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The Impact of MA TEFL Curriculum on Student Teachers' Self-Efficacy*

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Abstract

The importance of professional development programs in enhancing teacher self-efficacy has attracted the attention of researchers in the realm of teacher education for two decades. However, the role of university programs and their curriculum in developing teachers' self-efficacy has not been given adequate attention, specifically in educating EFL teachers. This study investigated the impact of MA TEFL curriculum on student teachers' self-efficacy. To control the influence of experience, the self-efficacy of experienced students in teaching and novice ones was examined as well. To this end, 277 MA TEFL students from the seven major state universities of Tehran participated in this project. The results indicated that MA TEFL courses did not significantly affect teacher self-efficacy of MA TEFL students. However, a significant difference was found between novice teachers and experienced ones in terms of their self-efficacy and its subcomponents. Also, the findings of the semi-structured interviews revealed unlike the novice ones who were more interested in practicum, the experienced ones were in favor of both theoretical and practical courses. Despite this difference, some similarities were found, specifically in efficacy for classroom management and instructional strategies.

Keywords: teacher self-efficacy, teacher professional development programs, teacher experience, MA TEFL Curriculum.

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Introduction

People's thoughts and beliefs about themselves have a significant influence on the way they behave in their lives. In fact, as Bandura (1982) points out, even though they may know very well what to do, they sometimes are not able to behave satisfactorily under the impact of their thoughts and beliefs. "Among the types of thoughts that affect action, none is more central or pervasive than people's judgments of their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1991, p. 257), i.e. self-efficacy, which determines individuals' abilities in the way they act, decisions they make, effort they put into action, and their perseverance and persistence in confronting aversive or difficult situations (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1991; Pajares, 1996, 1997; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000).

As a result, due to the important influence of this construct on people, it is expected that the sense of self-efficacy affects teachers' behaviors and actions significantly, specifically as according to Williams and Burden (1997), teachers' beliefs reflect their actions, can predict how they behave in the class and are regarded as an essential component of "effective teaching" (p. 63). Therefore, as a significant factor that is closely related to teachers' actions (Coladarci, 1992), teachers' self-efficacy should be enhanced through professional development provided to teachers (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003).

Hence, the role of teachers' professional development programs in raising their self-efficacy has attracted the attention of researchers. Indeed, many researchers have tried to investigate variables such as teacher professional development programs that would influence teachers' self-efficacy, and they have found different results (Anderson & Hirschkorn, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Pendergast, Garvis, & Keogh, 2011; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Woodcock, 2011; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005).

In spite of these efforts, there is dearth of studies on the influence of universities' teacher preparation programs on student teachers' self-efficacy and the way they affect it (Anderson & Hirschkorn, 2012; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Pendergast et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Schunk & Pajares, 2005, Woolfolk Hoy,

2000), specifically in EFL setting (Chacon, 2005). Besides, it seems that there is still argument among researchers over the positive relationship (e.g., De la Torre & Casanova Arias, 2007; Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013; Pendergast et al., 2011; Tanriseven, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002, 2007), or negative correlation (e.g., Chacon, 2005; Page, Pendergraft, & Wilson, 2014), between teachers' experience and their self-efficacy.

As a result, the present study was conducted with the purpose of investigating the effect of teacher preparation programs offered in Iranian state universities on MA TEFL students' efficacy. Moreover, it was attempted to examine the effect of experience on teachers' self-efficacy of MA TEFL students. Interviews were also conducted with MA students to see how experienced teachers and novice ones had experienced self-efficacy at the end of TEFL program, specifically as Pajares (1996) and Woodcock (2011) have recommended to conduct the qualitative research to explore teachers' self-efficacy, while there is little attempt in this regard. Thus, this study aims at addressing the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between the self-efficacy of MA TEFL students at the beginning and the end of TEFL programs offered in the state universities?
2. Is there any significant difference between the self-efficacy of MA TEFL students who are experienced teachers and those who are novice teachers in the state universities by the end of the TEFL program?
3. How do MA TEFL students (experienced vs novice teachers) experience self-efficacy by the end of the TEFL program?

Review of Literature

Teacher Self-Efficacy Belief

Self-efficacy construct first was introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977, with the publication of *Self-efficacy: Towards a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change*, and he put this concept in the theory of human agency with the publication of *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control* in 1997 (Pajares, 1997). Bandura (1989, 1991, 1997, 2001, 2006) regarded self-efficacy as the central component and foundation of human agency in which people are regarded as the agents of their actions. This is evident as he mentioned, "Among the mechanisms of personal agency,

none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1991, p. 257).

Considering teachers' self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) define it as "teachers' beliefs in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 233). It is believed that teachers' sense of self-efficacy is the most malleable during early years of teaching (Bandura, 1977; De la Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002; Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), and when it is established, it is resistant to change (Bandura, 1977; Chacon, 2005; Guskey, 1984, 1988; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Pajares, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Murphy, 2001).

Teacher self-efficacy brings about certain consequences in the classroom. Teachers who have higher level of self-efficacy are willing to use new and more useful instructional strategies and classroom management techniques (Ross, 1994), show more persistence and flexibility in the task of teaching and put more effort in it (Gibson & Demo, 1984; Pajares, 1996), have more commitment to teaching (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005; Coladarci, 1992), and affect their students' achievement (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Woodcock, 2011).

Teacher Professional Development Programs

The teachers' self-efficacy belief can be provoked through professional development programs. These programs affect teachers' outcomes by raising teachers' self-efficacy expectations by providing requisite knowledge and skills. As Ingvarson et al. (2005) assert, the content knowledge and skills which teachers receive strongly affects their self-efficacy, practices, and students' outcomes. Similarly, Ross and Bruce (2007) believe that professional development programs enhance teachers' self-efficacy through teaching instructional skills and strategies, and encouraging them to implement those new strategies.

Many of investigations refer to the positive impacts of professional development programs on teachers' self-efficacy (Anderson & Hirschhorn, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Ingvarson

et al., 2005; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Woodcock, 2011; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). For instance, Ingvarson et al. (2005) examined the effects of 40 professional development programs in Australia through the “Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme” (p. 2) on the knowledge, practice, and self-efficacy of 1731 teachers. The results of the study revealed that strong knowledge base and theoretical issues provided by programs affected teachers’ practices and enhanced their self-efficacy.

In addition, Ross and Bruce (2007) studied the impacts of the professional development program on 106 teachers in elementary schools of one Canadian district. They also came to the conclusion that the professional development programs positively affected teachers’ self-efficacy, specifically for classroom management. Moreover, Woodcock’s (2011) investigation on the self-efficacy of 40 pre-service teachers during teaching education clarified that these courses contributed to the development of teachers’ beliefs in their capabilities to teach, i.e. self-efficacy. In another study on the effect of university campus program on pre-service teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, Anderson and Hirschhorn (2012) concluded that student teachers attributed their success in teaching to their learning in the university.

Despite these studies, little attention has been paid to the influence of universities’ teacher preparation programs and their courses on student teachers’ self-efficacy (Anderson & Hirschhorn, 2012; Garet et al., 2001; Pedergast et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998; Schunk & Pajares, 2005, Woolfolk Hoy, 2000), specifically in EFL setting (Chacon, 2005).

Teacher Experience

In studies related to teachers’ self-efficacy, teacher experience has been extensively investigated which most of them demonstrate a positive relationship between teachers’ experience and the sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1977; De la Torre & Casanova Arias, 2007; Loreman et al., 2013; Pendergast et al., 2011; Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996; Tanriseven, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002, 2007; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007).

Among such studies the important role of experience in raising teachers’ self-efficacy is revealed through comparing pre-service and novice teachers with more experienced teachers. For example, De la

Torre Cruz and Casanova Arias (2007) compared the efficacy beliefs of 339 pre-service and in-service teachers and they came to the conclusion that there was a significant difference between the efficacy of in-service teachers who had greater experience in teaching and prospective teachers. It should be noted that this difference was with respect to classroom management and establishing discipline in the classroom.

Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2002) examined the self-efficacy of 255 experienced and novice teachers and concluded that experienced teachers with five or more than five years of teaching experience, had higher self-efficacy than novice ones who had less than five years of experience. This difference was observed in terms of their self-efficacy for instructional strategies and classroom management, but no differences were found in their self-efficacy for student engagement. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) also conducted another research with 235 in-service teachers and gained similar findings. Similar to the previous investigation, in this study experienced teachers with more than four years of teaching experience had higher self-efficacy for classroom management and instructional strategies than novice teachers with three or less than three years of experience, but no differences were observed with respect to student engagement.

Although many studies have been conducted on the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their teaching experience, there is still controversy over the effect of experience on teachers' self-efficacy. In fact, a number of researchers found a negative correlation (Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1988); no significant relationship (Chacon, 2005; Khodaverdi, 2009; Page et al., 2014; Rastegar & Memarpour, 2009), and even a non-linear and curvilinear relationship (Klassen & Chiu, 2010) between these two variables.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and seventy seven MA TEFL students from the state universities of Tehran, i.e. Allameh Tabataba'i University, Alzahra University, Kharazmi University, Shahid Beheshti University, Sharif University, Tarbiat Modares University, and the University of Tehran, participated in the present study. It should be noted that the researchers followed Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2002) criterion for

determining experienced and novice teachers. Hence, MA students with less than five years of teaching experience were considered as novice, and those with five years experience or more as experienced ones. From among the 277 MA TEFL students, from the first and the third term, 180 of them were novice teachers and 97 were experienced, and the years of their experience ranged from 0 to 20. Ninety-two of the participants were novice teachers and fifty were experienced at the end of the third term. The total number of 28 MA TEFL students who were at the end of their third term participated in semi-structured interviews including 4 students from each university, two of whom were novice and two of whom were experienced teachers of English as a foreign language.

Instrument

The long version of the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES), also known as Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was implemented in this study. This questionnaire includes 24 items, while each item is measured at a 9-point scale anchored at *1-Nothing* to *9-A Great Deal*. TSES is divided into three subscales of efficacy for instructional strategies, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for student engagement. The reliability of teacher efficacy for the subscale of instructional strategies is 0.91, for classroom management is 0.90, and for student engagement is 0.87, and the total reliability of the 24-item scale is 0.94 at $p < 0.01$ (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). However, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated for the total efficacy and for each of the subscales of teacher efficacy questionnaire with 277 MA TEFL students as the participants of the study. The total reliability obtained for TSES was 0.90, for the subscale of instructional strategies was 0.80, for classroom management was 0.82, and for student engagement was 0.78.

Procedure

In the present study, the process of data collection was conducted in two phases. At the first stage, the long version of Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) devised by Tschannen-Moran, and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), was used to investigate teacher self-efficacy of MA TEFL students and to gather the demographic information including teachers' years of experience.

Before conducting the research the questionnaire was piloted with ten MA TEFL students who had already graduated, and it was found out that minor changes should be made in the wordings of three items. In items 4 and 6 the word *school work* were replaced by *classroom activities*, and in item 22 the word *school* was replaced by *classroom*. Besides, with the help of Tschannen-Moran through emails and based on her proposed explanations for items, definitions were added to item 1 for *difficult students*, to item 19 for *problem students*, and to item 21 for *defiant students*. Distinctions were also made between item 15 and item 19, by adding an explanation to each item at the bottom of the related pages. Finally, as item 19 led respondents into thinking that the word *problem student* would be grammatically wrong, with the recommendation of Tschannen-Moran this word was modified into *problematic student* to better fit it into the context of Iran.

Having made the required modifications in the questionnaire, it was distributed among the participants once at the beginning of the first term and once at the end of the third term. It is worth mentioning that the study was conducted cross-sectionally, instead of longitudinally, i.e. instead of comparing the same students at the beginning of the first and at the end of the third term, students who were in the first term were compared with other students who were in their third.

Three weeks after gathering the data for the quantitative section of the study, the researchers started the second phase. The semi-structured interviews were based on the purposeful sampling of interviewees according to the demographic information including experience provided by the participants in the questionnaires. Interview questions were sequenced based on three major categories of TSES proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), i.e. student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies, and two general questions added by the researchers for gaining more information.

The interviewees were selected from among those who were at the end of their third term, and in fact, they had passed all their MA TEFL courses. After the interviewees' approval, the interview was conducted individually and lasted from 1 hour and 20 minutes to 2 hours. The whole process of interviewing lasted two months.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the present study was carried out on the basis of the qualitative-quantitative method. Data analysis of the quantitative section should be logically conducted through paired samples t-test. However, as the present study was conducted cross-sectionally rather than longitudinally. An independent samples t-test was used for analyzing data.

Using SPSS version 22, teacher self-efficacy as well as its three sub-components were analyzed. The analysis of the data collected for the qualitative section of the study was conducted through thematic analysis. For this purpose, the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. These included: 1. *Familiarisation with the data*; 2. *Generating initial coding*; 3. *Searching for themes*; 4. *Reviewing themes*; 5. *Defining and naming themes*; and 6. *Producing the report*.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented considering the values of global teacher efficacy, and its subcomponents, i.e. efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies.

Teacher Efficacy of MA TEFL Students and the Effect of MA TEFL Courses

As Table 1 shows, the mean score of teacher self-efficacy in group 2, i.e. participants at the end of the third term, ($M = 157.8732$) was more than that of group 1, i.e. participants at the beginning of the first term ($M = 156.3926$). With respect to the subcomponents of teacher self-efficacy, it should be mentioned that although the mean score of efficacy for student engagement of group 1 ($M = 50.4889$) was close to that of group 2 ($M = 50.3592$), the means of efficacy for classroom management ($M = 53.1972$) and instructional strategies ($M = 54.3169$) of group 2 were larger than the mean scores of group 1, respectively.

To investigate the statistical difference an independent samples t-test was run. Accordingly, there was not a significant difference between teacher self-efficacy of MA students at the beginning of the first term and MA students at the end of the third term $t(275) = .532, p > 0.05, d = 0.063$. Besides, there was no significant difference between efficacy for student engagement, i.e. $t(275) = 0.121, p > 0.05, d = 0.014$,

efficacy for classroom management, i.e. $t(275) = 0.695$, $p > 0.05$, $d = 0.083$, and efficacy for instructional strategies, i.e. $t(275) = 0.850$, $p > 0.05$, $d = 102$, of the two groups.

As the results of the first research question revealed, MA TEFL programs did not significantly affect the self-efficacy of MA TEFL students. MA TEFL programs have not been very effective in improving neither self-efficacy in general, nor the subcomponents of self-efficacy in particular, i.e. efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results Related to Teacher Self-Efficacy and its Subcomponents for MA Students at the Beginning of the First Term and at the End of the Third Term

	Groups	N	X	sd	df	t	p
Teacher Self-Efficacy	First Term	135	156.3926	23.49408	275	-.532	.595
	Third Term	142	157.8732	22.81683			
Student Engagement	First Term	135	50.4889	8.90234	275	.121	.904
	Third Term	142	50.3592	8.91436			
Classroom Management	First Term	135	52.4370	9.03278	275	-.695	-.487
	Third Term	142	53.1972	9.14985			
Instructional Strategies	First Term	135	53.4667	8.70563	275	-.850	.396
	Third Term	142	54.3169	7.94785			

Similarly, Pendergast et al. (2011) found out that professional development programs did not increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Indeed, they concluded that professional development programs were not effective in enhancing the self-efficacy of teachers who had enrolled in three pre-service preparation programs at an Australian University. It is worth mentioning that although in the study conducted by them, the level of students' self-efficacy declined between the commencement and conclusion of the programs, in the present study the self-efficacy of MA students increased but not significantly. According to Pendergast et al. (2011), the cause of the decline in their study was that students confronted realities of the actual teaching and

they developed a greater understanding of teaching profession through their university studies and actual teaching practice.

Even though some believe that students' learning in university programs contributes to their teaching efficacy (Anderson & Hirschhorn, 2012; Woodcocks, 2011; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005), still many teachers are not satisfied with the quality of professional development programs (Fullan, 1995, 2005), and despite the significance of the quality of these programs, "the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate" (Borko, 2004, p.3).

The majority of these programs fail since they do not pay attention to teachers' real needs for gaining the knowledge that is concrete and is directly related to teaching (Guskey, 2002; Harwell, 2003). Though professional development programs enhance teachers' efficacy through providing the required knowledge and skills (Ingvarson et al., 2005; Ross & Bruce, 2007), studies indicate that these programs are more effective when they address "the concrete, everyday challenges involved in teaching and learning specific academic subject matter, rather than focusing on abstract educational principles or teaching methods taken out of context" (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, & Richardson, 2009, p. 10). As researchers mention, most of teachers who receive professional development are not content with their usefulness and in most communities the qualified professional development is still rare since they do not meet students' real needs such as classroom management (Harding & Parsons, 2011).

Teacher Efficacy of MA TEFL Students as Experienced Teachers vs. Novice Ones

According to Table 2, the mean score of teacher self-efficacy in group 1, i.e. experienced teachers, ($M = 173.4400$) was more than that of group 2, i.e. novice teachers ($M = 149.4130$). It should be pointed out that the mean score of efficacy for student engagement ($M = 55.5200$), efficacy for classroom management ($M = 57.9400$), and efficacy for instructional strategies ($M = 59.9800$) of experienced teachers were larger than the mean scores of novice teachers, which were ($M = 47.5543$; $M = 50.6196$; $M = 51.2391$), respectively.

To investigate the statistical difference an independent samples t-test was run. As it is observed in Table 2, there was a significant difference

between the self-efficacy of MA students who were experienced teachers and those who were novice ones $t(140) = 6.918$; $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.215$. Moreover, there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of their efficacy for student engagement, i.e. $t(140) = 5.608$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.985$, efficacy for classroom management, i.e. $t(140) = 4.913$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.863$, and efficacy for instructional strategies, i.e. $t(140) = 7.340$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.289$.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results of Teacher Self-Efficacy and its Subcomponents for MA Students as Experienced and Novice Teachers

	Groups	N	X	sd	df	t	p
Teacher Self-Efficacy	Experienced	50	173.4400	20.61816	140	6.918	.000
	Novice	92	149.4130	19.29365			
Student Engagement	Experienced	50	55.5200	8.58152	140	5.608	.000
	Novice	92	47.5543	7.80302			
Classroom Management	Experienced	50	57.9400	8.68593	140	4.913	.000
	Novice	92	50.6196	8.36771			
Instructional Strategies	Experienced	50	59.9800	6.00167	140	7.340	.000
	Novice	92	51.2391	7.16120			

As the results of the second research question indicated, teaching experience had a significant effect on the self-efficacy and its subcomponents among MA TEFL students at the end of MA TEFL program.

The years of teaching experience plays an essential role in raising teachers' self-efficacy. Mastery experience is the most influential and the strongest source of efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1994), and it has an enduring influence on it (Palmer, 2006). Thus, as Woolfolk Hoy and Burke-Spero (2005) argue, mastery experiences gained through student teaching has a great impact on the development of teachers' efficacy. The reason for this power is that mastery experiences are based on the personal experiences of the person, and they are attributed to the skill he/she possesses (Smith, 2002). Furthermore, through experience people have the opportunity to evaluate the results of their own actions

(Pajares, 1997), and to learn teaching activities (Ferguson & Donno, 2003).

Teaching experience increases teachers' efficacy as well as its subcomponents, as people gain skills and strategies for teaching and managing the classroom. Therefore, not only does teaching experience contribute to teachers' self-efficacy (Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008; Pendergast et al., 2011), but it also provides teachers with more chance of developing instructional strategies, classroom management (Choy, Wong, Lim, & Chong, 2013; Klassen, Durksen, & Tze, 2014; Loreman et al., 2013; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007), and student engagement (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2010).

The findings of the present study are in line with the results of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2002) investigations. They concluded that teachers with five or more than five years of teaching experience had higher self-efficacy for classroom management and instructional strategies than novice teachers with less than five years of experience. The only discrepancy between the results of the present study and those of their study is that they did not find any significant difference between novice and experienced teachers' efficacy for student engagement.

The results of this study were against what some other researchers have found out. For instance, Chacon (2005) investigated the self-efficacy of English language teachers in Venezuela, and he found out that there was no correlation between teachers' sense of efficacy and the years of teaching experience. Similarly, Page et al. (2014) studied the self-efficacy of teachers from urban and rural areas located in the Southeast part of the United States, and they came to the conclusion that there was no significant correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and their teaching experience. In Iran, Khodaverdi (2009), and Rastegar and Memarpour's (2009) studies also revealed no significant relationship between the self-efficacy of teachers and their experience. Besides, Brousseau et al. (1988) concluded that as classroom teachers gained experience, their sense of efficacy became weaker.

The Attitudes of MA TEFL Students as Experienced Teachers and Novice Teachers towards the Effect of MA TEFL Courses on Their Teacher Efficacy

Considering all transcribed interviews, it was found out that the participants who were experienced teachers and those who were novice ones had different perceptions of the effect of MA TEFL courses in some aspects, while some similarities were found in response to interview questions. Table 3 shows the themes extracted from the participants' answers to the interview questions. First, themes related to the two general questions, which were not based on the items of self-efficacy questionnaire will be presented. Then, themes related to the self-efficacy questionnaire will be referred to, i.e. efficacy for student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies. It should be mentioned that under each major category themes are mentioned as three subcomponents, including themes related to novice teachers, then, to experienced ones, and finally, themes common to both groups. Table 3 clarifies themes extracted from the responses of interviewees to the interview questions.

Table 3.

Themes Extracted the From Interview with Novice and Experienced Teachers

1. Themes Related to Students' Perceptions of the Helpful Features of MA TEFL Courses

Novice Teachers

The effectiveness of observing others' act of teaching and giving and receiving feedback

Learning important teaching tips in the Practicum as the major course

Experienced Teachers

The usefulness of both theories and practice

The significance of updated materials

Common Themes

The need for offering more specialized courses based on students' needs

Putting theories into practice in projects

The effectiveness of professors' teaching methodology

2. Themes Related to Students' Perceptions of the Effect of MA TEFL Courses on their Teacher Self-Efficacy

Novice Teachers

The impact of degree on raising teacher self-efficacy

Dissatisfaction with courses because of their theoretical aspects

Experienced Teachers

Raise in teacher efficacy by gaining support and confirmation from courses

Common Themes

The usefulness of actual teaching and giving demos in the Practicum

3. Themes Related to Efficacy for Student Engagement

Novice Teachers

Professors' teaching methodology as the role models

The uselessness of Teaching Methodology course as a theory-based course

Experienced Teachers

The efficiency of the Teaching Methodology course as an important course and the role of experience in the better understanding of its theories

The significance of teaching experience in enhancing the knowledge of teaching and raising teacher efficacy

The role of TTC classes vs. universities' courses in teacher education

4. Themes Related to Efficacy for Classroom Management

Novice Teachers

The inefficiency of the Teaching Methodology course due to the gap between theories and practice or the impracticality of its theories

Experienced Teachers

The usefulness of the Teaching Methodology, Materials Development, or Syllabus Design, and the role of experience in connecting theories to practice

Common Themes

Professors' teaching methodology as the reflection of teaching techniques

The essentiality of giving demos in the classroom and the importance of the Practicum

5. Themes Related to Efficacy for Instructional Strategies

Novice Teachers

Taking advantage of theories by relating them to practice

Experienced Teachers

Experience as a framework for the better understanding of the theories of the Teaching Methodology, ESP, Teaching Skills, CALL, and Syllabus Design, or Materials Development

Common Themes

Professors' teaching methodology as the teaching instructors

The role of observation and giving demos in the Practicum in learning teaching nuances and techniques

6. Additional Theme Related to MA TEFL Students' Professional Life

Common Theme

The effectiveness of the SPSS, Quantitative and Qualitative Research, Seminar, and Advanced Writing in professional development

The results of the interviews showed that some themes have been common for both novice and experienced teachers. First, the common themes are discussed, then, themes which are specific to each group of experienced and novice ones will be discussed.

In response to the first interview question, i.e. the effective feature of the courses, novice teachers believed that Practicum was the most influential and helpful course they had experienced during their education. They referred to the experiences they had in the Practicum. They attributed the major reason to the observation of their classmates including, the more experienced teachers' demos and the act of giving and receiving feedback on each others' teaching. However, the above-mentioned reasons have not only been emphasized by novice teachers, but also by the experienced participants. Moreover, both experienced and novice teachers regarded Practicum as a factor which had raised their self-efficacy in general, and their efficacy for classroom management and instructional strategies in particular.

The importance of the practical issues and Practicum has been emphasized by many researchers. According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009), research supports the professional development programs which increase teachers' academic and pedagogical knowledge, and help them apply them in practice. In fact, as Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) argue, theoretical knowledge should be changed and transferred into practice. Malderez and Bodoczky (1999) also explain that the theoretical side of learning teaching incorporates two aspects: a) the theoretical knowledge of profession which is Theory with capital T and is taught at universities. This theory includes the knowledge of the subject matter and the knowledge of pedagogy; and b) theory with small t which is constructed personally by teachers. According to them, Theory should be taught to teachers; however, professional development programs should take into account teachers' personal theory as well. They continued that this point demonstrates the

significance of regarding more classroom practices, i.e. Practicum, as the central part of teacher education programs. Hence, Practicum offered in university programs is regarded as a significant component of higher education which links theory to practice and prepares student teachers for their work (Hughes, 1998; Klassen et al., 2014; Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996; Soontornwipast, 2008).

Besides, it is believed that Practicum raises the self-efficacy of student teachers in general, and their efficacy for classroom management and instructional strategies in particular in professional development programs. Practicum is an important component of professional development programs that enhances student teachers' self-efficacy (Atay, 2007). Accordingly, these programs should provide student teachers with more microteaching experiences to raise their teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

The essential effect of the Practicum is further clarified by the act of observation of teachers' teaching and providing feedback on them. In fact, people do not only rely on their mastery experiences as the sole source of self-efficacy belief, and by watching others performing an activity, or a stressful task successfully observers are led into believing that they are also able to perform the comparable, or similar activities successfully (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1994). Therefore, through observing successful teachers as the models of teaching, student teachers begin to believe that they have the ability to perform the same task since the teaching task is manageable (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Another finding of the study was that projects conducted by MA students were regarded as a useful way of learning since they made students learn by doing something practically and by putting what they had taught and studied into practice. The effectiveness of projects was referred to by both novice and experienced teachers as the useful feature of the courses, i.e. the response to the first interview question.

Researchers believe that getting projects done by TEFL majors improves their knowledge which leads to higher teachers' self-efficacy. As Garet et al. (2001) note, professional development that involves teachers in hand-on learning as a type of active learning, increases their skills and knowledge. This is referred to as Project-Based Learning (PBL) by which "students drive their own learning through inquiry, as

well as work collaboratively to research and create projects that reflect their knowledge” (Bell, 2010, p. 39). Such an experience raises teachers’ self-efficacy by enhancing their content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Darling-Hammod & Richardson, 2009).

The findings of the study also showed the importance of professors’ teaching methodology or way of teaching for both novice and experienced teachers as the influential feature of MA TEFL program, and as a factor which had affected their efficacy for classroom management and efficacy for instructional strategies. They tried to follow professors whose teaching methodology they found to be useful and to avoid those whose teaching methodology seemed to be problematic. Moreover, novice teachers mentioned that they did not learn anything from courses and courses did not have any influence on their efficacy for student engagement, while professors’ teaching methodology was more effective.

Professors’ teaching methodology refers to the concept of apprenticeship of observation and it is considered as a vicarious experience which enhances teacher efficacy. Referring to Lortie (1975), Almarza (1996) claims that student teachers internalize “models of teaching by [apprenticeship of observation], which they activate, while they are in a classroom” (p. 51). This provides student teachers with a limited but powerful source for understanding teaching (Borg, 2004). Thus, EFL teachers need vicarious experiences provided to them through modeling and observing effective teachers, which enhance their self-efficacy (Chacon, 2005). Classroom teachers and university professors model the teaching and thinking of outstanding practitioners (Chase & Merryfield, 2000). Nevertheless, “teachers can serve both as a positive and as a negative role model to student teachers” (Korthagen, 2000, p. 5).

Furthermore, both novice and experienced teachers believed that not all MA TEFL courses were related to teaching. While they found Teaching Methodology, Testing, ESP, or CALL as essential courses, they thought that Linguistics was not related to teaching. Universities are expected to offer more specialized courses which are related to the field of study. Indeed, student teachers have different needs and challenges of which university programs should be aware and mindful (Woodcock, 2011). For instance, Teaching Methodology is considered as the most

significant course in MA TEFL program (Edwards & Owen, 2002), Materials Development is favored by students (Coskun & Daloglu, 2010), and courses such as Testing, ESP, and CALL are essential courses, while Linguistics is “remotely relevant to language pedagogy” (Govardham, Nayar, & Sheorey, 2013, p. 122). Hence, universities should offer more specialized courses, specifically as they should prepare teachers for work and recruitment (Coughlan, 2008; Pocklington & Tuppe, 2002).

In addition, the results of interviews were indicative of the efficiency of courses related to writing and conducting research including thesis. This included Seminar, Quantitative Research, Qualitative Research, SPSS, and Advanced Writing. It should be noted that both novice and experienced teachers believed that these courses were connected to their professional experiences and life.

It is believed that conducting research contributes to student teachers’ professional development and efficacy. Johnson (2002) and Hernández (2009) believe that conducting research leads to the professional as well as personal development of student teachers, plays a significant role in improving their classroom practices, and should become one of their major responsibilities. This point signifies the importance of courses such as seminar which is helpful in writing theses and even dissertation (Mauch & Park, 2003).

Despite the above-mentioned common attitudes between experienced and novice teachers, there were some different viewpoints between them about the effect of MA TEFL courses on their self-efficacy. Experienced teachers mentioned that both theoretical and practical aspects of courses have been helpful to them. Teachers’ experience of teaching informs personal theories; and these theories and the theories taught in Linguistics, Teaching Methodology, etc., inform actual teaching practices (Malderez & Bodoczky, 1999). Hence, teacher professional preparation programs should pay attention not only to the practical aspects of teaching, but also to the knowledge base and theoretical issues (Loreman et al., 2013). In other words, they should make a balance between received knowledge and experiential knowledge (Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Wallace, 1991).

However, except for the Practicum, novice teachers were not content with the usefulness of other courses and they expressed their

dissatisfaction about their focus on theoretical issues. Usually theory taught about teaching is not useful, especially for novice teachers (Northfield, 1998). Korthagen (2001) criticizes the usefulness of theories taught to novice teachers in professional development programs and he puts the emphasis on the need to connect theories to practice.

While novice teachers referred to the uselessness of theories, they believed that when these theories were taught practically, they could comprehend them. According to Stone and Mata (2000), universities should provide the necessary support to novice teachers by integrating theories and practice.

On the other hand, experienced teachers stated that courses such as Teaching Methodology, Teaching Skills, Testing, and ESP were useful and they had learned a lot from their theories. They noted that the theories of Teaching Methodology had affected their efficacy for student engagement and classroom management, and the theories of Teaching Methodology, Teaching Skills, Testing, CALL, and Materials Development, or Syllabus Design had influenced their efficacy for instructional strategies. According to Tarone and Allwright (2005) and Kunzman (2002), experienced teachers often participate in professional development programs to deeply understand theories to support their classroom practices, and they try to improve their understanding by reading research articles.

Experienced teachers also believed that courses raised their knowledge of teaching and made them more aware of what they had been doing in the classroom which, in turn, improved their teaching efficacy. Humphrey et al. (2008), and Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) regard teachers' knowledge as an essential issue leading to their efficacy.

However, novice teachers stated that the certificate they would receive from universities was the major cause of increase in their self-efficacy. Campbell (1996), and Cantrell, Young, and Moore's (2003) investigation also indicates that pre-service student teachers who have higher academic degree, have higher levels of self-efficacy.

The interviews also indicated that some of the experienced teachers were not satisfied with the content of the books and articles they had covered, and they suggested that materials should become updated.

Razi and Kargar (2014) believe that as “teachers need to update their teaching knowledge based on recent theories and methodological advancement, the need for supporting EFL teachers in in-service programs is also felt” (p. 221). As they continued, experienced English teachers who have proficiency in classroom management and instructional strategies need to be updated with the new changes and concepts in foreign language teaching. Thus, the materials provided to MA TEFL students should be up-to-date to make them familiar with changes in their field (Aliakbari & Ghoreyshi, 2013; Foroozandeh, Riazi, & Sadighi, 2008).

The results revealed that experienced teachers emphasize the important role of TTC classes they had passed in enhancing their knowledge of teaching and their efficacy for student engagement. They considered these programs even more helpful than the programs offered by universities. According to Baines (2010), although many teachers are prepared and educated in traditional colleges and universities, many other teachers are prepared in other “fast track programs that emerge and now compete with traditional college and university based undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs for students” (p. 8). TTC courses train teachers in different areas related to teaching (Maxom, 2009) even more quickly than programs offered by universities, and they educate teachers who stay longer in their profession and show more teaching efficacy (Humphrey et al., 2008).

Finally, the results of the interviews showed experienced teachers’ emphasis on the significant role of teaching experience in raising their efficacy for student engagement. The act of teaching in the classroom helps teachers learn teaching activities (Ferguson & Donno, 2003). Teaching experience is regarded as the most powerful source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 1982, 1994), and it contributes to teacher efficacy for student engagement (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2010).

Comparing the results of the quantitative part and the qualitative phase of the study can reveal more clarification. The results of the quantitative section, i.e. the first research question, indicated that the self-efficacy of MA students did not change after attending MA TEFL programs (see Table 1). However, the findings of interviews revealed participants’ satisfaction with specific features of university courses in raising their teacher efficacy in general, and in enhancing their efficacy

for student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies in particular. This discrepancy can be attributed to the nature of questionnaires which usually include general questions and should be complemented with qualitative method in which more in-depth and hidden concepts of participants' ideas are clarified (Dornyei, 2003; Nieswandt & McEneaney, 2009). This point is more evident in the results of the third research question, through which the self-efficacy of MA TEFL students were explored with regard to their teaching experience in interviews. The more specific the questions of the quantitative questionnaires, the better the results would be.

The results of the second research question showed that experienced teachers had higher level of self-efficacy (see Table 2). Similarly, the findings of the qualitative section demonstrated that MA TEFL courses had a greater effect on the self-efficacy of experienced teachers than novice ones. As it was mentioned, experienced teachers have a better understanding of theories (Tarone & Allwright, 2005), regard them as the further confirmation of what they have done in the past in their classrooms, learn many things from these theories (Kunzman, 2002), and think that they help them make the right decisions in the classroom (Hernández, 2009). However, novice teachers appear not to benefit from theories because they do not have enough teaching experience (Northfield, 1998). This difference is of utmost significance since universities are usually only theory-based and do not provide teachers with the opportunity of putting theories into practice in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Moreover, the results of the qualitative part of the study revealed a point that was not evident in the quantitative findings. Although novice teachers could not benefit from courses and the related theories, they were influenced by professors' teaching methodology. According to Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007), novice teachers who have fewer mastery experiences benefit from the other sources of efficacy. In other words, as they explain, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and emotional arousal are more helpful for novice teachers who lack significant actual teaching experience than for experienced teachers. This clarifies that professors are regarded as prominent models for teachers (Chase & Merryfield, 2000).

Conclusion

The results of the study indicated that Iranian MA TEFL courses offered in the state universities have not been successful in enhancing the self-efficacy of the MA TEFL students. However, teaching experience was a contributing factor in increasing their self-efficacy. As the findings of interviews showed, theoretical issues have not been effective for novice teachers; therefore, the screening system should be changed so that teachers who have more teaching experience are admitted to the MA TEFL program. On the other hand, experienced teachers expressed their satisfaction with both the theoretical and practical aspects of courses. Henceforth, course designers and curriculum developers should try to plan courses so that they offer a more appropriate balance between theory and practice.

Both novice and experienced teachers found Practicum as an effective course. Major revisions need to be made in the curriculum of the MA TEFL programs by offering more Practicum, specifically to novice teachers. Universities can also sign contracts with schools to provide EFL teachers with mastery experiences. Curriculum designers should plan courses in a way to place Practicum with Teaching Methodology, Teaching Skills, and similar courses to provide MA students with the chance of implementing what they have learned during courses.

Both groups also confirmed the efficiency of the projects in putting theories into practice. Thus, more attention should be paid to involving MA students in carrying out projects. The contribution of courses such as SPSS, Qualitative and Quantitative Research, Advanced Writing, and Seminar to MA students' professional life signifies that faculties should offer these courses.

The present study was conducted cross-sectionally and it compared the students in the first term with those who were in the third term. The future research is suggested to study the impact of MA TEFL courses longitudinally. This would enrich the results of the first question. In addition, as teacher efficacy deals with teachers' perception of their capabilities to teach, further research should be conducted through direct observation of the class of experienced teachers to see if what they indicate in questionnaires or what they report in interviews match their actual teaching in the classroom (Pajares, 1996).

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