lured by technological advancement, people's increased use of satellites and the Internet, and the quick development of societal interest in them in private language schools in Iran. Additionally, the demand for and popularity of teaching communicative languages (CLT) is expanding. The use of language for various purposes and to convey important information is a fundamental tenet of CLT. EFL instructors who wish to instruct CLT must be fluent in English. To communicate with students of other languages, EFL instructors must use functional English skills.

3. Method

Research and correlational research approaches were used in the current investigation. In order to determine the effectiveness of English language high school teachers and how communication affects what is referred to as "English competency," we used a descriptive correlational methodology. To conduct the study, 40 Iranian Persian-speaking high school teachers were selected. This sample consisted of 21 female and 19 male teachers from the province of Yazd and Esfahan. The teachers ranged from 27 to 62 years. Their teaching

experience ranged from one to twenty years. No one amongst the instructors had traveled or studies in an English proficient nation. 29 had bachelor's degrees in TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language), English literature, or translation, while another eleven were in-service teachers pursuing a master's in TEFL. To choose a sample from the population, convenience sampling was employed. In this study, we used two questionnaires: one to gauge teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness in teaching English, and the other to gauge teachers' self-reported English language skills. Participants in both surveys grade themselves on a Likert-style scale and indicate how well they can handle each issue on a scale that is provided. A Persian translation followed (Farsi). Making sure that the participants comprehend the survey's components is the goal. In order to gauge the instructors' sense of efficacy (or confidence) in teaching English, the 12-item condensed version of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk was prepared for this section. Hoy was changed [17]. The TSES items are a Likert scale from one to five. Participants chose how much they could do with each item. Score 1 indicates that the respondent cannot do

anything about the submitted statement. Ranking five shows that participants can do a lot about the statement.

4. Result

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on self-efficacy for managing the classroom, engaging students, and teaching techniques. The means of the three subscales demonstrated that EFL instructors in Iran had more effective teaching methods (= 4.26) than they did for managing the class (= 4.17) and engaging students communicatively (= 4.02). This implies that EFL teachers ranked employing effective teaching methods as being more important than managing their classes and motivating students to learn English. The interaction subscale's items 1 and 4 have the lowest mean values, as can be seen in the table above. The previously listed items are pertinent to students' attitudes toward and motivation for learning English. Teachers discover that their capacity to influence students' motivations or attitudes about the advantages of studying English is not as strong as their capacity to improve descriptions (item 10) and control problematic behavior (item 7).

Table 1- Iranian EFL Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Items of efficacy subscales	Mean*	SD
Efficacy for student engagement		
1. What can you do to inspire kids who don't seem motivated to learn English?	3.92	0.62
2. What can you do to ensure that every student enjoys English class?	4.07	0.65
3. What can you do to encourage kids to think they can succeed in English?	4.20	0.72
4. What can you do to help students understand the potential advantages of studying English?	3.92	0.76
Total	4.02	0.52
Efficacy for class management		
5. How much can you do to maintain high attendance in your English class?	4.30	0.68
6. How much can you do to get students to turn in assignments or papers promptly?	4.27	0.78
7. How much can you do to calm down a student who is noisy or uncooperative in your English class?		
8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	4.02	0.88
Total	4.17	0.54
Efficacy for instructional strategies		
9. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies in your English class?	4.00	0.98
10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when your students are confused?	4.47	0.59
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	4.30	0.64

12. How well can you implement alternative instructional strategies when a certain strategy does not work?	4.20	0.68
Total	4.26	0.53

The averages and standard deviations for each of the 12 EFL instructor English proficiency tests are shown in Table 2 below. Iranian EFL instructors are more proficient in speaking (=4, 2) and reading (=4, 3) and less proficient in writing (=3.9) and listening comprehension (=3, 6). The highest score (=4.47) for item 3—"I feel comfortable using English as the language of instruction in my English class—indicates that teachers feel comfortable using English for teaching drives. Teachers assessed themselves as incapable of utilizing methods to continue conversation for the second item (I know the necessary strategies to maintain a discussion with an

English speaker), presumably due to their strategic talents. Additionally, they believed that the process of writing a short essay more feasible. But business and personal letters were believed to be more challenging. It reflects a high academic orientation towards learning and teaching English in the EFL context. Teachers rated themselves as having the lowest listening skills. In order to understand English speakers, it is especially helpful to watch English news and English movies without subtitles and to use common idioms in conversation.

Table 2-Iranian EFL Teachers' Self-Reported English Proficiency

Items of English proficiency subscales	Mean*	SD
1. In face-to-face interaction with an English speaker, I can participate in a conversation at a normal speed.	4.12	0.59
2. I know the necessary strategies to help maintain a conversation with an English speaker.	4.05	0.71
3. I feel comfortable using English as the language of instruction in my English class.	4.47	0.84
4. I can watch English news (for example, CNN) and/or English films without subtitles.	3.52	0.96

5. I understand the meaning of common idiomatic expressions used by English speakers.	3.37	0.74
6. I can understand when two native English speakers talk at a normal speed.	3.92	0.82
7. I can understand English magazines, newspapers, and popular novels.	4.37	0.58
8. I can draw inferences/conclusions from what I read in English.	4.32	0.61
9. I can figure out the meaning of unknown words in English from context.	4.15	0.73
10. I can easily write business and personal letters in English and can always find the right words to convey what I want to say.	3.65 4.02	0.76 0.86
11. I can fill in different kinds of application forms in English such as a bank account application.		
12. I can write a short essay in English on a topic of my knowledge.	4.32	0.69

English skills

Speaking	4.2	0.54
Listening	3.6	0.70
Reading	4.29	0.51
Writing	3.99	0.60

Descriptive statistics on EFL teachers' self-reported teaching strategy use are shown in Table 3. In this section 10 items were included, 5 were about grammar (1, 2, 3, 6, and 8), and 5 were about communication. Here the participants' overriding orientation towards communication-based instructional strategies was high (= 3.87) in comparison with their self-reported use of grammar-oriented activities (= 2.48). Memorizing new vocabulary (item number 2) and translating sentences (item number 3) are seen to be the lesser employed activities, and relying on metalinguistic descriptions of

complex sentences (item number 6) had the highest use of grammar-related activity. Similar to communication-oriented teaching strategies (item 9, = 4.17), creating real-world problem-solving situations (presenting real-life situations to students and asking them to find appropriate answers or answers in English for these situations). = 4.07) received the highest average. In contrast, the use of original English-language films by EFL teachers or the incorporation of video-mediated language learning in the classroom was considered the least commonly used strategy (item 7, =2.77). .

Table 3 -Iranian EFL Teachers' Use of Pedagogical Strategies

Items of pedagogical strategies subscales Mean* SD

1. I use students' native language rather than English to explain terms or concepts that are difficult to understand.	2.47	1.06
2. I ask students to memorize new vocabulary or phrases without showing them how to use the words in context.		
3. As a classroom exercise, I ask students to translate single sentences in the English text into their native language.	1.82	0.95
	2.00	1.19

4. I offer students the chance to form groups and talk about the solutions to problem-solving exercises.	4.10	0.9
5. I ask students to respond to questions about conversations between native English speakers on the audiotapes that I play.	3.97	1.32
6. I help students understand difficult English sentences by using grammatical rules.	3.27	1.19
7. I show English movies and videos in class and encourage debate among the participants.	2.77	1.29
8. Rather than how well kids speak English, I place greater emphasis on their ability to construct grammatically sound phrases.	2.85	0.92
9. I encourage students to use English outside of class by asking them to have conversations with one another in that language.	4.17	01.10
10. I offer actual scenarios to the students and ask them to come up with comments or solutions that are suitable for the circumstances in English.	4.07	01.04
Strategy subscales		

Grammatically-oriented 2.48 0.65
Communicatively-oriented 3.87 0.80

To ascertain the relationship between EFL teachers' self-reported English proficiency across all four abilities and their perceived English competence, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used. The correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' self-reported English ability in the areas of hearing, speaking, reading, and writing and their self-efficacy regarding student interactive involvement, class management, and teaching tactics was found to be as follows: (Table 4). Positive. Teachers' perceived classroom management effectiveness and speaking abilities ($r = 0.31$), self-efficacy in teaching tactics, and self-reported listening, speaking, and writing abilities ($r = 0.30, 0.39, \text{ and } 0.39$, respectively) were all statistically significant. These results indicate that the higher proficient the Iranian EFL teachers believed they are in the areas of speaking, the higher their perception of efficiency for management; additionally, more competent teachers are more confident in their listening, speaking, and writing skills. More adept at creating strategies for teaching languages. There was no significant correlation between instructors' reading ability and their self-efficacy subscales. Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of their abilities to engage students in successful language learning activities and their English proficiency varied significantly across all four of the study's four skills assessments. This was in line with teachers' unfavorable assessments of changes in students' motivation to learn English (Table 3). As shown in Table 4, we calculated Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients to look at how instructors' self-efficacy subscales and the usage of communicative and grammatical teaching styles correlated.

Table 4-Self-Efficacy Subscales and Proficiency + Pedagogical Strategies Subscales

Variables	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	GOS	COS	
Engagement		0.23	0.15	0.19	0.13	-0.04	0.37*
Management		0.31*	0.20	0.20	0.18	-0.08	0.25
Instructional strategies		0.39*	0.30*	0.22	0.38*	0.19	0.30*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) GOS=Grammatically Oriented Strategies COS=Communicatively Oriented Strategies

This study found a significant positive correlation between the instructors' self-efficacy subscales and their use of communicative language teaching strategies (i.e., students' interactive involvement, class management, and instructional modalities). However, a negative association among teachers' self-efficacy for engagement and handling and the employment of high grammar approaches though considering the statistics it was not statistically significant. The utilization of communication-focused methods and instructors' perceptions of their effectiveness in engaging pupils were positively correlated ($r = 0.37$). Additionally, self-efficacy ($r = 0.30$) in using didactic and communication-focused tactics. These results indicate that her EFL teachers in Iran with stronger self-efficacy were more likely to use communication-oriented strategies as well as lower probability to employ grammatical-oriented approaches. .

5. Discussion

Investigating the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and other factors added to the existing literature since the perceived competency of foreign language teachers generally, EFL teachers in particular are an under-researched area. Additionally, the relationship between language proficiency and EFL teachers' sense of self-efficacy has been successfully researched in the present literature. According to Ghaith and Shaaban, teachers are crucial change agents, and the efficacy of their application of educational practice should be considered. The research's conclusions make recommendations for programs that promote teacher professional development [8]. To preserve or improve teachers' sense of efficacy, school administrators should create intervention programs. Since language competency and instructors' sense of self-efficacy are related, it is recommended that EFL teachers take English improvement classes to maintain or improve their language proficiency. EFL teachers must be well prepared in all four skills in order to use the language effectively and motivate students to learn English.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that high school EFL teachers in Iran were more efficient in teaching approaches

compared to handling the class and attracting students interactively. This indicates that EFL teachers are failing to inspire and motivate their students to learn English and lead classes, but they excel in using effective teaching strategies. An examination of correlations revealed a substantial relationship between the perceived English competence of EFL teachers and their efficacy as teachers. The findings of this study on the connection between English proficiency and perceived effectiveness are consistent with those of other studies in the field of teaching English as a second language in this regard. Particularly among participants whose educational backgrounds are similar to their own. The more the instructors believed they are competent in language skills, the higher efficiency the present. This findings obtained varies from some studies results, which showed that in teachers' instructional activities, the focus was mainly on grammar.

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Conflict of interest

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Ethics statement

None

Reference

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