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EFL Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs: Impacts of Gender, Experience, and Educational Background

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Abstract

In recent years the notion of teachers' professional development has featured regularly in the field of second language teaching and received great attention as a result of concerns for teacher education, particularly factors affecting teacher's principled pragmatism in the postmethod era. One such factor functioning as the focus of this study is teacher efficacy. Using Dellinger, Bobbett, Olivier, and Ellett's (2008) *Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs System-Self Form* (TEBS-Self) (consisting of the six sub-scales of communication/clarification, management/climate, accommodating individual differences, motivation of students, managing learning routines, and higher order thinking skills), this study investigated the relationship between EFL teachers' expectation of their efficacy and the three teacher variables of gender, years of experience in EFL teaching, and relatedness of their education to ELT. As many as 59 EFL teachers were administered the TEBS-Self. Results showed that the three selected teacher characteristics did not affect teachers' evaluation of their efficacy. The findings

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imply that teachers need reflective teaching practice to develop a good understanding of their efficacy.

Keywords: Postmethod; Principled Pragmatism; Self-efficacy Belief; Teacher Education; Teacher Efficacy

Background

Teachers' Professionalism in the Postmethod Era

Teachers' professional development has attracted the attention of applied linguists and L2 researchers for a few decades. Researchers have investigated a wide range of topics relevant to such development, including teachers' handling of the demands of teaching tasks, their impact on students' learning, and their role in improving the learning condition. As a result, the literature has documented several personal and contextual variables that influence teacher professional development, such as reflective practice (Coro, 2004; Farrell, 2004, 2007; Richards, 1990; Richards & Farrell, 2005), teacher education programs and communities of practice (Mule, 2006; Sim, 2006), and materials writing (Kiely, 1996; Taylor, 1992). Farrell (2004, 2007) considered professional development to be affected by conscious and systematic reflective practice. Focusing on critical reflection, Coro (2004) found some connection between such reflection and more professionally informed teaching practice. The theme of Kiely's (1996) study was the role of writing materials in the professional development of teacher trainers. Sim (2006) focused on the preparation of teachers for professional experiences through incorporating pre-service teachers as communities of practice. Among teachers' individual variables, as Ghaith and Shaaban (1999) discussed, are gender and previous teaching experience. This concern for teacher development is compatible with the shift of emphasis in applied linguistics, over the past two decades, away from teacher training to teacher education. Holding a dynamic view of teacher professional development, teacher education has brought with it a focus on teachers' reflective teaching and their self-assessment of their capabilities.

Along with the contributions from the teacher education approach to teacher professionalism, the rise of the postmethod paradigm (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008) has made teachers' qualifications and personality features the center of interest to many teacher educators. Postmethod is based on the premise that teachers' autonomy enables them to dispense with theorizers and

empowers them to theorize from their own practice and practice what they have theorized. Apparently, contrary to the learner-centered nature of CLT, this redirection toward the prominent role of teachers in ELT highlighted the need for research on teachers' autonomy and reflective practice, one aspect of which is their perception of their self-efficacy.

Through the use of reflective models, teachers are required to be competent practitioners who can directly solve their learners' problems and make crucial decisions related to their students' learning outcomes. In other words, language teacher profession has become aware of the centrality of teacher's roles in learners' success. Despite arguments against the blind welcoming of postmethod in general (Bell, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2005a, 2005b; Liu, 1995; Tajeddin, 2005) and the misinterpretations of reflection in particular (Akbari, 2007), the idea of reflection is valuable because it gives practitioners a stronger sense of autonomy and authority to make decisions in the classroom instead of waiting for applied linguists as to what can or cannot be done. Biggs and Tang (2007) believe that wise and effective teaching is not, however, simply a matter of applying general principles of teaching according to rules; they need to be tailored to each teacher's own personal strengths and teaching context. It follows that good teachers have willingness to collect student feedback on their teaching in order to understand where and how their teaching might be improved. Expert teachers continually reflect on how they might teach even better. Research in the field of teacher efficacy can be regarded as one of the sub-branches of research on the reflective approach to teachers' professional development because whether a teacher thinks he/she is efficacious or not is a starting point for being reflective.

Teacher Self-efficacy

Teacher efficacy has grown from Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. He defined self-efficacy as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Teacher efficacy, sometimes called teaching efficacy, refers to teachers' belief about their ability to influence students' learning outcomes. Teacher efficacy is considered a future-oriented motivational construct that mirrors teachers' competence beliefs for teaching tasks.

The construct of teacher efficacy has become a main objective in the investigation of teachers' beliefs. The resounding interest in this construct is rooted in its continued predictive and rational power in research on teachers and teaching. Teachers' beliefs in their ability to perform tasks related to teaching have been and continue to be intertwined with such variables as student achievement (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978), student motivation (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), teachers' valuing of educational innovations (Cousins & Walker, 2000), classroom management skills (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990), and teacher stress (Greenwood, Olejnik, & Parkay, 1990).

Teachers' sense of efficacy or their judgments about their abilities to promote students' learning was identified over two decades ago as one of the few teacher characteristics associated with student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Teacher's sense of efficacy appears to be a powerful belief that affects teaching and learning, teacher educators, administrators, and policy makers.

The role of self-efficacy in teaching and learning is one of the constant interests of researchers and practitioners. In order to be effective, teachers need more than content and pedagogy knowledge. Teachers' beliefs about their own teaching capabilities and professional practice have a powerful influence on their teaching effectiveness. Many researchers have defined teacher efficacy (Eren, 2009; Klassen et al., 2009; Wong, 2005), but most of efficacy researchers have preferred to draw on an oft-quoted definition, stating that it is "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplishing a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). Another definition, proposed by Guskey and Passaro (1998, cited in Brouwers & Tomic, 2000, p. 240), is "teachers' belief or convictions that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated." Knoblauch and Woolfolk Hoy (2008) contend that a teacher's sense of efficacy can be viewed as the self-efficacy belief directed toward a teaching context and that it is grounded within social cognitive theory. These efficacy beliefs have been shown to powerfully predict the choice of task, effort, persistence, and the level of success achieved (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). A growing body of empirical research substantiates Bandura's (1977) theory that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs would be related to the effort teachers invest in

teaching, the goal they set, their persistence when things do not go smoothly, and their resilience in the face of setbacks (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of self-efficacy beliefs as an assessment of one's capabilities to attain a desired level of performance in a given endeavor. He argued that belief in one's abilities was a powerful drive influencing motivation to act, the effort put forth in the endeavor, and the persistence of coping mechanisms in the face of obstacles. Self-efficacy theory, applied in the education realm, has inspired a lot of researchers into how teachers' self-efficacy beliefs affect their actions and the outcomes they achieve (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). According to social cognitive theory, teachers who do not expect to be successful with certain students are likely to put less effort in preparation and delivery of instruction, and to give up easily at the first sign of difficulty, even if they actually know of strategies that could assist these students if applied.

Self-efficacy beliefs constitute a dynamic personal factor that, as Bandura (1997) states, is crucial to human agency or our ability to act. Self-efficacy beliefs are believed to mediate relationships between knowledge and behaviors while interacting within environmental contexts. Bandura (1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3) or a personal belief that one is able to do what it takes to accomplish a task at a particular level of quality. Efficacy beliefs are not considered a stable character of an individual; rather, they are an active and learned system of beliefs held in context (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, efficacy beliefs can change and vary depending upon the context and specificity of tasks. In the context of schools, as Dellinger et al. (2008) define, the concept of teacher self-efficacy beliefs refers to "teacher's individual beliefs in their capabilities to perform specific teaching tasks at a specified level of quality in a specified situation" (p. 2). This definition was used for the first time to develop Teachers' Efficacy Belief System-Self (TEBS-Self).

Factors Affecting Teacher Self-efficacy

Teacher efficacy has been shown to be related to a number of important issues, including selected teacher characteristics (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999), the amount of teaching experience in in-service and prospective teachers (Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias, 2007), the influence of contextual factors (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy,

2008), burnout (Akbari & Karimi Alvar, 2007; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007), teachers' predictions of student success (Tournaki & Podell, 2005), self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007), and the strength of teachers' efficacy beliefs (Egel, 2009).

Many researchers have examined the way a teacher's sense of efficacy changes across contexts and even form one subject or group of students to the next. School context effects, such as organizational structure and climate, principal leadership, and collective efficacy have also been examined. Ross, Cousins, and Gadalla (1996) conducted a study in which secondary school teachers were asked to respond to the single-item Rand measure of personal teaching efficacy for each of the classes they taught. Analysis showed significant variance within teachers across the different classes they taught. Teachers' level of personal teaching efficacy depended upon the subject matter and the particular group of students they worked with in each period. The teacher sense of efficacy is also related to some school variables like the climate of school, behavior of the principal, sense of school community, and decision making structure. For example, Moore and Esselman (1992, cited in Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 14) found that teachers who felt they had a greater influence in school-based decision making and perceived fewer impediments to teaching had a strong sense of personal teaching efficacy.

In addition to school structure and climate, some researchers have begun to examine collective efficacy at the school level, i.e. the extent to which perceptions of efficacy, either high or low, are shared across teachers in a school building (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Schools in which teachers work together to find ways to address the learning, motivation, and behavior problems of their students are likely to enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy. As Bandura (1995) discusses, "In collectively oriented systems, people work together to produce the benefits they seek. Group pursuits are no less demanding of personal efficacy than are individual pursuits" (p. 34). Bandura argues that the strength of families or any social institutions lies partly in its members' sense of collective efficacy that they can solve the problems they face and improve their lives through unity. Therefore, the same idea is true for school as a social institute and teachers as its members. The collective efficacy of schools appears to act in powerful ways.

Research Questions

Data are thin on the ground as to the relationship between self-efficacy and teacher characteristics. The principal aim of this study was to investigate how significantly the components of teacher efficacy were related to three selected teacher characteristic: gender, years of experience in ELT, and field of education.

In order to address the aims described above, the following research questions were raised:

1. Does teachers' gender affect their self-efficacy beliefs?
2. Does teachers' educational background affect their self-efficacy beliefs?
3. Does teachers' teaching experience affect their self-efficacy beliefs?

Method

To investigate the research questions, the research methodology below was adopted to select participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Participants

The participants who took part in this study were EFL teachers. As many as 59 teachers took part, 28 of whom were female and 31 were male. The range of their experience of teaching English as a foreign language was between one to more than 5 years (Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency distribution of teachers by gender and teaching experience

	Number	**gender**		**Teaching experience (in years)**		
		female	**male**	**3<**	**3-5**	**5>**
Teachers	59	28	31	6	12	41

Teachers who took part in this study were graduates of different fields of study, holding different degrees as it is shown in Table 2. Fields of study that were considered related to language studies were English translation, teaching English,

teacher training, linguistics, and French. Others teachers, the non-L2 group, were high school graduates or had studied non-language courses such as different branches of engineering. One of the participants did not specify their field of study; hence the frequency distribution below applies to 58 teachers.

Table 2
Frequency distribution of teachers by degree and major

	No.	Degree				Major	
		Diploma/ Associate	B.A.	M.A.	Ph.D.	L2-related	Non-L2
Teachers	58	4	41	11	2	34	25

Instruments

This study used the questionnaire called *Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs System-Self Form* (TEBS-Self), which is the most recent measure of teacher's self-efficacy belief according to the latest study done by Dellinger et al. (2008). This measure assesses teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, or teachers' individual beliefs, about their own abilities to successfully perform specific teaching- and learning-related tasks within the context of their own classroom. The instrument was developed in the US context, but as Dellinger et al. state, "it is useful to an international audience" (2007, p. 1). The TEBS-Self accurately reflects Bandura's (1977) original definition of self-efficacy.

According to Dellinger et al. (2008), three issues must be addressed if a measure of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs is to improve the past and current state of assessment in this area. First, the measure should clearly and precisely reflect the meaning of self-efficacy. Second, the measure should assess teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the context which the beliefs are shaped. Third, the specific tasks selected for the measure should be meaningful. They endeavored to fill this gap in other instruments by developing the TEBS-Self.

The TEBS-Self subsumes 31 items, which are categorized in six sub-scales of communication/clarification, management/climate, accommodating individual differences, motivation of students, managing learning routines, and higher-order thinking skills. This instrument uses a four-point scale, consisting of the following:

1=very weak belief in my capabilities, 2=moderate belief in my capabilities, 3= strong belief in my capabilities, and 4=very strong belief in my capabilities.

The researchers changed the format of the TEBS-Self to make it more comprehensible to participants and to remove difficulty that participants might have in choosing the answers. In this regard, two modifications were deemed appropriate. First, the questionnaire was translated into Persian so that all teachers, either novice or experienced, could fill it out without any comprehension problem. The TEBS-Self was translated by the researchers and reviewed by eight experts. Their comments were considered carefully and then the Persian version of the TEBS-Self was finalized. Second, the original questionnaire (TEBS-Self) was a four-point scale, but the researchers changed it to a five-point scale in order not to have skewedness in terms of positive and negative directions in the scale. As a result of the latter modification, the scale in the new version included: 1=very little, 2=little, 3=average, 4=often, 5=very often. The Persian version of the TEBS-Self included questions about teachers' demographic characteristics such as their gender, their experience of teaching English as foreign language (less than one year, one to three year(s), three to five years, and more than five years), and their field of education.

After modifications and changes were made, the reliability of the questionnaire was measured, using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. The reliability of the total questionnaire was 0.89 and the reliability of each item was acceptable (all were above 0.80). Then, following Dellinger et al.'s (2008) original version of the TEBS-Self, the 31-item questionnaire was divided into the six sub-scales, with some of the items falling within two or more categories. Table 3 shows the items related to each sub-scale.

Table 3
Items related to each sub-scale of the TEBS-Self

Sub-scales	No. of Items	Items
communication/clarification	9	5,10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23
management/climate	10	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 24, 30, 31
accommodating individual differences	7	1, 2, 12, 13, 14, 27, 28
motivation of students	3	26, 29, 30
managing learning routines	3	3, 4, 5
higher-order thinking skills	4	19, 20, 21, 25

Data Collection and Analysis

At first, the questionnaires were administered to the teachers at the different branches of a language institute. As many as 59 questionnaires were distributed and 59 were collected back, so there were no missing data.

For data analysis, the teachers' responses to the items of the questionnaires were fed into SPPS (version 15). In addition to descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment correlation, Independent-Samples *t*-test, and one-way ANOVA were the analytical methods to analyze the data. An Independent-Samples *t*-test was used to investigate the effect of teachers' gender and field of education on their self-efficacy. One-way ANOVA was employed to explore the relationship between teacher efficacy and the variable having more than two dimensional values, i.e. teaching experience. It was used to investigate the impact of teachers' years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language on their efficacy.

Results

The participants' scores on the TEBS-Self were analyzed, using descriptive and inferential statistics. This section presents the findings along with the discussion about the relationship between teacher efficacy and some of teacher characteristics.

Teacher Efficacy and Gender

The first research question concerned the effect of gender on teachers' efficacy. As Table 4 shows, the means of efficacy for male and female participants were rather high, ranging from 3.71 to 4.28. Male teachers reported stronger efficacy beliefs than female teachers. This stronger perception was found to apply to all sub-scales of efficacy. Male teachers' efficacy perception was strongest for "motivation of students" (M=4.28, SD=.57) and weakest for "accommodating individual differences" (M=3.86, SD=.62). Female teachers scored highest on "management/climate" (M=4.04, SD=.40) and lowest on "managing learning routines" (M=3.71, SD=.49).

Table 4
Descriptive statistics for teacher efficacy in terms of gender

Gender / Efficacy	Female (F) N= 28		Male (M) N= 31		Direction of mean differences
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
communication/ clarification	3.90	.43	4.10	.40	F<M
management/ climate	4.04	.40	4.24	.37	F<M
accommodating individual differences	3.80	.47	3.86	.62	F<M
motivation of students	3.96	.55	4.28	.57	F<M
managing learning routines	3.71	.49	3.93	.57	F<M
higher-order thinking skills	3.87	.52	4.11	.59	F<M

To investigate the statistical differences in efficacy in terms of gender, an Independent-Samples *t*-test was run. Table 5 presents the results of the differences. Based on the table, there were no significant differences in teachers' efficacy belief in terms of gender except for "motivation of student," where male teachers' efficacy perception was significantly stronger than that of female teachers (t=2.133, df=57, p<.05).

Table 5
Independent-Samples *t*-test for the effect of gender on teacher efficacy

Efficacy			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
communication/clarification	1.798	57	.078
management/climate	1.987	57	.052
accommodating individual differences	.445	57	.658
motivation of students	2.133	57	.037*
managing learning routines	1.578	57	.120
higher-order thinking skills	1.633	57	.108

Teacher Efficacy and Educational Background

The descriptive statistics on the effect of educational background on teacher efficacy, as presented in Table 6, show that the teachers with an L2-related educational background had a stronger belief than the non-L2 teachers in four efficacy sub-scales and a weaker one in the two efficacy sub-scales of "motivation of students" and "higher order thinking skills." The L2-related teachers had the strongest belief in their "management/climate" (M=4.19, SD=.38) and the weakest in their "accommodating individual differences"/"managing learning routines" (M=3.85, SD=.49). In the non-L2 group, the strongest and weakest perceptions were related to "motivation of students" (M=4.18, SD=.58) and "accommodating individual differences"/"managing learning routines" (M=3.84, SD=.63/.60), respectively.

Table 6
Descriptive statistics for teacher efficacy in terms of educational background

Field of study / Teacher efficacy	L2-related (L) N=33		Non-L2 (N) N=25		Direction of mean differences
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
communication/clarification	4.06	.40	3.96	.45	L>N
management/climate	4.19	.38	4.12	.40	L>N
accommodating individual differences	3.85	.49	3.84	.63	L>N
motivation of students	4.08	.59	4.18	.58	L<N
managing learning routines	3.85	.49	3.84	.60	L>N
higher-order thinking skills	4.00	0.61	4.05	0.63	L<N

To investigate the statistical significance of differences in efficacy by educational background, an Independent-Samples *t*-test was computed. Despite the stronger belief of ELT-related teachers in their efficacy in four subscales, the *t* values in Table 7 show that no difference reached statistical significance. It can be concluded that educational background did not significantly affect any of the components constituting teachers' efficacy.

Table 7
Independent-Samples *t*-test for the effect of educational background on teacher efficacy

Efficacy			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
communication/clarification	.795	56	.430
management/climate	.667	56	.508
accommodating individual differences	.086	56	.932
motivation of students	.675	56	.502
managing learning routines	.059	56	.953
higher-order thinking skills	.420	56	.676

Teacher Efficacy and Teaching Experience

To investigate the effect of teaching experience on teacher efficacy, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. According to descriptive statistics (Table 8), teachers with different professional experience reported a high level of efficacy. Although the more experience teachers generally reported a higher level of efficacy, the increase in efficacy as a function of professional experience did not proceed in a linear mode. While teachers with 1-3 years of teaching experience demonstrated a stronger confidence in their efficacy, the trend, by and large, underwent a downward movement with 3-5 years of experience and again experienced an increasing proportion with more than 5 years of experience.

Table 8
Descriptive statistics for teacher efficacy in terms of teaching experience

Experience / Efficacy	3< N=6		3-4 N=12		5> N=41	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
communication/clarification	3.79	.59	3.78	.43	4.10	.36
management/climate	3.95	.54	4.05	.31	4.21	.39
accommodating individual differences	3.35	.727	3.66	.51	3.95	.50
motivation of students	4.05	.71	4.00	.47	4.18	.60
managing learning routines	3.61	0.49	3.77	.65	3.87	.52
higher-order thinking skills	3.91	.54	3.93	.67	4.03	0.54

To explore the statistical differences in efficacy in terms of teaching experience, a one-way ANOVA was employed. As depicted in Table 9, differences were found as to sub-scale 1 ("communication/clarification") ($F=3.701$, $df=2$, $p<.05$) and sub-scale 3 ("accommodating individual differences") ($F=4.057$, $df=2$, $p<.05$). These results indicate that professional experience partially affected the strength of teacher efficacy in light of teaching experience.

Table 9
One-way ANOVA for the effect of teaching experience on teacher efficacy

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sub-scale 1	Between Groups	99.19	2	49.59	3.701	.031*
	Within Groups	75.53	56	13.40		
	Total	849.72	58			
Sub-scale 2	Between Groups	48.68	2	24.34	1.553	.221
	Within Groups	878.02	56	15.67		
	Total	926.71	58			
Sub-scale 3	Between Groups	112.58	2	56.29	4.057	.023*
	Within Groups	777.04	56	13.87		
	Total	889.62	58			
Sub-scale 4	Between Groups	3.00	2	1.50	.481	.621
	Within Groups	175.02	56	3.12		
	Total	178.03	58			
Sub-scale 5	Between Groups	3.734	2	1.86	.692	.505
	Within Groups	151.10	56	2.69		
	Total	154.74	58			
Sub-scale 6	Between Groups	2.036	2	1.01	.192	.826
	Within Groups	295.97	56	5.28		
	Total	298.00	58			

*$p<.05$

To determine the location of the difference in the two sub-scales where the F value was significant, a post-hoc analysis was used through the Tukey test. As seen in Table 10, teaching experience affected overall teacher efficacy belief in sub-scale 1, without the source of the difference located. However, the application of the Tukey test to sub-scale 3 showed that the teachers who had more than 5 years of teaching experience had a stronger belief in their "accommodating individual differences" than those with less than 3-year teaching experience.

Table 10
The post-hoc Tukey test for efficacy differences by teaching experience

Dependent Variable	Experience		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Sub-scale 1	3<	3-5	.08	1.830	.999
		5>	2.76	1.600	.205
	3-5	3<	.08	1.830	.999
		5>	2.84	1.202	.055
	5>	3<	2.76	1.600	.205
		3-5	2.84	1.202	.055
Sub-scale 3	3<	3-5	2.17	1.863	.480
		5>	4.18	1.628	.034*
	3-5	3<	2.17	1.863	.480
		5>	2.02	1.223	.234
	5>	3<	4.18	1.628	.034*
		3-5	2.02	1.223	.234

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between teacher efficacy and three teacher characteristics, i.e. gender, years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language, and field of study.

The findings showed only marginal gender differences in nearly all aspects of efficacy in favor of male teachers; however, statistically speaking, male teachers had a stronger efficacy belief as to one efficacy component: "motivation of students." The findings indicate that efficacy belief is a general construct underpinning both male and female teachers' professional career. One reason might be that all teachers, irrespective of gender, think they are good at what they are doing as a language teacher, as evident in their most positive responses to the questionnaire items about their efficacy. Consequently, gender is not a significant factor in operation. This lack of significant gender differences is compatible with findings in various aspects of L2 learning, such as learning strategies and motivation, which showed differences in only certain components of these learner variables rather than learning strategies and motivation in general. In particular, the findings from this study lend support to the previous research into efficacy in which no significant gender differences were found (see Gencer & Cakiroglu,

2007; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Gencer and Cakiroglu deem the lack of gender difference promising in that gender is not a source of bias in effective classroom management. Despite the absence of general difference in efficacy, male teachers in this study expressed a statistically stronger belief in their ability to motivate students. The difference may be the result of the male teachers' perception that they have more authority to inspire in learners a desire to learn English.

The second purpose of this study was to investigate efficacy differences in terms of educational background. The findings showed differences, albeit statistically non-significant. However, there were non-significant results which were mixed in their directions. Lack of efficacy differences in general, despite variation in teachers' educational background, ran counter to our expectation of stronger efficacy beliefs of language-related teachers. One possible explanation is that teachers with language backgrounds have a better understanding of their efficacy, and hence do not tend to overestimate their efficacy. As to the components of efficacy, the teachers with language-related backgrounds held stronger, though non-significant, beliefs in three components of efficacy, while those with no academic language education had a stronger belief in their 'motivation of students" and "higher-order thinking skills." The outperformance of the latter group in these two components somewhat stands to reason. As non-language teachers are less familiar with the complicated nature of L2 motivation, they may overrate their ability to raise L2 learners' motivation. As regards the component of "higher-order thinking skills," it seems that higher-order thinking is not totally entrenched in language education. As some of the non-language teachers had an educational background in engineering, they considered themselves capable of involving learners in constituents of higher-order skills such as critical thinking. As a result, they manifested a strong belief than the teachers with a language education background.

The final purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between efficacy and teaching experience. Although the more experienced teachers consistently manifested stronger beliefs in their efficacy than the less experienced ones, the findings showed significantly stronger beliefs of more experienced teachers in two out of the six sub-scales of efficacy: communication/clarification and accommodating individual differences. The lack of significant difference in most of the sub-scales is in line with three argumentations in the literature dealing with

non-significant efficacy differences. One argument, as Guo, Piasta, Justice, and Kaderavek (2010) put it, is that the teachers who have been in the field come to notice that they have an insufficient knowledge about current approaches. Due to this noticing, they are more aware of their professional knowledge and hence hold a more realistic perception of their ability. Second, as Guo et al. further argue, efficacy is a future-oriented judgment intertwined with perceptions of competence rather than actual competence or realized abilities. As a result, in efficacy reports, the divergence between more and less experienced teachers declined. Third, less experience teachers overestimate their efficacy since they want to show that they are up-to-date teachers and effective teachers. This overestimation of efficacy is acknowledged in the literature. As Donaghue (2003) points out, teachers have a subconscious or conscious tendency to promote their efficacy-related image. The non-significant relationship found in this study as to more than half of the efficacy components is largely compatible with the previous studies which found no or even negative correlation between efficacy and teaching experience (e.g., Brown & Gibson, 1982; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007; Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999; Guo et al., 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

On the other hand, this study revealed that more experienced teachers had a significantly stronger belief in their "communication/clarification" and "accommodating individual differences." An in-depth consideration of the sub-scales of efficacy indicates that the two are the most-complicated, experience-related efficacy sub-scales. As a consequence, it is quite reasonable these two components differentiate more experienced from less experienced teachers. Communication is the efficacy component encompassing 9 items which involve clarification of learning routines and student misunderstanding, providing feedback, offering students suggestions for learning, and so on. Such a sub-scale is necessarily affected by teaching experience. The sub-scale of "accommodating individual differences" was the other efficacy component for which more experienced teachers reported a stronger belief. Like the "communication" component, this component is deeply rooted in and shaped by practice in the course of teaching experience. The ability to accommodate learners' differences through planning activities and evaluation, to consider various cognitive levels, and to adapt the teaching pace based on individual differences emerges out of years of language teaching practice.

To conclude, gender and educational background are, to a very small degree, the sources of differences in teacher efficacy beliefs. The fact that male teachers reported a strong belief, though non-significant, in all aspects of efficacy components suggests that gender, as in many other areas of language learning and teaching, is the variable leading to variation. However, the fact that the variation did not reach statistical significance indicates that teacher efficacy is not strongly gender oriented and that efficacy belief, which is a significant concept in teacher education and professional development, is shared by both male and females teachers in the Iranian context. Lack of differences despite background education, however, is not a favorable result. That a background in language did not lead to a better efficacy image might suggest that language education per se is not advantageous. There might also be a competing, alternative suggestion: teachers with no language background overrate their efficacy, so they need to gain a more accurate understanding of their efficacy through teacher education workshops and discussion sessions.

Teaching experience was found to be the teacher characteristic having the greatest impact on teachers' perceptions of their efficacy. This suggests that, among the three teacher variables, experience is the most fundamental. The consistently stronger perception of efficacy, particularly regarding communication and accommodating individual differences, is evidence of efficacy as a belief deeply rooted in teaching experience and functioning as a more effective variable than the demographic variable of gender and the educational variable of language education. The significant effect of the two efficacy sub-scales of communication and accommodating differences supports the conclusion that these two components comparatively need more teaching experience to shape. In fact, teaching experience is needed for a stronger belief in one's ability to deal with the complicated issue of individual learner differences and to communicate content knowledge to L2 learners. By contrast, the non-significant relationship between teaching experience and the other four components of efficacy, which are similarly connected with teaching experience, might be the result of less experienced teachers' overestimation. One important solution to this overestimation of efficacy is to make ELT teachers more reflective in four respects: pedagogical, curricular, personal/professional, and critical. Pedagogical reflection is concerned with the technical aspects of how to teach. "What am I teaching?" is the basic question of curricular reflection. Personal characteristics will influence the personal reflection and the notion of critical reflections begin with the "why" questions. These four

categories of reflection may help teachers develop a more accurate perception of their efficacy.

The findings and insights from the present investigation encompass suggestions for research and implications for teacher education. First, the only instrument which was used in this study was a questionnaire. Researchers should consider the point that a self-report questionnaire is not sufficient to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher efficacy. Therefore, supervisors and heads of language institutes shouldn't use only the questionnaire as a measurement instrument. Other tools, such as regular observations, interviews with teachers, and recording sessions of teaching, can help substantiate the findings. Second, reflective teaching should be considered to be very more important. Making teachers aware of their teaching practice can improve their perception of their real efficacy. As LaBoskey (1994) argues, teachers must be thoughtful students of their own practice, rather than followers of prescriptions or routines.

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