

# Investigating the Iranian EFL Teachers and Learners' Beliefs about Teacher Efficacy

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**Abstract**—The present study was an attempt to investigate Iranian EFL teachers and learners' beliefs about teacher efficacy. For the purpose of the study, 200 male and female learners, between 20 and 34 years old ( $M_{age} = 27$ ) and 50 male and female teachers, with the age range of 48 from Roudehen Islamic Azad University and Ershade Damavand University, and Tehran Central Branch participated in the study. The participants' beliefs about teacher efficacy were measured using Bandura's teacher efficacy (1997). The results showed that students' belief about teacher efficacy was significantly better ( $t = 2.980$ ,  $p = 0.001 < 0.01$ ). Inspection of the both teachers and students' answers to each question was done by descriptive statistics and also interview was made to find the underlying differences. The results of this study have implications for students, teachers, and all those involved in the area of teaching and learning.

**Index Terms**—teachers' beliefs, learners' beliefs, teacher efficacy

## I. INTRODUCTION

In general, individuals think and act on the base of their beliefs and beliefs of the world. These beliefs and ideas have been shaped through years under the effect of numerous factors and are greatly impressive in people's actions and decisions in life (Pishghadam & Navari, 2010). One variable, which has received a lot of attention recently in language learning process, is the beliefs about language learning.

The significance of learners' belief about second language acquisition (SLA) has been recently emphasized in the literature (Brown, 2009) due to its possible influence on improving independent language learners in future (Wenden, 1999). Second language teachers and students may have more or less similar or different considerations of effective teaching and the meeting point of the two belief systems has helpful consequences for students' language learning and the efficiency of teaching instruction (Brown, 2009). The teacher's roles in the L2 learning process are of considerable importance. No matter what approaches are taken to better understand L2 acquisition and learning, the cognitive tradition or the critical perspective (Johnson, 2004, as cited in Saengboon, 2012), it is widely acknowledged that L2 teachers play key roles in helping the learner to learn. Moreover, while the notion of learner beliefs has been extensively researched (e.g., Benson & Lor, 1999; Huang, 2005), teacher beliefs are few and far between, especially those concerning the Iranian EFL teachers.

One of these important variables in teaching and educational context is teachers Efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (1998), state that by teacher efficacy, it means the teachers' beliefs about their abilities to bring about student change and affect their learning even in those difficult or unmotivated students. Teachers with having efficacy believe that they can make a difference in learners' lives, and they teach in ways that prove these changes in their lives (Gibbs, 2002). On the other hand, according to Bandura (1997), teachers with a low level of efficacy have been found to be distrustful both about their own capabilities, and about the abilities of their students and colleagues. In education system, there are some requirements to be certificated as a teacher (Shulman, 1987). Findings from past researches show that beliefs not only affect considerably the teachers' instructional practices and classroom behaviors, but also are associated with their students' performance (Johnson, 2004).

In addition, as the literature suggests learners' belief has been mostly neglected in many researches or educational setting (Barkhuizen, 1998). Moreover, knowing the beliefs of teachers enables one to make predictions about teaching practices and to assess the outcomes of those practices in classrooms (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Furthermore, researchers insist that teacher efficacy is another important dimension of teachers. According to Guskey (1988), highly effective teachers are more open to new thoughts and are willing to test with new approaches, and they can be determined in dealing with problems and being more resistant in the face of setbacks (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

However, a survey of the literature reveals that little research have been done about both teachers and learners' beliefs on teachers' efficacy. By investigating teacher and learners' beliefs about teacher efficacy, teaching can be improved and developed because Bandura (1997) considered teacher efficacy as a powerful and unique tool for the development of teaching in teachers and achieving in students. Moreover, by studying these concepts, one can also

develop an understanding of the role of efficacy in the teaching process. However, the present study tries to fill a gap through identifying the overall beliefs of students and teachers' beliefs about efficacy.

## II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

### A. *Teacher's Beliefs*

According to Richardson (1996), beliefs may be thought of as psychologically held understanding, principles, or suggestion about the world that are felt to be true. Richardson explains that beliefs and attitudes are subsets of a group of constructs that name; define the configuration and content that derives a person's actions. In the realm of education teachers' beliefs will ultimately affect what they teach and how they teach.

### B. *Students' Beliefs*

In cognitive psychology, learner beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning have been examined with the idea that they are part of the primary instruments of metacognition (Flavell, 1987), form the building blocks of epistemology (Goldman, 1986), and are a driving force in an academic performance. Psychologists have started to recognize the universal effect of personal and social epistemologies on academic learning, thinking, reasoning, and problem solving (Schommer, 1993), persistence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

### C. *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy*

Applied to the context of education, teacher efficacy is the judgment of his or her abilities in bringing about preferred results of student engagement and learning, even among unmotivated students (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Although teacher efficacy is easily confused with actual teaching efficiency, teacher efficacy beliefs may underestimate, overestimate or precisely reflect actual teaching exactly. To sum up the previous debate about the meaning and assessment of teacher efficacy, teacher efficacy is a theoretically subtle concept that is hard to assess with certainty (Hebert, Lee, & Williamson, 1998, as cited in Wheatley, 2005).

### D. *Previous Studies of Teachers' Efficacy*

In the study, which was done by Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1992), there was a positive feelings of self-efficacy, but not enough, for effective teaching. That is, these positive feelings produce a generative ability that will allow teachers to develop new teaching approaches, increase their effort, and spread out their determination in the face of difficult teaching situations. Consequently, these authors prove that "from this perspective feelings of positive self-efficacy cannot promise effective teaching, since teachers with high levels of self-efficacy may lack the essential knowledge or skills which are real. The study by Davies (2004) was conducted on a sample selected from 35 governments secondary and high schools in, as well as an additional seven teachers from four different schools in South Wales who took part in semi-structured interviews. The participants were 85 teachers from the sample, divided between science and history teachers. Teachers answered the items that assessed their background knowledge as well as items from the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). In order to measure instructional emphasis on higher order thinking processes, Davies was guided by a Raudenbush (1992) scale, which ordered instructional ideas from low to high that encouraged teachers to rank their importance of each objective. The finding of teacher efficacy detects the cyclical nature of this idea and accepts that any teacher efficacy is in a state of growth at any time, as new capabilities are met. No studies have been investigated the Iranian EFL Teachers and Learners' beliefs about Teacher Efficacy. Considering these points, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about teacher efficacy?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference between EFL teachers' and learners' beliefs about teacher efficacy?

## III. METHOD

### A. *Participants*

Based on practicality and feasibility, the participants of the study included 50 female and male teachers and 230 female and male students from Roudehen Islamic Azad University, Ershade Damavand University, and Tehran at central branch. It is worth noting that 125 students were females and 75 were males. In additions, from the 50 teachers 34 were females and 16 were males. The students were studying in English Translation and English Language Teaching and the mean age of the students was 27 years, ranging from 20-34 years and their average experience in studying English was six years. They all belonged to the same level of education, and they follow the same curriculum. In addition, the mean age of the teachers as participants was 48 years and the teachers' average experience in teaching English was 12-years. For the qualitative aspect of the study, the researchers randomly selected 20 students and 10 teachers who completed the questionnaires, to conduct semi-structured interviews. The sampling procedure for interviews for both students and teachers is random sampling in which each of these 200 students had an equal and independent chance of being selected. The data was gathered during one semester.

### B. *Instruments*

Teacher efficacy questionnaire for learners was initially developed with items addressing students' perceptions of the teacher efficacy. The items for their perception about teacher efficacy came from a pilot version. These items were based on the research literature, and some of them were adapted from previous questionnaires designed to measure Bandura's teacher efficacy (1997). This 29-item questionnaire was conducted according to a 5-point scale: "nothing, a little, some influence, quite a bit, a great deal". It is worth noting that after running item analysis, five malfunctioning items were discarded and 24-item questionnaire was administered in main study. It is worth mentioning that the reliability of the questionnaire after discarding malfunctioning items was 0.89.

Teacher efficacy questionnaire for teachers was initially developed with items addressing teachers' perceptions of their own efficacy. The questionnaire was based on the research literature, and some of them were adapted from previous questionnaires designed to measure Bandura's teacher efficacy (1997). This 29-item questionnaire was on a 5-point scale: "nothing, a little, some influence, quite a bit, a great deal". It is worth noting that after running item analysis, five malfunctioning items were discarded based on teachers' ideas and 24-item questionnaire was administered in main study. It is worth mentioning that the reliability of the questionnaire after discarding malfunctioning items was 0.912.

A semi-structured interview with 3 questions about teacher efficacy was prepared regarding teachers and learners' perceptions based on the questionnaires. It is worth noting that the interview comprised 6 questions with 5-point Likert scales from "Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree"

### C. Procedure

To assess the validity of teacher efficacy questionnaires, the researcher conducted a pilot study with 30 female and male students and also 30 female and male teachers with the same characteristics of the main participants. Analyzing the learners' and teachers' responses and having their comments, the researcher modified the questionnaires and omitted the malfunctioning items. The analysis of the pilot study data was done by using Cronbach's Alpha to see whether the questionnaires are reliable enough to be implemented in the study or not. The modified questionnaires were distributed to 230 female and male learners and 50 female and male teachers from Roudehen Islamic Azad University and Ershad Damavand University and Tehran Central Branch. During class time, the questionnaires were administered preceded by a brief explanation of the purpose and nature of the study. In this regard, a brief informative oral overview of the nature and purpose of the study before implementing the questionnaires were given to both the students and teachers. After the completion of the instrument, the completed questionnaires were collected and scored by the researcher, but there are just 200 questionnaires out of 230 were answered completely. The questionnaire took about 10 minutes to be completed. After gathering information through the questionnaire, the research had an interview with 20 students and 10 teachers. Three questions based on the questionnaire were asked and the answers were rated based on five-likert scale. This descriptive study was of a mixed-method by using both qualitative and quantitative approach. For the null hypothesis, teachers and learners' beliefs are proposed as the dependent variables while the teacher efficacy is considered as the independent variables. Gender and age are considered as intervening variables. In order to collect data through the Likert-scale items in the questionnaires, the quantitative data analysis component was applied to the collected data. The data emerging from answering the Likert-scale are numerical. Hence, they were analyzed quantitatively. In order to summarize the participants' responses, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated. The measure of central tendency, including mean, the measures of variability, including range and variance (or the standard deviation), and the measure of frequency, including percentage of answers to each scale in each item, were done, too. In order to determine the underlying factors that may account for the main bases of variation among the individuals' answers to the teacher efficacy, Factor analysis was used. Cronbach Alpha formula was also used to estimate the reliability and consistency of the instruments. In order to compare beliefs of the students and teachers' perception about teachers' efficacy, the researcher used an independent samples *t*-test in order to compare the significant difference between the two groups' means and to test the null hypothesis. Through Qualitative data analysis, the process of breaking down and restructuring the information was done so as to decode the data. In fact, qualitative data analysis was applied in the analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions collected from interviews.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the outset of the study, a pilot was conducted. The researcher employed two adopted questionnaires, using Likert-type scale. At this stage, the researcher was specifically interested in assuring that a valid and reliable indication of subjects' attitude could be extracted through the questionnaires. For this purpose, the researcher piloted the student questionnaire among 30 students who bore almost the same characteristics of the main participants and also piloted the teacher questionnaire among 30 teachers bearing the similar characteristics of the main participants. The Cronbach's alpha for the teacher efficacy questionnaire based on students' point of view was 0.884 while the Cronbach's alpha for the teacher efficacy questionnaire based on teachers' point of view 0.905. Moreover, each questionnaire went through item analysis to see if there is any malfunctioning item. The analysis showed that items 5, 10, 15, 16, and 17 were of both efficacy questionnaires were malfunctioning. So these items were discarded. The Cronbach's alpha for the teacher efficacy questionnaire after discarding malfunctioning items based on students' point of view was 0.890 while the Cronbach's alpha for the teacher efficacy questionnaire after discarding malfunctioning items based on teachers' point

of view 0.912. Moreover, the validity of both questionnaires was checked through factor analysis. Followings are the descriptive statistics of answers to Teacher Efficacy questionnaire both by students and teachers.

TABLE I.  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF ANSWERS TO TEACHER EFFICACY QUESTIONNAIRE BY BOTH STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	
Students	200	50.00	120.00	80.3300	13.51571	.136	.172
Teachers	50	50.00	108.00	73.1600	14.55091	.647	.337
Valid N (listwise)	50						

As it is evident from the table above, there is a different between the mean of two groups, student having the mean of 80.33 and teachers having the mean of 73.16.

Furthermore, the percentage of answers to each item by both students and teachers were reported as below. Forty percent of students think that their teacher may help other teacher with their teaching skills while 50 percent of teachers think that they may provide their colleagues with a little or no help regarding their teaching skills. The results also showed that while almost half of students think that teachers can make a quite good or great help to administrators to make a more effective school, only 20 percent of teachers think they can do so. Furthermore, while only 24 percent of students think that teachers may have a little influence on reducing the drop-outs, almost a half of teachers think of themselves as a little influence in doing so. Finally, while only 20 percent of teachers think they can do a good job to help to reduce absenteeism, more than half of the students have such an idea. The inspection of the overall percentages indicated that students think of teacher efficacy to make a good school climate more than what teachers do.

Finally to test the null hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was done. As it is evident in Table 1 above, regarding teachers' efficacy questionnaire, both distributions manifested normality with their skewness ratios ( $0.137 / 0.241 = 0.568$ ;  $0.647 / 0.337 = 1.919$ ) falling between the acceptable  $\pm 1.96$  range); so running an independent samples t-test was legitimized to compare the two groups' means. As it is evident from the table below, with the F value of 1.086 at the significance level of 0.299 being larger than 0.05, the inconsistencies between the two groups were not meaningfully different. Therefore, the results of the t-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here.

TABLE II.  
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR THE TEACHERS' EFFICACY FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS' POINT OF VIEW

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Teacher Efficacy	Equal variances assumed	1.290	.257	3.304	248	.001	7.17000	2.17034	2.89535	11.44465
	Equal variances not assumed			3.160	71.597	.002	7.17000	2.26891	2.64658	11.69342

The results ( $t = 3.304$ ,  $p = 0.001 < 0.01$ ) indicate that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. Hence, the first null hypothesis was rejected and it was shown that there was a significant difference between the Teachers' efficacy from students' and teachers' point of view. As a part of survey, both teachers and students were asked to sit in an interview. Three questions based on the questionnaires were asked from them and the answers were rated according to five-likert scale which was Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Strongly disagree (1).

Moreover, as evident form the result of interview regarding the first question(Do you think teachers' perceptions of efficacy influence the students' achievement?), most of the respondents, either teachers or students, were agree or strongly agree that efficacy could help learners' achievement; meaning that both teachers and students were aware of the effect of efficacy on the achievement. Regarding the second question (Does the school leader do anything to support teachers in their work?), both teachers and students stated that the school leader do much less than support to the teachers. This seems to be a very disappointing point to educational system. Regarding the third question, (Is the teacher efficacy the key point in making students learn better?), students believe that the key point in making students learn better is the teacher efficacy while the teachers are not considering it as a key point, yet they emphasize its importance.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Findings

As a result, it can be concluded that the students think of teachers' efficacy to make a good school climate more than what teachers think. In fact, 40 percent of students think that their teacher may help other teacher with their teaching skills while 50 percent of teachers think that they may provide their colleagues with a little or no help concerning their teaching skills. . The results also indicated that while almost half of students think that teachers can make a quite good

or great help to administrators to make a more effective school, only 20 percent of teachers think they can do so. Moreover, while only 24 percent of students think that teachers may have a little influence on reducing the drop-outs, almost a half of teachers think of themselves as a little influence in doing so. Finally, while only 20 percent of teachers think they can do a good job to help to reduce absenteeism, more than half of the students have such an idea. The findings of this study were also in line with that of Raudenbush and colleagues (1992). They reported that there was a positive feelings of self-efficacy, but not enough for effective teaching. That is, these positive feelings produce a generative ability that will let teachers improve new teaching approaches, increase their power, and extend their perseverance in the face of difficult teaching circumstances. Specifically, these studies have demonstrated that there is a strong link between the verified knowledge of teachers and their reported feelings of teaching efficacy. Thus, it can be concluded that feelings of positive self-efficacy cannot guarantee effective teaching, as teachers with high levels of self-efficacy may lack the essential knowledge or skills, which are real.

### B. Applications and Implications

Teachers can use the result of this study in order to maximize the quality of their teaching. Regarding teachers' efficacy, teachers can prepare some information to initiate the new way. Being aware of learners' beliefs regarding teachers' efficacy allows teachers to think critically about these issues. By knowing their ideas, teachers can provide situations in which they can use their ideas in the classroom and applied them in their teaching. By providing insights gained from the results of this study teachers can develop an awareness regarding what factors students find important about teacher efficacy effective and can consequently provide learners with better learning opportunities by studying these perceptions. The sense of knowing about efficacy influences teachers' instructional behavior, classroom organization, and feedback patterns to students who are particularly experiencing difficulty in language learning. The implication of the findings of this study for teacher educators and teacher trainers is to familiarize them with the issue of teacher efficacy. Therefore, results of the current study have implications for language learners, encouraging them to be more aware not only about their teachers' beliefs, but also about their own beliefs in language learning regarding teacher efficacy. Moreover, results of the current study have implications for language learners, encouraging them to be more aware not only about their teachers' beliefs, but also about their own beliefs in language learning regarding teacher efficacy.

### C. Suggestions for Further Research

Besides teachers' beliefs about their efficacy, their personal characteristics (e.g. teacher experience, education level, teacher academic ability, teaching assignment) and personality factors are crucial to be investigated too. In addition, this research was done on BA students majoring in English. Further studies can be conducted in different educational settings including language institutes, MA students as well as students majoring in different disciplines. Moreover, the learners as participants were aged within the range of 20-34. In addition, the mean range of teachers as participants was 40. Teachers' age is another investigated variable with relation to self-efficacy. Also, longitudinal studies can be conducted in this respect.

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