

EFL Teachers' Language Proficiency, Classroom Management, and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship among EFL teachers' self-efficacy, language proficiency, and classroom management. A total of 110 Iranian EFL teachers of different levels of high schools and private language schools in Tehran participated in this research. The data were collected through two questionnaires and one test: the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and a sample TOEFL were administered in two different sessions while two sessions of each teacher's class were observed by two raters who used the Murdoch(2000) checklist to score the effectiveness of each teacher's teaching. To find out the relationship among the three variables of this study, that is the teachers' self-efficacy, language proficiency, and classroom management, a Pearson correlation was carried out. The results revealed that teachers' self-efficacy was correlated with their language proficiency and that language proficiency and effective classroom management were not correlated. The study provides useful insights into the need to help teachers develop their language proficiency that, in turn, has relevance for their self-efficacy.

Keywords: ELT, teacher variables, language proficiency, self-efficacy, effective classroom management

Introduction

In the world today, English is considered to be *the* universal language as it is understood at least to a threshold of functional communication in many – if not all – countries around the world. In fact, as of the 1990s, the number of the nonnative speakers of English outweighs that of the native speakers (Schmitt, 2002). Naturally, the demand for more efficient and effective ELT programs has risen yet further in the current highly competitive global market where command of English is perhaps no longer an extravagant luxury but a basic must.

One indispensable element in ELT of course is the English teacher who, since the 1980s and especially following the postmethod era, is no longer viewed as a mechanical implementer of external prescriptions but as an actively thinking decision-maker (Freeman, 2002). Perhaps, one of the most striking features of the English teacher is his/her own level of language proficiency. Albeit defining this construct is by no means “a readily available task as various scholars adopt epistemologically different approaches in providing their definitions for language proficiency” (Khabiri & Azaminejad, 2009, p. 134), research demonstrates that it is an important issue for nonnative English teachers (Brinton, 2004; Butler, 2004; Kamhi-Stein & Mahboob, 2006; Medgyes, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999).

Alongside English teachers' language proficiency, there exists also a plentitude of variables regarding the teacher's other capabilities. One such is self-efficacy which is defined by Bandura (1997) as “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 2). The literature of ELT is relatively rich with studies

on teachers' self-efficacy (e.g. Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Carara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Chacón, 2005; Cheung, 2008; Goker, 2006; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Sewell & St. George, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007) with more than just a few studies conducted in Iran (e.g. Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Ghonsooly, Khajavy, & Mohaghegh Mahjoobi, 2014; Marashi & Dakhili, 2015; Vaezi & Fallah, 2011).

Another decisive teacher competence is his/her classroom management which could be viewed as “efforts to oversee the activities of a classroom, including learning, social interaction, and student behavior” (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1998, p. 4). Classroom management has been studied extensively both independently (e.g. Allen, 2001; Rosas & West, 2009; Siebert, 2005; Silvestri, 2001) and from many different aspects and in association with other attributes (e.g. Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010; Clunies-Ross, Little, & Keinhuis, 2008; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007; Giallo, & Little, 2003; Hoang, 2009; Main & Hammond, 2008; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007) with certain studies reporting findings from the Iranian context (e.g. Aliakbari & Abdollahi, 2014; Jalili & Mall-Amiri, 2015; Marashi & Zaferanchi, 2010; Rahimi & Asadollahi, 2012).

Based on the abovementioned points and a review of the studies conducted, the researchers felt that there is a gap in the literature on the possible connection of the three constructs of language proficiency, self-efficacy, and classroom management among EFL teachers. Accordingly, this study was conducted to investigate such a possible relationship. To this end, the following research questions were raised:

- Q1) Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' English proficiency and classroom management?
- Q2) Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' English proficiency and self-efficacy?
- Q3) Is there any significant difference in the predictability of EFL teachers' self-efficacy and classroom management by their English proficiency?

Review of the Related Literature

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to a judgment of teachers' “capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 783). Current studies on teachers' sense of self-efficacy are perhaps more inspired by Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory since, as is the case with many other human attributes of course, teachers' self-efficacy does not develop in isolation and is affected by or correlated with certain other factors such as their sociocultural background and language proficiency (Goker, 2006).. According to Bandura (1997), “Self-efficacy belief is the foundation of human agency and stands at the core of social cognitive theory” (p. 191). He further argues that self-efficacy is “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 102). Arguing that “ability is not a fixed attribute residing in one's behavioral repertoire” (Bandura, 1993, p. 118), Bandura (2008) maintains that possessing knowledge and skills is one thing and “being able to use them well and personal accomplishments require not only skills but self-beliefs of efficacy to use them well. For this reason, people with similar constituent skills, may perform differently depending on their self-efficacy beliefs” (p. 32).

Adopting a somewhat results-based approach towards self-efficacy, Ashton (1984, p. 288) asserts that, “Teachers' beliefs about their ability to bring about outcomes in their classrooms and their confidence in teaching in general play a central role in their abilities to effectively serve

their students”. A perhaps amalgamate results- and resource-based perspective is discussed by Tshannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) who define teachers’ self-efficacy as the perceptions they have regarding of “their resources and strategies for bringing about student behavioral and instructional outcomes. Rather than ask, *How much can you help your students think critically?* it should be asked, *How much can you do to help your students think critically?*” (p. 784).

Classroom Management

Classroom management has been a historical problem for teachers. Since the early 1930s, teachers have reported that classroom management and student misbehavior were the two most challenging issues for new and, sometimes, even experienced teachers (Wolfgang, 1995). Classroom management refers to a teacher’s ability to keep order in the classroom, engage students in learning, and elicit student cooperation; all three functions are of course coterminous with balancing the routine tasks of the classroom (Wong & Wong, 2009). The importance of classroom management is perhaps multiply amplified when research shows that, “Students spend up to one-half of instructional time engaged in tasks not related to learning, such as classroom procedural matters, transitions between activities, discipline situations, and off task activities (Coddling & Smyth, 2008).

Classroom management comprises two parts: behavioral management and instructional management (Magableh & Hawamdeh, 2007). These two parts complete each other and form a good classroom environment for students and teachers. Behaviors related to management of learning situations, or instructional management, include: interruption of teacher, non interest of teaching material, collective answers, not participating, etc. (Coddling & Smyth, 2008).

Behaviors related to behavior management include: side talks, joking during the lesson, changing sitting locations, issuing annoying voices, too many requests, using a cell phone, etc. (Coddling & Smyth, 2008). The ultimate goals of classroom management are to provide a healthy, safe environment for learning, and to equip students with the necessary skills to be successful in life, both academically and socially (Wong & Wong, 2009). Classroom management is often reduced to a set of techniques for disciplining individual children’s misbehavior (Choi & Lee, 2009) but the overall goal for classroom management is not disciplining individual students (Wong & Wong, 2009). Teacher as a director of the class guides students in learning and behavior, controls the environment, and leads students to be successful individually and as a group.

Even though research on classroom management began around the turn of the century, more than 100 years later, novice teachers still struggle with the same problems they did a century ago (Ritter & Hancock, 2007; Rosas & West, 2009; Stoughton, 2007).

Language Proficiency

In the modern era of linguistics and specifically following Chomsky’s (1965) introduction of language competence, many have provided their definition of language proficiency throughout the years (e.g. Brinton, 2004; Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Clark, 1975; Cummins, 1984; Lee, 2004; Mahboob, 2004; Oller, 1979; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). The construct is however far from having a universally acceptable definition as there are various conceptualizations; there are those who subscribe to Hymes’ (1972) notion of communicative competence and present sub-composites for it (Canale & Swain, 1980), and others such as Madsen (1983) who provide an essentially practical definition for language proficiency and label it as “the overall mastery of a given language, and how well prepared one is to use that language in a particular setting” (p. 6).

Regardless of the lack of concordance over the definition of language proficiency – which is perhaps rooted in both the prevailing absence of a unified definition of language itself and the fact that language proficiency is very much composed of a multiplicity of constructs – one point remains certain: there is ample research in favor of the importance of language proficiency for nonnative English teachers (as discussed earlier).

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 110 EFL teachers: 66 in the sample were females while 44 were males with their age ranging from 23-37. They enjoyed 2-17 years of experience at different private and public schools in the different districts of Tehran. The selection of the participants was through convenience sampling in that those teachers who were available to the researchers and were willing to participate in the study were included.

Table 1 below provides certain relevant demographic data regarding the sample.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

Category	Subcategory	Frequency
Gender	Male	34
	Female	76
Age	23-25	17
	26-30	39
	31-35	42
	36-37	12
Years of Experience	2-5	15
	6-10	50
	11-15	34
	16-17	11
Academic Degree	Bachelor's degree	52
	Graduate student	35
	Master's degree	15
	Postgraduate student	8
Field of Study	English translation, literature, and TEFL	49
	Humanities	36
	Science	25

The two researchers also participated in this study as the raters of the writing and speaking papers. The inter-rater reliability of the two raters for the writing and speaking was established a priori and was significant standing at 0.91 and 0.89, respectively. In addition to the 110 EFL teachers, one supervisor in each of the schools also cooperated in this study for the classroom management questionnaire which required two raters.

Instrumentations

The following three instruments were used in the process of this study for collecting the required data:

Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES)

The TSES developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) was administered in the research. The TSES which includes the three main factors of *classroom management*, *ensuring student engagement in class*, and *using instructional strategies in class* consists of 24 nine-point Likert type items with the minimum and maximum scores being one and nine. The top achievable score is thus 216 (24×9) and the minimum score that can be obtained is 24 (24×1). There are eight questions for each sub-factor:

- a) *Efficacy for Classroom Management* which has to do with teachers' opinion about their ability to manage their class in the best possible way. It will be measured through items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, and 21.
- b) *Efficacy for Ensuring Student Engagement in Class* which is intended to measure how much teachers believe they can involve more students in class activities. Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, and 22 are supposed to measure the component.
- c) *Efficacy for Using Instructional Strategies in Class* that refers to teachers' belief in the effectiveness of the strategies they implement in the classroom. Items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, and 24 are intended to assess this factor.

The published reliability for each of the three aforesaid domains was 0.91, 0.90, and 0.87, respectively, while the overall reliability was 0.94. The timing is 30 minutes. The items' ensemble average was found to be 9.05 out of 10 and not found below 7.85. Moreover around 55% of the items were found to be matching to a degree of 9.00 out of 10; in other words 13 of 24 scale items were found to be matching above a degree of 9.00 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

In an extensive study conducted in five countries in North America, East Asia, and Europe, Klassen et al. (2009) have demonstrated “convincing evidence of invariance of factor forms, factor loadings, and factor variances and covariances across groups of teachers” (p. 73).

Murdoch's Checklist for Effective Classroom Management

This checklist developed by Murdoch (2000) evaluates EFL teachers' effective teaching and contains three parts: part A is ELT competencies and contains 24 questions, part B is general teaching competencies which includes 10 questions, and part C has 20 questions. The complete checklist thus contains 54 items each followed by four values from 1 to 4 (i.e. 4 = excellent, 3 = above average, 2 = average, 1 = unsatisfactory) and N/A meaning not applicable. The total time for answering the questionnaire was 35 minutes.

This checklist has been validated by Murdoch (2000) and the reliability of this instrument has been reported to stand at 0.90.

General Language Proficiency

To investigate the teachers' English proficiency, a sample Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) developed by English Testing Services (ETS) was run. The test includes different sections. The listening part comprise 50 multiple-choice items followed by the structure and written expression section containing 40 multiple-choice items in two different subsections. The reading part consists of five texts with 50 multiple-choice items.

The Test of Spoken English or TSE measures the participants' ability to speak about a variety of topics.

- In questions 1 and 2, the testee's response is scored based their ability to speak clearly and coherently about familiar topics.
- In questions 3 and 4, the testee first reads a short text and then listens to a talk on the same topic. S/he would then have to combine appropriate information from the text and the talk to provide a complete answer. The response would be scored based on their ability to accurately convey information and to speak clearly and coherently.
- In questions 5 and 6, the testee would listen to part of a conversation or lecture. Then, s/he would be asked a question about what s/he has heard. The response would be scored on the ability to accurately convey information and to speak clearly and coherently.

Ultimately, the Test of Written English or TWE contains two writing tasks which measure the participants' ability to write in English in an academic environment.

- For the first task in this part, the testee would read a passage and part of a lecture about an academic topic. S/he would then write a response to a question that asks about the relationship between the lecture and the reading passage using information from the reading passage and the lecture. The question does not ask him/her to express a personal opinion and the response would be judged on the quality of the writing and on how well the response presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage.
- For the second task, the testee would demonstrate his/her ability to write an essay in response to a question that asks him/her to express and support an opinion about a topic or issue. The essay would be scored on the quality of the writing. This includes the development of ideas, the organization of the essay, and the quality and accuracy of the language they use to express the ideas.

Procedure

To begin with, the researchers discussed the study with the principals of the schools so that they would give their consent. Next, they explained to the 110 teachers who agreed to participate in this study the purpose and procedure of this research. Obviously, as all the participants were not present in one setting, the researchers had to hold these briefings and administrations in many different sessions.

To begin with, the self-efficacy questionnaire and the TOEFL were administered. For the Murdoch checklist and classroom observation, the researchers arranged a separate briefing session for each supervisor to inform them about the different dimensions of the study, particularly, the classroom management factors that the researchers meant to be observed. Moreover, during the processes of the study, the researchers and the supervisors had different meetings to arrange the order of observation.

As it is part of the routine duties of a supervisor to observe every teacher at least once during a term, the researchers arranged with the supervisor to attend the observation session with each relevant supervisor. The supervisor was of course asked to fill out the Murdoch checklist too as the recommendation for this checklist is that it is best completed by a direct supervisor of a teacher and an external evaluator. After each observation, the mean score of the supervisor and researchers was considered for every item. Each observation took between 90 and 100 minutes depending on the duration of the class which varied in different schools.

The 110 teachers participating in this study were observed in accordance with the above procedure over a period of around seven months since it was not easy to arrange to observe more than an average of four teachers per week.

Once all the data was collected, the researchers analyzed the data to test the null hypotheses.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Language Proficiency

Table 2 below includes the descriptive statistics of the scores of the participants on the sample TOEFL. The mean and standard deviation of the scores stood at 75.20 and 1.87, respectively. Also, the set of scores enjoyed normalcy ($-0.160 / 0.230 = -0.695$).

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Scores on the Language Proficiency Test*

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error
Language Proficiency	110	71	79	75.20	1.871	-.160	.230
Valid (listwise)	N 110						

Furthermore, the reliability of the scores in this administration was 0.91.

Self-Efficacy

Following the language proficiency test, the self-efficacy questionnaire was administered. Table 3 below displays the descriptive statistics for this administration.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Scores on the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error
Self-Efficacy	110	198	211	204.65	2.608	.015	.230
Valid (listwise)	N 110						

As is clear, the mean and the standard deviation of the aforesaid scores were 204.65 and 2.608, respectively. Furthermore, the scores enjoyed normalcy ($0.015 / 0.230 = 0.065$). The reliability of the scores in this administration stood at 0.81.

Classroom Management

Finally, the classroom management checklist was administered. According to Table 4 below, the mean and the standard deviation of the aforesaid scores were 193.55 and 2.750, respectively. Furthermore, the scores enjoyed normalcy ($-0.072 / 0.230 = -0.313$). The reliability of the scores in this administration was 0.85.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Scores on the Classroom Management Checklist*

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error
Classroom Management	110	184	199	193.55	2.750	-.072	.230

Valid N₁₁₀
(listwise)

Testing the Hypotheses

Following the calculation of the descriptive statistics above and with the skewness ratios of all the sets of scores representing normalcy, the researchers were able to employ parametric tests.

First Null Hypothesis

To test the first null hypothesis, i.e. whether *there was any significant relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency and effective classroom management*, the parametric Pearson correlation test was run. As is clearly evident in Table 5 (below), there was no significant correlation at the 0.01 level among the teachers' language proficiency scores and their scores on Murdoch's Checklist ($r = 0.174$, $p = 0.069 < 0.05$) which meant that the first null hypothesis raised in this study was not rejected.

Table 5. *Correlation of the Teachers' Scores on the Language Proficiency Test and Classroom Management Checklist*

		Murdoch's Checklist	TOEFL
Murdoch's Checklist	Correlation	1	.174
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.069
	N	110	110
TOEFL	Correlation	.174	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.069	
	N	110	110

Second Null Hypothesis

To test the second null hypothesis, i.e. whether *there was any significant relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency and self-efficacy*, again the Pearson correlation test was run (Table 6).

Table 6. *Correlation of the Teachers' Scores on the Language Proficiency Test and Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*

		TOEFL	Self-Efficacy
TOEFL	Correlation	1	.452**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	110	110
Self-Efficacy	Correlation	.452**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	110	110

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As is evident in the above table, there is a significant correlation at the 0.01 level among the teachers' scores on the language proficiency test and self-efficacy questionnaire ($r = 0.452$, $p = 0.0001 < 0.05$) meaning that the second null hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, according to

Table 7 below, R^2 was 0.204; this of course is a large effect size (Cohen, 1992; Larson-Hall, 2010).

Table 7. Correlation Report

No of cases	R	Sig (2-tailed)	R^2
30	.452	.003	.204

Third Null Hypothesis

As one of the previous null hypotheses was not rejected, verifying the third null hypothesis through running a multiple regression was not justified.

Discussion

Teachers' self-efficacy has been studied extensively in different cultural contexts vis-à-vis various contexts. Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, and Steca (2003) report that teachers' efficacy beliefs are determinants of their job satisfaction while Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, and Malone (2006) prove further that teachers' self-efficacy is a determinant of students' academic achievement. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) concluded that teacher self-efficacy is strongly related to collective teacher efficacy and teacher burnout.

In their study on teacher self-efficacy and classroom management, Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh, and Khalaileh (2011, as cited in Epstein & Willhite, 2015) found that teacher efficacy is correlated with classroom management. Hamidi and Khatib (2016) demonstrated that teachers' classroom management and language proficiency are correlated significantly while the results of a study conducted by Ghasemboland and Binti Hashim (2013) showed that teachers' perceived efficacy was positively correlated with their English language proficiency.

The finding of the present study is in accordance with the findings of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2007). Although one should be cautious in making direct comparisons of the scores reported in different cultures due to the possibility that survey responses may reflect cultural biases (King, Murray, Solomon, & Tandon, 2004), such a comparison can provide useful information in examining where the teacher self-efficacy levels reported by teachers in the present study are located in relation to other teachers, especially when there are no previous studies conducted in the Middle-East EFL context using the same instruments.

The findings corroborate those of the previous studies that have reported significant relationships between teachers' self-efficacy or confidence in teaching English and English language proficiency (e.g. Chacón, 2005; Lee, 2009, as cited in Ghasemboland & Binti Hashim, 2013). Those who perceived they had sufficient English language proficiency tended to believe in their capability to carry out a variety of tasks related to student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategy.

It is considered that teachers' self-efficacy would determine the amount of effort they put into teaching, the kind of decisions that they make, the degree of their persistence, and the task choices they make (Ross, 1998). These are the teachers who believe strongly in their abilities to affect students' learning, support the development of students' intrinsic interests, and endeavor to adopt different ways to motivate learners.

Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the relationship between language proficiency and self-efficacy among EFL teachers, yet another reason for the indispensability of the never-ending

need to promote the culture of improving language proficiency among teachers. The constant quest for methods and techniques which facilitate language learning and the expansive exploration of learners' personality features and variable should simply not drive ELT practitioners to turn a blind eye on the crucial necessity of nonnative teachers' language proficiency. To this end, both teacher education institutions and in-service training centers may wish to put teachers' language proficiency into focus.

The above point gains perhaps even more prominence when one listens to the multitude of the different accounts and narratives of not only the principals/directors of language schools who almost never run short of prioritizing teachers' language proficiency as arguably the most significant requirement but also the teachers themselves who feel more confident and motivated to teach when they feel they possess a relatively adequate language proficiency level. The same is perhaps very much true about students who tend to have a high opinion of the English teacher whose language proficiency is high.

The results of this study highlighting the go-togetherness of EFL teachers' language proficiency and self-efficacy brings into yet further focus the notion that has been drawing more attention and emphasis ever since the emergence of the postmethod conceptualization, i.e. "Teachers are one of the most influential elements for the success of any educational system as they can construct learning environments that promote students' progress" (Author, 2014, p. 2644). This is the case as teachers have the potential to develop a strong sense of personal competence among learners. To this end, investments in teacher education/empowerment programs which enable teachers to enhance their necessary features (such as language proficiency and self-efficacy) need to be continuously consolidated and facilitated as an inevitable prerequisite to improving the quality of ELT programs.

The present study also provides possible directions for further research. First of all, teachers' self-efficacy is a multifaceted construct that varies across tasks and contexts where teachers do their teaching. It would be useful to explore teachers' perspectives through additional studies that provide a deeper understanding of how teachers' self-efficacy influences teachers' actions and decision-making in planning and conducting lessons. Observations of teaching performance, teaching techniques as well as multiple interviews should be used as another source of data to explore teachers' self-efficacy.

Secondly, longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate whether teachers' self-efficacy to teach EFL varies across years. It is recommended to follow-up teachers to investigate whether or not and how their efficacy changes over the years.

Last but not least, further studies can look into personal and environmental factors collectively in explaining teachers' self-efficacy. The construct of teachers' self-efficacy should be further developed to reflect the standards and competencies that EFL teachers in different settings are expected to perform.

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