Rezaeian, S., & Abdollahzadeh, E. (2020). Teacher efficacy and its correlates in the EFL context of Iran: The role of age, experience, and gender. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET), 7*(4). 1533-1548.

http://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/788

Received: 14.11.2019
Received in revised form: 04.05.2020
Accepted: 14.05.2020

TEACHER EFFICACY AND ITS CORRELATES IN THE EFL CONTEXT OF IRAN: THE ROLE OF AGE, EXPERIENCE, AND GENDER

Research Article

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Abstract

Teacher efficacy is a context and culture-specific construct. The current study explored the two types of teacher efficacy (individual and collective teacher efficacy) among Iranian English language instructors. Moreover, this study was an attempt to discover whether age, gender, and experience can significantly influence perceptions of collective and self-teacher self-efficacy. Data were collected from 130 English language instructors through Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and Goddard's (2002) Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale questionnaires. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) showed no significant difference between the English instructors' collective teacher efficacy and teacher self-efficacy and their respective subscales. Furthermore, the results indicated no meaningful differences in perception among teachers with different age, experience, and gender levels across all the subscales of collective teacher efficacy or teacher self-efficacy. We conclude that efficacy beliefs seem to be resistant to change once established and may not change significantly with age, experience and gender.

Keywords: Teacher-efficacy, Self-efficacy, EFL, Collective teacher efficacy

1. Introduction

Self-related perceptions have been of interest for personality and social psychology researchers (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). In general, terms such as 'self-concept', 'self-esteem', 'self-worth', and 'self-efficacy' fall under the umbrella term of "self-referent thought", or alternatively "self-perception" (Shavelon, Hubner & Stanton (1976 cited in Bong & Skaalvik, 2003); that is, different ways of thinking about and perceiving the self.

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's judgement and estimation about one's ability to reach a specific goal. Bandura (1997) described self-efficacy as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). In sum, self-efficacy is usually considered as a belief about one's level of competence in a particular future situation (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998), and it is looked at as a motivational construct which, according to Tschannen-Moran, et al. (1998) is the result of one's perceptions, not necessarily one's competence.

Teachers' self-efficacy (TSE), or their "belief or conviction that they can influence students' learning, even those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, p. 4), has been consistently researched for over 40 years now (Klassen, Tze, Betts& , Gordon,

2010). Teacher self-efficacy influences "the efforts teachers put into teaching, the goals they set, and their level of aspiration" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk & Hoy, 1998: 19). Efficacious teachers demonstrate more planning and organization (Allinder, 1994). As Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) argue "greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which leads to better performance, which in turn leads to greater efficacy" (p. 234).

Teacher efficacy is context-specific, i.e. a highly efficacious public high-school English teacher might feel very inefficacious teaching English in private language institutes. Although more experienced teachers rely on their memories and interpretations of their past experiences, the novice teachers frequently analyze the teaching task (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Therefore, if one wants to make judgment of teachers' efficacy, teaching task and its context should be accounted for.

Competent and effective teachers can enhance students' feelings towards their own selves and improve their outcomes (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Chacon, 2005). Such teacher efficacy studies not only have the potential to improve and enrich language teaching in different instructional environments, but also can provide more interesting and effective avenues for teacher development programs in educating efficacious teachers.

Barcelos, Ghaith, and Shaaban (1999) explored the relationship between teacher characteristics (e.g., gender, experience, and grade level taught), and teacher efficacy. Experience and personal efficacy were found to be negatively related to teaching concerns perceptions while factors such as gender, grade level taught, and general efficacy were not correlated to the categories of teaching concerns. Their study revealed that personal and general teaching efficacy were not related internally while the categories of teaching concerns were related internally and this suggested that personal and general efficacy represent two different indices that should to be measured separately(Ashton & Webb,1986, Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997, Gibson & Dembo,1984; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990. They found that novice teachers and those with low efficacy were more concerned about both the teaching task and their impact in comparison with their more experienced and efficacious counterparts. Both gender and teaching level (e.g., teaching at elementary or intermediate level) were not related to the perception of teaching efficacy. Contrarily, Pigge and Marso (1994) reported that female teachers in elementary schools of America had higher teaching concerns compared to the male secondary school teacher counterparts.

The research reported above contributes to general perceptions of L2 teachers and students of certain aspects of teaching and learning. Some of these variables such as gender (Pigge & Marso, 1994), previous school experiences (Ryan, 2007), and overall experience were the chief ones (Silvia, 2003). However, many questions still remain such as how EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious behavior varies and which similar or different beliefs exists between male and female teachers. The observed male-dominancy of instructors in Iranian academic context particularly at post-graduate level, occupational distribution, and workplace earnings prompted the researchers to probe this issue in the EFL context of Iran. The current literature shows that teacher efficacy improvements can lead to more job satisfaction, feelings of competence, and thus decrease burnout (Dixon et al., 2014; Sariçam & Sakiz, 2014). Furthermore, Eells's (2011) meta-analysis of studies on educational achievement and collective efficacy showed that the beliefs teachers hold about school performance in general are "strongly and positively associated with student achievement across subject areas and in multiple locations" (p. 110).

Moreover, teachers' perceptions of their own self-capability are vital to student learning (e.g., Armor et al., 1976; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Ross, 1992, cited in Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), teaching enthusiasm and clarity (Tschannen-Moran et al, 1998), innovation

willingness (Berman, et al., 1977; Guskey, 1984; Smylie, 1988), stress level of teachers (Parkay, et al. 1988; Greenwood, et al., 1990), and teacher willingness to stay or leave the profession (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982).

More recently, researchers have shown that as well as individual teacher efficacy, collective teacher efficacy is positively related to differences of student performance at schools (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000). Goddard and Goddard (2001) refer to some factors as correlates of collective teacher efficacy. Some based on the related literature are as follows: consultation openness to educational issues (DeForest & Hughes, 1992) positive attitudes to reform of education (DeMesquita & Drake, 1994; Guskey, 1988; Smylie, 1988), teacher satisfaction (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991), and increase in the extent of parental involvement in schooling (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992, 1987).

The available literature attaches considerable importance to teacher efficacy and its correlates (Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Despite the plethora of research on different aspects of English instructors' self-efficacy, the literature is still scant with regard to the role of sociodemographic factors (age, race, ethnicity, and experience) in enhancing or decreasing teachers' sense of efficacy. This study investigates the impact of gender, teachers' level of experience, and age level on EFL university instructors' general teaching efficacy. There is scarcity of studies in the EFL context of Iran on the impact of personal and contextual variables on teachers' efficacy perception, classroom management, and teacher professional development. Efficacy studies not only have the potential to improve and enrich language teaching in Iran, but can also provide input for interesting and effective ways of teacher development programs with an emphasis on educating efficacious teachers. This study examined the following questions:

1. Is there any meaningful differences between male and female EFL instructors in their self and collective teacher efficacy perceptions and their respective subscales?

2. Is there any meaningful differences between high and low-experience EFL instructors in their perception of teacher self and collective efficacy and their subscales?

3. Is there any meaningful differences between higher and lower age EFL instructors in their perceptions of teacher self and collective efficacy and their subscales?

2. Background

2.1. Teacher Self-efficacy and Its Subscales

Teacher efficacy construct is mainly derived from Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997). Within educational arenas, it mainly refers to teachers' belief in their ability to positively influence students' intended learning outcomes (Tschannen-Moran et al, 1998). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), following Armor et al. (1976 cited in Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) and Bandura (1997), define teacher efficacy as teachers' judgement of their capabilities to produce intended learning outcomes stemming from student engagement and learning among unmotivated or difficult students. Abdollahzadeh and Rezaeian (2011) investigated the relationship between collective teacher efficacy, teacher self-efficacy and its components in the EFL context of Iran and found that none of the collective efficacy subscales was a stronger predictor of university teachers' self-efficacy.

2.2. Collective Teacher Efficacy and Its Domains

Self-efficacy perceptions and beliefs of teachers about the collective capability of a school or faculty has been a key concern for many researchers. Obviously, teaching occurs in a context. Teachers should work together conjointly to change students' lives. Thus, it is important to consider the social context of the school in teacher efficacy studies. As Goddard

at al. (2004) observed, collective teacher efficacy is "an emergent group-level attribute – the product of the interactive dynamics of the group members" (p.483). Put it another way, collective efficacy is not only the sum of individual characteristics and attributes, but "the groups' shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477).

Collective efficacy differs from individual teacher efficacy because it is not the sum of individual competency. Hence, what matters for collective teacher efficacy is to what extent teachers perceive the whole faculty as successful. The collective efficacy framework employed in this research is Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) model of teacher efficacy. Attainment expectations in this model depend on two collective teacher efficacy domains known as teaching task analysis and group competence assessment. Of note is the point that separation of these two domains is difficult because are they occur simultaneously (Goddard, 2002).

Many correlates of teacher efficacy pertain when various efficacy measurements and scales are taken into account. Not only is teacher efficacy related to teacher behavior, but it relates to students' efficacy perception (Anderson et al., 1988) and achievement as well (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989).

Compared to teacher self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy is a less explored domain. As Bandura (1997) states "although perceived collective efficacy is widely recognized to be highly important to a full understanding of organizational functioning, it has been the subject of little research in schools" (p. 468, cited in Goddard & Goddard, 2001). One of the earliest efficacy studies by Bandura (1993, cited in Goddard & Goddard, 2001) showed that collective efficacy and school-level achievement are significantly and positively related.

2.3. Sources of Efficacy

Bandura (1997) mentioned four information sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, arousal of physiology or emotion, vicarious experience, and social persuasion. The review of the studies on the sources of efficacy beliefs indicates that the most powerful source among these four is mastery experiences. According to Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007), mastery or enactive experiences are the sense of satisfaction obtained through one's past teaching successes. Mastery experiences are important for strengthening not only self-efficacy but also collective efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001).

The other way of altering efficacy beliefs, i.e. physiological and emotional arousal, is "to enhance physical status, reduce stress and negative emotional proclivities, and correct misinterpretations of bodily states" (Bandura, 1997, p.4). That is, the circumstances, the history of person and the overall arousal level are determining factors in the interpretation of increased perspiration, trembling hands or increased heart rate (Bandura, 1997 cited in Tschannen – Moran et al., 1998).

Since teaching is performance-based, the belief in one's ability to teach a particular subject and/or to teach well in general, may be affected by years of teaching experience. Teachers' mastery experiences along with variables such as student achievement, and student engagement have been reported to be associated with teacher self-efficacy (Malmberg et al., 2014). In the same vein, in this research we investigate the difference between perceived teacher efficacy of the high-experienced and low-experienced EFL instructors. Moreover, the age of the participants is also investigated to probe the effect of vicarious experience on the perceived teacher efficacy.

2.4. Socio-demographic Factors and Teacher-Efficacy: Role of Gender, Experience, and Age

Gender studies in this regard involve the distinction the teachers' sex may make in their instructional method(s), interaction types with their learners, and even evaluations of their own teaching performance (Pigge & Marso, 1994; Verhoeven, 1997).

Betz and Hackett (1981) found that girls do as well academically as boys but have lower perceived self-efficacy. While progress has been made in recent decades, it is clear that gender differences in academic fields of study, occupational distribution and workplace earnings persist (Blau & Kahn, 2000). Previous research has shown conflicting results about women professors' teaching behaviors and ratings The studies of teaching behaviors and ratings of women professors revealed conflicting results. Regarding classroom interaction approaches of teachers, Canada and Pringle (1995) postulated that male and female teachers negotiated differently in mixed and single-sex classrooms. They observed that "female-led, mixed-sex classes were more professor-driven and were less student-driven than were male-led, mixed-classes" (p.177), and in all-female classes, the female professors behave more male-like and the male professors behave more female-like" (p.178). On the other hand, the results of other studies on the probable effects of gender on self-efficacy have shown no significant difference between teachers (either male or female) in their evaluation of their sense of self-efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2010).They attributed lack of significant difference to culture-specific personality dispositions. Oettingen (1995 cited in Bandura, 1997) analyzed the dimensions of cultural diversity and their impact on the information sources of self-efficacy in different contexts. The results pointed to the societal institutions' power, which in some cultural ways, modify different sources of self-efficacy information in different aspects such as prevalence, form, and evaluation.

For Vieluf, Kunter and Vijver (2013, p.96), national cultures could influence teacher self-efficacy in the following ways:

1. The basic structure of the construct may be culturally contingent, which would imply that behaviors and beliefs associated with teacher self-efficacy would vary across cultures and that there is no basis for comparing the construct across nations.

2. The strength of associations with educational processes and outcomes may vary, which would suggest that the psychological and practical relevance of the construct varies across countries.

3. Cross-national differences in average teacher self-efficacy could reflect genuine cross-national differences as well as differences in self-presentational norms.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), the strongest source of efficacy perceptions of novice teachers is verbal persuasion, while mastery experience is the obvious efficacy source of experienced teachers.

Reviewing the related literature on the effect of age on efficacy perceptions show negative to positive effects of age on efficacy. Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2009) found age is positively related to higher self-efficacy, while studies by Edward and Robinson (2012, cited in Lesha, 2017), and Smit & Bosscher (1998), revealed that younger teachers had greater self-efficacy beliefs. On the other hand, Bandura (1995) stated that age is not related to self-efficacy although efficacy beliefs vary during everyone's life spans. Moreover, Jenks (2004, cited in Lesha, 2017), Hicks (2012, cited in Lesha, 2017) and Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007), found no significant relationships between age and self-efficacy.

This study is bound within the national culture of Iran. Therefore, the researchers in this study probed the potential difference between Iranian male and female English university instructors to see if growth in professional knowledge and commitment to teaching and increased competence can affect the efficacy beliefs of male and female instructors differently.

2.5. Teacher Efficacy in TESOL

In the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages), research on teacher efficacy usually emerges from cultures of English language teaching places. Chacon's (2005) study showed that teachers' perception of efficacy had a significant correlation with teachers' English proficiency reported by themselves, and that efficacy of teachers for instructional strategies was higher compared to management and engagement efficacy levels among EFL teachers in Venezuelan middle schools. "Diversity of professional activities teachers engage in, average number of students per class, working position, type of institution, and gender were the socio-demographic factors that predicted variations in EFL teachers' efficacy in Turkey" (Yavuz, 2007 p.1). Eslami and Fatahi (2008, p.2) found "the more efficacious the teachers felt, the more inclined they were to use communicative-based strategies" in Iran. Lee's (2009) research showed that oral English language use and attitude of Korean English teachers were influencing teachers' sense of efficacy highlighting context-specificity of teacher efficacy (p.69).

3. Method

3.1. Participants

130 male and female university instructors of English from all over Iran voluntarily participated in the study. Their teaching experience at Iranian universities ranged from 1 to 35 years. They were selected from a mix of state and private universities. The whole sample was split into low experience (with less than 3 years of teaching experience) and high experience instructors (with more than 3 years experience). Their age varied from23 to 60 with a mean age of 36 (see Table 1).

Table1**.** *Participant distribution in terms of age, gender, and experience*

Age		Experience		Gender	
Higher	Lower	High	Low	Female	Male
N 64	66	61	69	41	89

They were contacted either by email or through personal contact, and they all volunteered to participate. They were also assured about their anonymity and their details and responses will be kept confidential and only used for research purposes.

3.2. Instrumentation

Two instruments, i.e. Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), originally developed by Schannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001), and the Collective Teacher Efficacy Instrument (CTEI) developed by Goddard (2002) were used. The responses to both questionnaire items were on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 9 (*great amount*) showing the instructors' extent of agreement with an item. The TSES questionnaire included 12 items on different aspects of teacher efficacy and the CTEI included 10 items on different collective teacher efficacy dimensions. The CTES questionnaire was designed based on a social cognitive model. In their attempt to develop a measure of collective efficacy, Goddard, et al. (2001) chose a group orientation for the items in the collective efficacy scale. Goddard, et al.'s model of

CTEI items were developed in such a manner that both group competence (GC) and task analysis (TA) teachers were considered in their efficacy assessments.

3.3. Procedure

This research essentially employed a survey methodology. To assess the teachers' perceptions of their colleagues' efficacy (i.e. collective efficacy), the 12-item scale of CTES was used. As Goddard. (2002, p. 107) found, "the 12-item scale compared to the earlier 21-item scale was more theoretically pure, and these two were found to be highly correlated (r = .983, p<.001), suggesting that little change resulted from the omission of almost 43% of the items". The items in the questionnaires were on a 9-point scale so that the probability of the answers could be increased (Bandura, 1997). As Bandura (cited in Siwatu, 2005, p.44) contends, "including too few steps loses differentiating information because people who use the same response category would differ if immediate steps were included". Some minor modifications were made to the CTES in order to make it more compatible with the target situation. For example, the item, "The lack of instructional materials and supplies in this school makes learning very difficult", was replaced with "Learning at my university is more difficult because of students' worries about their exams". These changes were minimal; therefore, the conceptual structure of the questionnaire and its validity were kept intact. The final version of the questionnaire was checked by three applied linguistics researchers and their comments as to the intelligibility, format, and item classification were sought.

To measure teacher's perceptions of their self-efficacy, the short version of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) developed by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk (2001) was used. This questionnaire was further developed and modified by Chacón (2005) to fit the ELT context of Iran. TSES consisted of 12 items on a 9-point scale.

The two questionnaires tapping teacher self-efficacy and teacher collective efficacy scales were administered to 130 Iranian English instructors all over Iran. Initially, the instructors were contacted through email. The questionnaires were sent to those who expressed willingness to participate in the study. Those who participated were also sent valuable EFL textbooks and articles as a bonus.

The collected questionnaires were codified, and their data were entered into the SPSS Software (Version 19). Cronbach Alpha indicated reliability indices of .83 and 0.94 for the CTE and TSE questionnaires respectively. Then, EFL instructor's perceptions of different subscales of efficacy were analyzed and described. The missing item score was replaced with the item mean score. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to discover any significant difference between the English instructors' efficacy perceptions and their related subscales.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on different aspects of the EFL instructors' efficacy based on the instructors' responses.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics on EFL instructors' self-efficacy*

Construct	Mean	SD
Student Engagement	27.14	5.01
Classroom. Management	29.40	4.49
Instructional Strategies	28.56	4.87
Sum of Collective Efficacy	48.33	8.26
Task analysis	24.48	5.39
Teaching Competence	23.71	5.05

A detailed descriptive statistics of higher and lower age instructors' performance on different constructs of the questionnaires is presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the mean scores were very close between the two age groups.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics higher and lower age EFL instructors' efficacy*

	Age level	Mean	SD	N
Total collective efficacy (TCE)	higher	48.28	8.60	64
	lower	48.43	7.09	66
TCE group competence	higher	23.98	5.05	64
	lower	23.82	4.95	66
TCE task analysis	higher	24.30	5.22	64
	lower	24.61	4.32	66
Total self-efficacy (TSE)	higher	84.46	13.52	64
	lower	86.39	11.03	66
TSE student engagement	higher	26.52	5.54	64
	lower	27.83	4.80	66
TSE class management	higher	28.94	5.05	64
	lower	29.89	3.80	66
TSE instruction strategy	higher	28.91	4.99	64
	lower	28.67	4.37	66

Similarly, descriptive statistics of higher and lower experience instructors' performance (see Table 4) show rather close mean performances across both groups.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics on high / low experience EFL instructors' self-efficacy*

	Experience	Mean	SD	N
Total collective efficacy (TCE)	High	48.76	8.41	61
	Low	48.00	7.34	69
TCE group competence	High	23.71	5.11	61
	Low	24.07	4.89	69
TCE task analysis	High	25.05	4.87	61
	Low	23.94	4.65	69
Total self-efficacy (TSE)	High	86.49	11.69	61
	Low	84.51	12.84	69
TSE student engagement	High	27.28	5.26	61
	Low	27.10	5.19	69
TSE class management	High	30.20	3.81	61
	Low	28.74	4.91	69
TSE instruction strategy	High	29.02	4.67	61
	Low	28.58	4.69	69

A description of the male and female instructors' perceptions of teacher efficacy is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *Descriptive Statistics on male and female EFL Instructors' Self-efficacy*

	gender	Mean	SD	N
Total collective efficacy (TCE)	male	48.25	8.07	89
	female	48.59	7.41	41
TCE group competence	male	24.08	4.92	89
	female	23.51	5.14	41
TCE task analysis	male	24.17	4.77	89
	female	25.08	4.76	41
Total self-efficacy (TSE)	male	84.55	12.76	89
	female	87.37	11.19	41
TSE student engagement	male	26.69	5.24	89
	female	28.27	5	41
TSE class management	male	29.37	4.68	89
	female	29.54	4.044	41
TSE instruction strategy	male	28.49	4.85	89
	female	29.41	4.24	41

A comparison of the perceptions of instructors with different age, gender, and experience levels can help us discover any potentially significant differences in their perceptions. Accordingly, to answer the research questions of the study, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted (see Table 6).

Table 6. *MANOVA results on the impact of age, gender, and experience*

Source	*Dependent Variable*	*F*	*Sig.*	*Partial Eta Squared*
Corrected Model	total collective efficacy	.934	.611	.795
	total self efficacy	.997	.529	.806
Intercept	total collective efficacy	2076.870	.000	.988
	total self efficacy	2789.121	.000	.991
Age	total collective efficacy	.949	.552	.487
	total self efficacy	.745	.767	.427
Gender	total collective efficacy	.026	.873	.001
	total self efficacy	1.203	.283	.046
Experience	total collective efficacy	.830	.649	.361
	total self efficacy	1.004	.485	.406
Age * Gender	total collective efficacy	.796	.611	.203
	total self efficacy	.278	.967	.082
Age * Experience	total collective efficacy	.869	.652	.534
	total self efficacy	.997	.510	.568
Gender * Experience	total collective efficacy	.839	.513	.118
	total self efficacy	.809	.531	.115
Age * Gender * Experience	total collective efficacy	.026	.873	.000
	total self efficacy	1.203	.283	.000

No significant differences were found between teachers with higher and lower age levels in terms of their teacher efficacy and its related subscales (see Table 6). Similar results were also found for male and female teachers. That is, no meaningful differences in terms of self-efficacy between male and female teachers were found. Higher experience teachers were not significantly different in terms of their self-efficacy from lower experience teachers. Iranian TEFL instructors' self-efficacy beliefs seem to have firmed up and learned early and, in line with Bandura's (1997) assertion, that efficacy beliefs seem resistant to change once set.

Furthermore, potential patterns of interaction between each of the independent variables were also examined. However, no significant interactions were identified between age level and gender on the one hand, and between age level and experience on the other. Similarly, no meaningful interactions were found between gender and level of experience. Multiple interactions between age, experience, and gender were not found either.

As for the role of gender, reviewing the related literature suggested higher probability of greater teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy among male teachers. Nonetheless, contrary to our expectations, this was rejected, nor did we find significant differences between subscales of teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy. Lack of significant differences between male and female instructors' perceptions of efficacy for student engagement or classroom management goes against Chen and Thompson's (2003) study which showed Taiwanese female university instructors made more attempts to involve students in the classroom (having higher efficacy for student engagement), and male university instructors had a greater tendency to employ personalization in their classes (having higher efficacy for classroom management). Iranian female instructors of TEFL had more or less similar levels of efficacy as their male counterparts. This can refer to growth in both sex's professional knowledge and in their commitment to teaching and increasing their competence. This finding might challenge the view that with a growth in female student body in higher education, we might in the future be moving towards EFL contexts which undergo a process of feminization (Statham, Richardson & Cook, 1991, cited in Chen & Thompson, 2003). It should be noted, however, that this trend might not be the case in Iranian universities as at present a considerable proportion of Iranian EFL instructor population is male. However, it can be the case in the near future.

A significant difference between high and low experience instructors was expected in the second question as we hypothesized that one who remains in teaching must own higher teacher efficacy levels compared to those who quit teaching during their first few years of instruction. Accordingly, those remaining in the teaching profession can boost their perceptions of efficacy as a result of greater levels of mastery experiences. However, no such significant difference was observed. This finding corroborates studies which show a non-linear relationship between teacher efficacy and experience (e.g., Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997, Wolters & Daugherty, 2007) where teacher efficacy first "rises until mid-career and then drops" (Klassen & Chiu, 2010, p.186).

As for the third research question, contrary to our expectations, no significant difference was found between higher age and lower age EFL instructors with respect to their teacher efficacy and collective teacher efficacy and their respective subscales. The results do not support Bandura's physiological and emotional arousal as one of the sources of efficacy beliefs. Physiological and emotional states are instrumental in people's judgment of their capabilities Stress and tension are usually interpreted as signs of reactions to poor performance. We assumed that the older one gets the manner in which affective states are interpreted and perceived would change. However, the results of the study do not support this hypothesis when it comes to EFL instructors' perceptions of their teaching efficacy. Less is known, however, about age and teacher efficacy perceptions. Our findings that efficacy beliefs of experienced teachers do not easily change once established may explain that efficacy did go down with teaching experience and this is reflected in Woolfolk Hoy & Bruke Spero's study (2005).

Given the above findings, the answer to the three questions of the study is negative. Therefore, age level, experience level, and gender differences do not significantly affect the participants' perceptions of teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the role of the oft-cited variables of age, gender, and teaching experience and their impact on the teachers' perceptions of efficacy in the EFL context of Iran. This study was limited to the ELT instructors' perception following Bandura (1997) who repeatedly put emphasis on the context-specificity of this construct.

The results of this study revealed that gender, age, and experience do not significantly affect one's perception of teacher self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy or their respective subscales. Interestingly, gender effects in the literature on TSE are mixed. While Ross et al. (1996) found male teachers have a higher teacher self-efficacy, Coladarci (1992) found female teachers to be higher in it. Similarly, females reported higher teacher efficacy than males (Greenwood, Olejnick & Parkay, 1990; Lee, Buck & Midgley, 1992; Raudenbush et al., 1992), possibly because teaching is considered a female occupation (Apple & Jungck, 1992), but Malmberg et al. (2014) found no gender differences. The results challenge some previous research that female teachers generally illustrate a higher level of teacher self-efficacy (Apple & Jungck, 1990), but male teachers report higher classroom management efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Klassen and Chiu (2010) showed that female teachers tend to report lower TSE in cases of high workload stress and stress with student behavior. These contradictory results may indicate that teacher efficacy is greatly influenced by contextual and cultural factors. Further, similar to Pas et al. (2012), work experience and academic level had no influence on teacher self-efficacy

We can speculate that efficacy beliefs are shaped in one's mind regardless of age, gender or experience. Efficacy is a future-oriented judgment that deals with perception not actual competence. (Tschannen-Moran and Wolfolk Hoy, 2001). Naturally people overestimate or underestimate their actual capabilities, and these estimations consequently affect one's persuasion strategies and attempt to pursue their actions. This might imply that efficacy might be subject to other personal characteristics (e.g. personality type) beyond the variables of this study. This needs to be established in future research.

Further, our understanding of self-efficacy beliefs of teachers may be incomplete without accounting for environmental effects because, as explained, self-efficacy beliefs play a fundamental role embedded within an environment, and the social context of teaching cannot be ignored if teaching tasks are to be effective. In general, it is difficult to describe how such beliefs are shaped and sustained during the teaching career. On the other hand, as observed in this study, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, once set, are stable. Hence, teacher educators and school leaders need to provide the kinds of supports for pre-service and novice teachers that would result in the development of stronger and more resilient teacher efficacy perceptions. Future studies can focus on observations of instructor' classes, focusing on gender and experience of the instructors for the probable under/overestimations of efficacy perceptions.

In future, professional development programs can be developed to emphasize the awareness of efficacy beliefs among English teachers. Teacher training programs have shown to positively augment teacher's awareness of their potential inefficacies and a higher level of teacher self-efficacy (Kazempour & Sadler, 2015).

Reflection on efficacious teachers' expected standards and capacities could develop our understanding of teacher efficacy in EFL education. To determine the physiological and emotional arousal influences on teacher efficacy during the period of teachers' professional lives, longitudinal studies should follow. The results of this study were mainly based on teachers' rating of their perceptions on two questionnaires. Further triangulation studies

employing interviews, diaries, and/or journals can determine more specifically what factors influence teachers' performances rooted in their perceptions of efficacy.

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

7. Ethics Committee Approval

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country.

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