CURRENT EFL PRACTICES IN KAZAKHSTAN: TEACHERS' SENSE OF PROFESSIONAL SELF-EFFICACY

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Abstract

Self-efficacy has received a great deal of attention in EFL literature. The article sheds light on self-efficacy theoretical framework and some prominent investigations of the last few decades. Focusing on the factors that influence self-efficacy, findings continue swelling the ranks of controversy results and require primary research in Kazakhstani context.

Key words: self-efficacy, factors, gender, teaching experience, proficiency level.

INTRODUCTION

XXI century successful EFL (English as a Foreign Language hereafter) teachers have to manifest high degree of professional competence so that their students gain a great deal of knowledge, which can be applied successfully after graduation. High self-perceived efficacy is one of substantial attributes. Bandura (1993, p. 2) defines self-efficacy (SE hereafter) as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence...”
ence over events that affect their lives”. In other words, if a teacher is confident in his/her abilities concerning professional duties, it affects instructional behaviour.

Seeking and gaining insight into teachers’ self-perceptions and beliefs are of great importance, because teachers are responsible for both teaching and learning processes (Jia et al., 2006). Teachers’ professional SE is tightly related to significant educational outcomes for teachers: success, dedication, persistence, passion, enthusiasm, commitment, and instructional behavior (Caprara et al., 2006; Sridhar, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Moreover, students’ motivation, achievement, and confidence positively correlate with teachers’ SE as well (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Johnson, 1992).

Having drawn from Bandura’s framework, existing articles on professional sense of SE and its factors suggest controversial findings. In other words, some of them allege that there is a great impact of teacher’s mastery experience (Karimvand, 2011; Oh, 2010); some consider gender to be crucial (Andersen, 2010; Coloradi, 1992; Nejati et al., 2014); some sought an answer in language proficiency (Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Jafarigohar & Ganjabi, 2012; Johnson, 1992); others discovered a strong influence of age, anxiety, contextual factors, personality traits, motivation, institution of work (Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2009; Huangfu, 2012; Rahimi & Asadollahi, 2012), etc. Therefore, the absence of commonly agreed answer makes the present secondary research, which aims to identify the factors that impact foreign language teachers’ SE, more meaningful and momentous.

Being aware of the fact that self-efficacy is vastly concerned educational psychology, the focus has been on EFL / English as a Second Language (ESL) literature. And the following research questions were guiding the study: 1) What factors influence EFL teachers’ sense of teaching practices? 2) How can SE be improved?

**WHAT IS SELF-EFFICACY**

SE was constructed by a Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977. He defined it as ‘the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes’ (Bandura, 1977, p. 192). The notion is based on Bandura’s (1977, 1993) social cognitive theory, which addresses human functioning and contributes to the idea that people can control their behavior. Since then, a great number of scholars across disciplines have conducted studies within this theoretical framework.

Later Dembo and Gibson (1985) proposed their interpretation of SE as ‘the extent to which teachers believe they can affect student learning’. And in 1993 Bandura extended his preceding definition to ‘people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives’ (p. 119). Eight years later the creators of Teachers’ SE Scale (TSES hereafter) Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001, p. 783 as cited in Karimi, 2011, p. 50) described SE as ‘judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated’.

In general, teachers’ beliefs of how they are able to motivate and promote learning affect the learning environment and outcomes. That is because perceived SE has a great impact on cognitive development and functioning. In fact, Bandura (1977, 1993) identifies four major processes involved, namely, motivational, cognitive, affective, and selection. He also suggests that four major sources develop people’s SE, namely, mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and somatic and emotional state.

There are two major dimensions of teachers’ perceived efficacy discussed in literature on teacher’s SE: Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE) and General Teaching Efficacy (GTE) (Coladarci, 1992). PTE is defined as teachers’ beliefs about their own capability to manage students’ learning
process, whereas GTE refers to teachers’ beliefs about their capabilities to manage external factors that might affect students’ learning process.

**FACTORS THAT SHAPE SELF-EFFICACY**

**Teaching experience**

Bandura (1977, 1993) considers mastery experience to be the most important source of SE, because any success strengthens and any failure weakens it easily. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) confirmed his statement in their study. In addition, contextual factors like the teaching resources and interpersonal support were identified as important but to some degree. The fact that teachers usually tempt a great number of successful and unsuccessful experiences during their teaching career caused a lot of research about years of teaching experience and SE.

Some studies have indicated a positive correlation between teaching experience and SE. For instance, in a study conducted by Lin and Tsai (1999 as cited in Karimvrad, 2011), the experts and more experienced teachers had higher SE than novice teachers. Like their predecessors, Wolters and Daugherty (2007) uncovered that teachers in their first year of teaching reported significantly lower SE than their colleagues with more experience. However, some scholars like Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) conducted similar studies and found conflicting results: novice teachers reported high personal and professional efficacy.

**English Language Proficiency**

Native EFL teachers take innate advantage over nonnative ones in terms of language proficiency. Reves and Medgyes (1994) found that the lower nonnative teacher’s proficiency level in English was, the less self-conscious, hesitant, and insecure they felt in the classroom. Butler (2004) as well as Ghasemboland and Hashim (2013) discovered positive correlation between nonnative English EFL teachers’ language proficiency and their perceived efficacy.

Chacon (2005) sought any correlation between EFL middle school teachers’ SE in Venezuela and their self-reported English language proficiency along with pedagogical strategy. She uncovered positive relationship between the variables. Additionally, the findings showed no influence of SE over the choice of pedagogical strategies. In 2008 Eslami and Fatahi continued examining this factor in Iranian context. As Chacon (2005), the researchers discovered that the participants’ perceived SE was positively correlated with self-reported English proficiency. Moreover, the teachers with high sense of SE inclined to use more communicative-based pedagogical strategies. However, a study with another Iranian high school teachers revealed only a degree of correlation (Jafarigohar & Ganjabi, 2012).

**Gender**

Another factor put on verge of discussion is teachers’ gender. Some scholars (Cheung, 2006; Coladarci, 1992; Coladarci and Breton, 1997; Raudenbush et al., 1992; Ross, 1994 as cited in Nejati, 2014) have found that female teachers have higher self-efficacy in comparison with male ones. Nejati (2014) also pointed out that “Garvis (2009), Gencer and Cakiroglu (2007), Ghaith and Shaaban (1999), Hoy and Woolfolk (1993), Lee, Dedrick, and Smith (1991), Pajares (2002), Taimalu and Oim (2005), Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2002), Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), and Wilson and Tan (2004)” (p. 1222) had discovered that there is no nexus between teacher gender and SE. In other words, both genders have the same level of SE.

Referring to latest studies, Sridhar (2011) investigated whether teachers have different classroom management styles and their level of SE in terms of their gender. The results suggest that there is a great impact of teacher SE on classroom management indeed. Moreover, male teachers have higher levels on management than female ones. In contrast, Karimvand (2011), exploring the main effects of years of teaching experience, gender, and their effects on Iranian EFL teachers’ SE, discovered that the female teachers were
found to have markedly higher SE than the male subjects. As opposed to Sridhar’s (2011) findings, in their quantitative study Abu-Tineh et al. (2011) discovered that Jordanian both male and female teachers practice the instructional classroom management style more than other management styles. Hence, it suggests that teacher efficacy is correlated significantly with classroom management styles in reality and there is no deviation in teacher gender choice.

Exploring classroom management orientations and their relationship with teachers’ individual differences and contextual variables, Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012) discovered that they were not connected to teachers’ experience, age, gender, and school type but to educational level. However, Andersen (2010) points out that Danish female teachers perceive themselves as more efficient professionals, they are more satisfied than male teachers. Therefore, he concludes that the gender difference in part explains this phenomenon.

Other Factors
In addition, a few more factors were identified by researchers. For instance, Oh (2011) investigated several potential sources of pre-service teachers’ sense of professional SE before and after taking literacy methods course. The results revealed that teachers’ teaching efficacy increased in the three subscales by the end of the literacy method courses. Moreover, it was discovered that pre-service teachers’ abilities, personality, and motivation were one of the important factors to improve their teaching SE. Overall, the study confirmed the results of previous research studies in the field (Poulou, 2007; Yeung & Watkins, 2000 as cited in Oh, 2011).

Goker (2006) investigated how peer coaching influenced EFL pre-service teachers’ SE and instructional skills in Northern Cyprus and discovered that peer coaching improved pre-service teachers’ SE greatly. Furthermore, back in 1988 Smylie (Coladarci, 1992) detected that interactions with colleagues about teaching behavior positively reflected to SE. Similar results were obtained by Hoy and Woolfolk (1990 as cited in Eslami&Fatahi, 2008). It is obvious that experiential activities like teaching practicum, developmental conferences, supervising, etc. have a significant impact on pre-service and in-service teachers’ professional SE. Moreover, the findings confirm Bandura’s (1977, 1993) and Tschanne-Moran and Hoy’s (2007) claim about mastery experiences to be the most important ones in increasing SE.

Merc (2015) studied the impact of the level of language teaching anxiety experienced by pre-service EFL teachers and their language teaching SE beliefs. The findings indicated participants’ low level of anxiety and high level of perceived SE. Moreover, Merc (2015) claimed sort of relationship between components of anxiety and SE beliefs.

HOW TO IMPROVE SELF-EFFICACY
After over 20 years of research, a vastly influential psychologist Badnura (1997) came up with a manual on how to refine and control one’s self-efficacy. According to him, it can be achieved through “compelling feedback that forcefully disrupts the preexisting disbelief in one’s capabilities” (p. 82). Therefore, Karimi (2011) aimed to find out whether professional development would be compelling enough to change previous beliefs of Iranian university EFL instructors about their teaching SE. A case study results revealed significant difference between controlled group and treatment group after 16-session course of professional development. As mastery experience was found to be the most potent which novice teachers lack, Tschanne-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) propose other sources of self-efficacy such as contextual ones to be paid more attention in pre-service teachers’ early preparation for teaching practices.

CONCLUSION
Every day teaching practices are strewn with challenges, setbacks, successes and
failures, impediments, and frustrations. Therefore, EFL teachers have to have a steering sense of professional SE to overcome any difficulties and continue being perseverant. Eslami and Fatahi (2008) allege ‘knowing the perceptions and beliefs of teachers enables one to make predictions about teaching and assessment practices in classrooms’ (p. 2). It urges need to investigate the factors shaping teachers’ SE and develop refining actions plan if needed.

Teachers with high levels of SE are more satisfied with their job, they are ambitious, determined, flexible, and keep calm when they face setbacks (Caprara et al., 2006). Moreover, the latters are more confident in their teaching skills and have more positive attitudes toward teaching (Sridhar, 2011). Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2011) have also discovered that there is a positive correlation between teachers’ pedagogical success and SE beliefs.

What is more, the results of Chacon’s (2005) study also showed that teachers’ SE significantly contributed to the prediction of teachers’ motivational teaching behaviors. Additionally, more successful classroom management strategies and instructional styles were discovered to be used by teachers with high perceptions of SE (Abu-Tineh, 2011). Dembo and Gibson (1985) discovered that teachers with high sense of professional SE provide students with more academic learning, help weak students succeed, and give them encouraging feedback. However, teachers with low sense of professional SE devote more classroom time on non-academic activities, give up quickly on students who do not understand materials, and criticize them. Therefore, confident about their instructional behavior teachers create exceptional conditions and learning experience for students; whereas self-doubting colleagues build discouraging environment, which negatively influences students’ cognitive development.

Since very contradicting proofs and little conclusive evidence – especially in Kazakhstan – are available on the vital factors shaping SE, the current study may initiate primary research to inform EFL pedagogy. It is known that English proficiency is an important educational requirement in Kazakhstan, which can be met with the help of competent and highly efficacious EFL teachers. In addition, it is estimated that the findings of the primary study may increase the awareness of local EFL teachers concerning their professional strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently, they will refine their instructional behaviour and learners’ SE accordingly. In a broader sense, the findings may contribute to implications for theoretical and practical issues of pre-service teachers’ training programs and teaching practices in general.

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