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The prospective English language teacher's reflections of self efficacy

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Abstract

According to research based on teacher efficacy, experiences during student teaching influence the development of teacher efficacy mastery and that the student teacher's mentor and cooperating teachers' role in their supervision also have a significant role in the development of their efficacy. The present study assessed teacher self-efficacy beliefs and the influences of the mentors and participating classroom teachers on their self efficacy among 67 undergraduate students in the final year of education in an English language teaching department at a faculty of education in Turkey.
The study addressed the following two questions: 1-Do the students feel that they are prepared to enter the teaching workforce in terms of efficacy? And 2- What are the major mentor feedback factors influencing and hindering the students' sense of self efficacy? These overarching questions framed the present research and provided an insight into the student teachers reflections of their teacher self-efficacy and the importance of their mentors and cooperating teachers role of feedback in the development of their efficacy.
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Introduction

Henson [1] in his teacher efficacy research has depicted the point that although the concept self-efficacy was theoretically founded more than 30 years ago in social cognitive theory and was developed by Bandura [2], in teacher efficacy there is still a need for much empirical work and model testing which will continue to advance this field. According to Henson [1] if teacher efficacy is a powerful predictive construct as it has been thought to be, then research based on the processes by which such efficacy is built is critical to fostering teacher efficacy and as a result changing behaviour. Based on this assumption, Henson [1] asks whether some mastery experiences are more salient than others and the types of sources of information which are the most effectual for pre-service teachers.

Previous research based on teacher efficacy, for example the research of Gorrell and Capron [3] has shown that experiences during student teaching influence the development of teacher efficacy mastery and that the student

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teacher's mentor and cooperating teachers' role in their supervision also have a significant role in the development of their efficacy.

In Turkey, universities in partnership with public schools have the responsibility to prepare and train teacher candidates. Here, students enrolled in teacher development programs have three compulsory courses relating to teacher training experience in both primary and secondary schools. These courses under the supervision of mentors provide detailed observation and hands on field experiences which give student teachers opportunities to perform micro-teaching and evaluate their teaching capabilities.

At Uludag University (UU), a university supervisor (mentor-1) from the Faculty of Education ELT department and classroom-based teachers (mentors-2) from the school districts participating are assigned to each student teacher. In order to increase and attract school districts participation UU also allocates funds to the schools participating. From each school, the school principal decides on two EFL classroom teachers capable of mentoring the student teachers, and these teachers are stipended.

The present study was motivated by Henson's [1] inquiries about teacher efficacy. This study attempts to investigate if the students who are to graduate from UU, Faculty of Education ELT department have a sense of self efficacy and tries to find out if their mentors are a source of giving effectual feedback.

Self-Efficacy and Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher education programs need to be effective in preparing their students as future teachers who believe that they are capable of applying their knowledge to influence and develop student learning. In terms of developing teacher efficacy in teacher education programs, Gorrell and Capron [3] emphasize that it is important to instil a sense of efficacy in those who are being prepared so as to ensure that they have the confidence to attempt to apply their knowledge when the appropriate time comes. The concepts' including the development of confidence in ones self and ones own ability to be able to teach effectively has become to be known as self-efficacy and teacher-efficacy.

Self efficacy is defined as the individual's beliefs about his/her abilities to perform a certain task or function at a designated level. Individuals with high self-efficacy are able to enhance their accomplishments and persevere in the face of setbacks and failures. Bandura [4] discovered that in contrast, people who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats and that they have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue.

Bandura's [4] research on self-efficacy theory suggests that there are four main sources of influence on people's beliefs about their efficacy. The first and the most effective way of creating a sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences. Bandura [4] says that successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy and that failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established. The second way is through vicarious experiences provided by social models. According to Bandura [4] seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required to succeed. The third way is by social persuasion. And finally, Bandura's [4] fourth way is the modifying of self-beliefs of efficacy to reduce people's stress reactions and alter their negative emotional proclivities and interpretations of their physical states.

Teacher efficacy is a concept stemming from the work of the social cognitive theorist Bandura. The last decades have witnessed debates relating to definitions and measurements of teacher-efficacy. Pajares [5] notes that construct relating to educational beliefs are broad and for research purposes have been refined into more specific sub-constructs. According to Albion [6] these examples include beliefs about confidence to affect students' performance (teacher efficacy), about the nature of knowledge (epistemological beliefs), about perceptions of self (self-concept) and about confidence to perform specific tasks (self-efficacy).

In its broadest sense, teacher efficacy is related to teachers' beliefs about their ability to influence student learning. More specifically, teacher efficacy has been defined by Ashton [4] as the teachers' beliefs in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning.

The Research

The Model of the Research

The research has a descriptive form to determine the self-efficacy and the sense of self-efficacy of the students at UU, Faculty of Education, ELT Department.

Scale and Sampling

The scale of the research is composed of a total of 67 undergraduate students in their final semester of the four years of education in the ELT department at UU Faculty of Education in the academic year of 2007-2008. The scoring system of this faculty is based on GPA where the overall score is 4.00. The sampling of this study constitutes of a total of 67 students- 32 students who have a GPA between 2.00 - 2.99 and 35 students who have a GPA of 3.00 – 4.00. All of the 67 students are graduates from Anatolian Teachers' High School.

Instruments for Data Collection

The students self efficacy beliefs were measured by two scales. Data collection was based on Hoy and Woolfolk's [8] short form of the "Teacher Efficacy Scale," and Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's [9] short form of the "Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale**".** The scales were used in order to measure student teacher candidates' self efficacy beliefs in teaching English. The "Teacher Efficacy Scale,**"** is comprised of 10 statements relating to 2 dimensions; 5 statements based on *Teaching Efficacy* (TE) and 5 statements based on *Personal Efficacy* (PE). The "Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale,**"** is comprised of 12 statements relating to 3 dimensions; 4 statements based on *Efficacy on Student Engagement* (ESE), 4 statements based on *Efficacy on Instructional Practices* (EIP), and 4 statements based on *Efficacy on Classroom Management* (ECM).

Information relating to the construct validity of the 10-item Teacher Efficacy Scale designed by Hoy and Woolfolk and implemented in the present study can be found in Hoy & Woolfolk [8]. The designers of the scale note that there are two independent factors: TE and PE. They also do not recommend combining the TE and PE scores to compute a total score because the TE and PE scales represent independent factor. For information on the construct validity of the "Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale,**"** see Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy [9]. The developers of this scale state that they consistently found three moderately correlated factors: ESE, EIP, and ECM.

Interviews represent qualitative results; this is the third source of data collection for the present study. 10 students randomly selected from the 2.00-2.99 GPA and 10 students randomly selected from the 3.00-4.00 GPA groups responded to the researcher's central questions based on their mentors and participating classroom teachers.

According to Hall et. al. [10] the role and responsibilities of mentor teachers are still misunderstood and because of this, the developments of mentoring self-efficacy instruments are hindered and there are not many validated instruments. Hall et.al. [10] have attempted to develop a mentoring self-efficacy instrument (MSEI).Their research indicated that the MSEI was only effective in measuring only one aspect of mentor teachers' self efficacy: feedback. Feedback was the aspect to have items with internal consistency reliability. The interview questions designed for the present study were inspired by the items on this instrument in the aspect of quality feedback. These items were structured for the mentors however; in the present study these six items were adapted for student teachers. The items are as follows:

- Do you have open lines of communication with your mentors?
- Do you think that your mentors provide appropriate feedback when conferencing with you?
- Do you think that your mentors are very effective in pointing out your weaknesses?
- Do you think that your mentors are a very good advocate for you when dealing with administrators, other teachers, and/or university personnel?
- When you have difficulty implementing a management plan, do you think that your mentor knows how to help you implement a plan?
- Do you think that your professional inadequacies can be overcome by the mentoring that you receive?

Student teachers in the short interviews were asked the above questions relating to the feedback they gained from their mentors. The interviews were taped and transcribed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gained from the two scales were analyzed using the STATISTICA program. Arithmetical mean and standard deviations were calculated for the variables. In order to determine the level of efficacy, an efficacy chart where there are minimum, average and maximum scores was calculated for each scale (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1 Chart of Teacher Efficacy Scale Scores Determining the Degrees of Efficacy

Level of Scores		Calculation	Interval	Degree
Minimum score	-Lower limit	6 x 1 = 6	0-6	Lowest level of efficacy
	- Upper limit	6 x 2 = 12	7-12	Low efficacy
Average score	- Upper limit	6 x 3 = 18	13-18	Moderate efficacy
Maximum score	-Lower limit	6 x 4 = 24	19-24	High efficacy
	- Upper limit	6 x 5 = 30	25-30	Highest level of efficacy

Table 2 Chart of Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale Determining the Degrees of Efficacy

Level of Scores		Calculation	Interval	Degree of sense
Minimum score		9 x 1 = 9	0-9	Not confident
Average score	- Lower limit	9 x 2 = 18	10-18	Somewhat confident
Average score	- Upper limit	9 x 3 = 27	19-27	Rather confident
Maximum score		9 x 4 = 36	27-36	Very confident

The qualitative data generated by the interviews after initial coding were focused coded through the identification and labeling of the same ideas expressed by the differing respondents. The reporting of this data is in the form of presenting repeating ideas which lead to major themes. Also a table is used to display the "yes", "no", and "sometimes" responses of the student teachers to the central questions addressed in the interviews.

Findings

In order to investigate whether there is any difference between the variables, the "t-test" in the $p<0.05$ was accepted as the value for the mean difference to be significant.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics on Teaching Efficacy

GPA	N	Mean	Std. D.	t	p	F-ratio	p var.
2.00-2.99	32	14.09375	4.423977				
3.00-4.00	35	14.88571	4.114332	-.759237	.450456	1.156184	.677582

As can be seen in Table 3, the mean score of the GPA 2.00-2.99 group was 14.09375 points, the GPA 3.00-4.00 group score showed hardly any difference at 14.88571 points. Both groups were found to have a moderate level of teaching efficacy.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics on Personal Efficacy

GPA	N	Mean	Std. D.	t	p	F-ratio	p var.
2.00-2.99	32	21.28125	4.017979				
3.00-4.00	35	23.74286	2.392917	-3.07756	.003054	2.819422	.003797

In Table 4, although both groups have a high level of personal efficacy the differences between the mean values of the GPA 2.00-2.99 group contrasted with the higher scores of the GPA 3.00-4.00 group displays a marked significance of $p=0.0030504$.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics on Efficacy in Student Engagement

GPA	N	Mean	Std. D.	t	p	F-ratio	p var.
2.00-2.99	32	25.78125	4.709184				
3.00-4.00	35	27.94286	3.105430	-2.23613	.028783	2.299576	.019269

Considering the p values in Table 5, it is possible to observe that in the case of the GPA 2.00-2.99 group, the mean score is lower, and as a result the p-value of the two groups have shown significance.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics on Efficacy in Instructional Practices

GPA	N	Mean	Std. D.	t	p	F-ratio	p var.
2.00-2.99	32	26.37500	5.398626				
3.00-4.00	35	27.48571	3.632949	-.995642	.323116	2.208248	.025822

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics on Efficacy in Classroom Management

GPA	N	Mean	Std. D.	t	p	F-ratio	p var.
2.00-2.99	32	25.68750	4.901859				
3.00-4.00	35	27.54286	3.061553	-1.87532	.065242	2.563528	.008362

Table 6 and Table 7 display the point that although the student teachers with a GPA of 3.00-4.00 scored higher in the mean scores for efficacy in instructional practices and classroom management, the p values in both tables did not show marked significance.

For ESE, EIP and ECM, the mean scores of both groups (see Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7) have ranged between 25.0 and 28.0. This finding shows that the participating student teachers are rather confident in their sense of teacher efficacy.

For analysis of the interviews, the randomly selected 20 student teachers were not grouped according to their GPA scores due to the assumption that mentors do not take into account or adjust their mentoring according to the student teachers GPA scores. The findings of the interview are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 Summary of Interview Findings

Effectiveness	%Yes	%No	%Sometimes
Mentors have open lines of communication with me	100		
Mentors provide appropriate feedback	70		30
Mentors are effective in pointing out my weaknesses	60		40
Mentors are good advocates for me in dealing with others	60		40
Mentors have the knowledge to help me implement a plan	80		20
Mentors can overcome my professional inadequacies	70		30

Examples of repeating ideas and themes were drawn from the interviews. For instance although all of the student teachers said that they had open lines of communication with their mentors, twelve students said that they wanted their mentor 1 to assist them more frequently at the practice school and that this communication was much less than the communication with mentor 2. For example one student said, "Mentor-2 is a very good person, she helps me a lot, but yet I think that I would be more happier if you (mentor-1) could also come and support me more often at the beginning of the course rather than coming more at the end to assess my performance. This makes me more excited and uneasy." Repeating ideas as such has shown the need for student empowerment in the sense of motivation and hence positively affecting the students achievement and hence efficacy.

Another repeating theme occurring in the interviews was that nine student teachers claimed that their mentor-2 sat at the back of the classroom and were busy doing other things rather than directly observing the student teacher's performance. However six of these student teachers said that their mentor-2 did this on purpose so as not to excite them and that despite this their mentor-2 still gave appropriate feedback and pointed out their weaknesses.

Discussion

Results of this research show that self efficacy beliefs of the students at the ELT department of UU are high and that they seem rather confident about their efficacy.

According to Bandura [11] teacher efficacy is a situation-specific and even subject-specific construct. As the present research has shown, the situation in which the student teachers academic achievements are high have resulted in higher mean scores for all of the factors found in the two scales employed. In addition to higher mean scores, the p values for personal efficacy and efficacy in student engagement have shown marked significances. The present research shows that poorer academic achievement can affect the self esteem and confidence of the student teacher.

Similar to the findings of the present research, Yavuzer and Koç [12] state that self-efficacy beliefs of teacher candidates increase on the condition that their academic achievements are high. According to self-efficacy theory one of the basic sources on which self-efficacy belief depends on is performance achievement.

The interviews of the present research have provided evidence that the student' teacher's efficacy also depends on mentor's behaviour. Therefore, it is possible to claim that mentor's behaviour directly has as impact on the professional self esteem and confidence of the student teachers. Mentors are also influential in terms of modelling for the student teachers. This can be seen in the interview responses to the fourth question of mentors being good advocates for dealing with other people in the teaching profession. As Safffold [13] explains, when a person sees another person accomplish a task, the vicarious experience of observing a model can also have a strong influence on self-efficacy.

In Shaughnessy' s [14] interview with Anita Woolfolk, a prominent figure in teacher self-efficacy, Woolfolk notes the point that some of the most powerful influences on the development of teachers' efficacy beliefs are mastery experiences during student teaching and the induction year. In this interview Woolfolk also explains that Bandura's theory of self-efficacy suggests that efficacy may be most malleable early in learning and that the first years of teaching could be critical to the long term development of teacher efficacy. She also notes that there are few longitudinal studies tracking efficacy during the malleable period of student teaching.

Conclusion

Distinctive research has confirmed that student achievement is highly determined by the teacher's ability. A good teacher is said to be one who possesses a high level of teacher efficacy. Therefore it is crucial that candidates entering the teaching profession starting from their formal schooling, whether in secondary or tertiary education, receive effective academic training and professional guidance, and continue this development throughout their career advancement.

Teaching is a complex skill requiring the creative application of technical and scientific knowledge in an artful or crafty way in order to successfully realize desired objectives in processes of learning. Teachers need to be able to engineer the learning of their students by taking into account that every individual student is unique while at the same time consider the factors such as the environment and the facilities which are at their disposal so as to reach the learning goals determined by the curricula and relevant authority. Therefore, it is very important that teacher education programs ensure teacher quality by adequately preparing their students to be and to remain as effective teachers throughout their career. If student teachers do not receive the necessary courses which prepare and support their professional development it will be a de-motivating challenge for them to meet the high level of performance demanded of them because efficacy beliefs trigger motivation.

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