



## A Self-efficacious TESOL Professional in the Arabian Gulf: Evidence from the Literature

Vol. IV, No. III (Summer 2019) | Page: 283 – 292 | DOI: 10.31703/grr.2019(IV-III).32

p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X

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### Abstract

*This article reflects on the notion of self-effectiveness as a substantial aspect of language teachers in ESL/EFL contexts. It introduces and defines the construct of teacher self-effectiveness, which can be derived from four different sources; a) enactive experience, b) vicarious experiences, c) social persuasion, and d) physiological states. The present study takes into consideration various skills, knowledge, and exposure that ESL/EFL teachers need in order to apply communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques and improve learners' linguistic competence. The review of literature brings into light a broad range of factors that might influence self-effectiveness beliefs of the teachers in a school context, and consequently their teaching outcomes. These factors include supportive organizational culture, collegial interactions, participation in continuous professional learning activities, high-level of English language proficiency, years of teaching experiences, and reflective pedagogical practices. It is also shown how self-efficacious teachers can impact EFL/ESL learners' motivation and their academic achievement.*

**Key Words:** CLT, EFL/ESL teachers, Learning outcomes, Self-effectiveness, Teacher education, TESOL professionals.

### Introduction

Language teaching is considered a competitive, challenging and demanding job, in foreign and second language context. Language teachers with inadequate professional training or knowledge often find it difficult to meet challenges of professional demands of language teaching and meet the expectations of their learners, employers, and colleagues. Despite required qualifications for English language teaching, teachers often work hard to keep themselves abreast of new developments in the field and learn about top-notch teaching skills that would benefit their learners, and consequently lead to organizational effectiveness. Developing professional capacity, enriching teaching repertoire and enhancing teaching skills are the teachers' goals to ensure the best teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers with these aims are often effective TESOL professionals who can have a strong impact on their learners, colleagues and organizational culture. Such teachers are considered self-efficacious individuals who not only help themselves to be effective professionals but contribute to their learners' and professional colleagues' effectiveness as well.

Communicative language teaching (CTL) is an established teaching norms in the second language classroom, whereas the teachers need to be equipped with classroom management and a variety of teaching skills. Although language proficiency and competence in the target language is a basic requirement of CLT, researchers have also established the fact that EFL teachers need to focus on pedagogical knowledge and other language skills, such as grammar, morphology, phonology, lexicon, syntax, and concepts of functions of English (Crandall, 1999; Tedick & Walker, 1995). It is therefore clear that competent EFL teachers possess pedagogical knowledge, improved language proficiency and knowledge of language skills as they are deemed critical in EFL teaching (Crandall, 1999), which can have a long-lasting impact on language learners.

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Acknowledging the significance of teacher competence, teacher education in the field of TESOL has aimed at developing and informing pre- and in-service EFL teachers to transform them into self-efficacious TESOL professionals (Ishihara & Lazarton, 2005). Research indicates that due to the absence of one acceptable method in ELT and the rise of post methods era (Kumaradavivelu, 2006), language teachers have no unified theoretical framework to use in their classrooms. Owing to varied contextual demands and lack of unified methods, therefore, classroom teaching heavily relies on the teachers' effort to learn new skills, upgrade their existing knowledge and enhance their context-specific pedagogical skills (Akbari, 2007; Halliday, 1998). Such teachers are deemed as self-efficacious professionals who adopt various informal ways of learning, such as reflective practices, collegiality and formal means to develop their self-effectiveness.

This conceptual paper reviews relevant research studies on the notion the self-effectiveness of the teachers, highlighting its significance in the context of English language teaching. The following sections of the paper provide useful insights into how the idea of self-effectiveness appeared in the field of teacher education as well as in ELT. On the construct of self-effectiveness, the present study tries to answer the following three questions:

1. What is "teacher self-effectiveness" and how it evolved in the field of teacher education?
2. What factors might influence the sense of teacher self-effectiveness in educational contexts?
3. What are the different facets of teacher self-effectiveness in the field of TESOL?

### **The Definition of Self-effectiveness**

The notion of teacher self-effectiveness is the teachers' beliefs about their professional competence and capacities. As it has a substantial impact on the learners' enactment, it enables teachers to learn and assess learners' difficulties and help them overcome those problems. Therefore, teachers in accordance with the learners' learning needs, devise a plan and execute it in order to successfully attain the context-specific teaching objectives (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Teachers with strong self-effectiveness beliefs are able to motivate and inspire language learners and impact their language learning process (Guo, Connor, Yang, Roehrig & Morrison, 2012). Highly self-efficacious teachers are proactive and conscientious professionals who willingly invest time and effort to overcome students' learning difficulties; choose, supplement and differentiate teaching materials; reflect and improve their pedagogical practices; and remain committed to their profession (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011). A significant sense of self-effectiveness in teachers can influence learners' learning and their own classroom practices, it is important to explore and evaluate factors that might enhance teachers' self-effectiveness.

Teacher self-effectiveness is a future oriented cognitive construct that builds teachers' capabilities to accomplish teaching goals (Bandura, 1997) and it never perform very special assignments in a special manner. In other words self-effectiveness is not an actual level of one's competence, it surely is a self-perception of one's professional competence in a given situation. It is considered a context-specific task which can be influenced by personal, professional and contextual differences, hence, individuals can judge the extent of their self-effectiveness while performing identical tasks in different ways (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). Furthermore, self-effectiveness beliefs assist individuals in predicting the amount of time and effort they put in, planning to overcome challenges and organizing their thoughts, actions, and plans in line with the requirement of the tasks (Bandura, 1993).

### **The Sources of Teachers' Self-effectiveness Beliefs**

In the light of social cognitive theory, individuals are often influenced by their environment and vice versa. Performing in a particular environment and then interpreting the outcome of the performance often leads to a change in one's beliefs that also affect the environment (Pajares, 1997). This reciprocal relationship of individuals and environment often help them assess their attitudes and behaviors by understanding and interpreting information from four major sources; a) experience to enact, b) experience of mediation, c) social persuasion, and d) physiological states (Bandura, 1997). Palmer (2006) considers enactive experience as "authentic successes at dealing with a particular situation" (p. 337) that directly affects one's self-effectiveness beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Scholars have pointed its relationship to the context of education and made it clear that in-service teachers'

perception of success raises one's self-effectiveness and sense of failure can lead to lower efficacy beliefs which can have a strong impact on teaching practices (Bandura, 1982; Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Vicarious experience is another source of information which allows the individual to work as protégé and model a skill. Inexperienced people often benefit from modeling a particular skill in a context that helps them develop their personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In Bandura's (1997) views, there are four ways of modeling a particular skill; a) symbolic modeling, b) effective actual modeling, c) cognitive self-modeling, and d) self-modeling. These models can be context-specific where individuals can learn and improve their skills. Palmer (2006) suggests a simulated model that allows the participants to create conditions for their own learning.

Social persuasion is another source of information that is based on performance feedback from a senior colleague, tutor or supervisor. Social persuasion is a major source of self-effectiveness which can be direct (verbal) or indirect (non-verbal) depending on the situation (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Mulholland & Wallace, 2001), which can lead to either encouraging or discouraging social environment (Milner & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2003). Bandura (1997) asserts that the degree of social persuasion is subject to the expertise, competence, credibility, and trustworthiness of the persuader whose words are taken either positively or negatively. The self-effectiveness of the novice teachers could be enhanced with the help of social persuasion and as result it could be observed in their classroom performance (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001).

A physiological state is considered another source of information. People in challenging and complex situations are often required to understand their physiological state signs of physical inefficacy (Bandura, 1997). This lack of physical efficacy can interfere with individuals' performance (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012) that may lead to different responses to different situations.

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), are the exponents of this cyclic process of four sources, which enables teachers to process the information by evaluating the pedagogical tasks in relation to their teaching competence. Having analyzed and evaluated the information, teachers reflect and gauge their self-effectiveness, which is followed by setting goals, determining time and effort to achieve the goals and making strategies to avoid or deal with anticipated problems. The whole process leads to improved performance and better outcomes as a consequence of their efforts which equip teachers with new mastery experience that help with self-effectiveness judgments in the future. All these efforts and judgments of self-effectiveness are context-specific as noted by Bandura (1997).

### **Factors Impacting Teachers' Self-effectiveness**

Research has offered great insights into how teacher self-effectiveness can influence pedagogical practices and students' learning outcomes in different educational contexts (Podell & Soodak, 1993). Moreover, self-effectiveness beliefs contribute to teachers' pedagogical performances and persistence, enhance their professional commitment help them to adopt new teaching techniques (Guskey, 1988), and equip them with more positive, student-friendly and up-to-date teaching strategies to help students overcome their learning deficiencies. The following sections further elaborate factors that might influence teacher self-effectiveness in different educational contexts.

### **Self-efficacious Teachers and their Classroom Practices**

Researchers have underscored the optimistic influence of self-effectiveness on teachers' overall demeanor. Researchers such as Ashton and Webb (1986) have acknowledged the fact that highly efficacious instructors are often well organized who possess top-notch pedagogical skills, effective questioning techniques. Such teachers can explain the concepts well, provide feedback in a variety of ways, and manage classroom affairs in a professional manner. On the contrary, low efficacy teachers lack these effective techniques and skills to control classroom activities and achieve greater teaching and learning outcomes.

### **Teacher Self-effectiveness and its effect on Students' Motivation and Academic Achievement**

Pintrich (2003) defines motivation as "a process for goal-directed activity that is instigated and sustained" (p.5). The presence of a caring, empathetic and friendly language instructor enhance the motivation of the students towards learning a second language (Gardner, 1985). Such teachers are often seen as self-efficacious individuals

who would teach in a humanistic style and inculcate hope and expectations in learners. Moreover, they would consider the learners' different learning styles and give them time, attention and constructive feedback on their work.

Classroom management is one of the key skills of a self-efficacious teacher. Teachers who have a good rapport with their learners often control their class well Wentzel (1994). As maintaining discipline becomes crucial for teachers, self-efficacious teachers with their ability to understand learners and their learning needs, do not find it difficult to create a conducive learning environment in the classroom. It can be said that the classroom environment, students' behavior and attitudes are influenced by the teachers' self-effectiveness beliefs. Similarly, Guo, Justice, Sawyer, and Tompkins (2011) established a positive association between student involvement in a task and teacher self-effectiveness in a classroom environment.

Since teachers with self-effectiveness beliefs are enthusiastic about their teaching, they love to introduce a variety of tasks that encourage students' engagement and autonomy as well as help in classroom management (Allinder, 1994). Ross (1992), is a great supporter of the students and teacher continuous interaction as there is positive relationship between teacher self-effectiveness and students' achievement.

### **The self-effectiveness and the knowledge of teacher**

As the significance of teacher knowledge and its impact on teacher self-effectiveness is widely acknowledged, it can be developed through formal and informal ways of learning. For teachers to improve their self-effectiveness, research illustrates that attending professional development courses, workshops and seminars can add to teachers' pedagogical knowledge and thus improve their self-effectiveness (Puchner & Taylor, 2006). However, Moseley, Reinke, and Bookout (2003) believe that professional development programs do not necessarily leave an impact on teachers' sense of self-effectiveness as there is often no scheme to track the teachers' progress or give teachers' feedback on their classroom practices. Nevertheless, professional development programs which are consisted of follow up sessions could incorporate peer feedback, students' feedback and feedback from the trainers. More research in this respect can establish whether teachers who attend regular PD programs have a refined essence of self-effectiveness.

### **Reflective Practices and Teacher Self-Effectiveness**

Reflection as a form of learning is a common practice in educational contexts around the world. Reflective teachers can help themselves assess their strengths and weaknesses and devise action plans to enhance their pedagogical skills. According to Schön (1996), reflective teaching is a thoughtful process of teachers' personal experiences that they apply to their classroom practices. An important aspect of reflective teaching is that reflective teachers directly receive information from the self-assessment of their classroom teaching, which is very much pertinent to their professional development. Researchers have found that effective teachers are reflective thinkers whose teaching practices are shaped by their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and professional values (e.g. Freeman, 2002; Mullock, 2006). Such reflective teachers develop their capacity and become self-efficacious professionals.

### **The Influence of Organizational context on Teacher Self-Effectiveness**

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) believe that teachers develop their self-effectiveness through considering their pedagogical competence in view of contextual factors, such as teaching resources, student factors, and organizational demands that either facilitate or obstruct classroom teaching practices. Nonetheless, it is the teachers' ability to evaluate the situation, devise a plan, and execute it in a professional way while meeting the contextual demands. Researchers have pointed out that teachers' self-effectiveness beliefs often fluctuate according to the context and its varying demands (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

A plethora of research has considered the influence of contextual factors, such as school context (e.g. teaching resources, students, administrators' factors), organizational environment, collegial interaction and collaboration, leadership practices on teachers' sense of self-effectiveness (e.g. Siwatu, 2011; Walker & Slear, 2011). It has been established that teachers in a supportive teaching environment with sufficient teaching

resources are often well prepared and teach with more confidence than those schools which offer less support and teaching resources (Siwatu, 2011).

As context shapes teachers' self-beliefs and either positively or negatively influences language instructors' understanding of self-effectiveness, researchers have considered it an important area of investigation (e.g. Walker & Slear, 2011). Most of the studies on the awareness of the language teachers' effectiveness have been conducted in the Western contexts; while teacher self-effectiveness in EFL contexts, especially in the Arabian Gulf has hardly been investigated.

### **Teacher Language Proficiency and Self-Effectiveness**

In ESL/EFL contexts, teachers adopt and apply CLT techniques which require them to have improved proficiency in the English language. In other words, ESL/EFL teachers may not be able to develop learners' linguistic competence if their own language skills are not up to the mark. Evidence from the literature shows that EFL teachers should continuously work on their language skills which will develop their sense of self-effectiveness and contribute to their learners' learning outcomes. Hence, it can be concluded that teachers' sense of self-effectiveness is linked to their level of English language proficiency.

### **Teacher Self-effectiveness in English Language Teaching**

On the positive side of the matter, research shows that there is a strong relationship between teacher professional learning activities, such as coaching and mentoring and teacher efficacy (Yost, 2002), professional development workshops, seminars and sessions teacher interest in research (Henson, 2001), and in-service or on the job training activities. These studies indicate that a supportive school environment embedded with professional learning opportunities can have a positive influence on English language teacher sense of self-effectiveness beliefs. However, if an organizational context does not encourage positivity, collegiality and professional learning, teachers' self-effectiveness might be severely affected leading to their underperformance.

In EFL settings where students have inadequate exposure to authentic use of English language, teachers' self-effectiveness plays a pivotal role. For instance, teaching skills like classroom management, English language proficiency, command over the subject matter, and demographic information are important features of EFL teachers' pedagogical repertoire (Chacon, 2005). Other studies relate various factors to the teachers' sense of self-effectiveness. For example, teacher satisfaction, preparedness for the role, classroom management skills, collegial relationship, and school environment can lead to either improved or low sense of self-effectiveness (Shim, 2001). Experienced teachers with innovative teaching techniques were considered highly efficacious, especially those who possessed high level of English proficiency and could effectively utilize CLT teaching tools (Chacon, 2005). These factors were obvious in a study by Eun and Heining-Boynton (2007) which also determined that organizational support, years of teaching experience, and continuous professional development programs would contribute to ESL teachers' self-effectiveness beliefs and influence their pedagogical outcomes. These findings corroborate with Richards' (2002) results that established a strong relationship between teachers' self-effectiveness and teachers' professional learning, teacher knowledge, years of experiences, understanding of learners' needs, supportive teaching context and positive administrative measures.

### **EFL Teacher Self-effectiveness in the Arabian Gulf**

The EFL context in the Arabian Gulf presents unique challenges to teachers in the wake of recent rapid socio-cultural changes. Studies in the Saudi EFL context (e.g. Alrabia, 2016) have shown that teachers' low self-effectiveness is among the leading causes of learners' poor English proficiency. In view of the literature presented in the current article, EFL teachers in the Arabian Gulf are required to participate in professional development programs which have special focus on teacher self-effectiveness development. However, as shown by Ahmad, Latada, Wahab, Shah and Khan (2018), EFL teacher self-effectiveness is less likely to develop in a single short presentation or workshop, rather a well-planned long-term professional development program based on needs analysis can serve this purpose. A structured PD scheme would provide teachers mastery of experience through practicing in a controlled environment, vicarious experience through observing experts, verbal persuasion from

mentors, and stable emotional or physiological state by overcoming challenges. In addition, such learning experiences would strengthen teachers' self-belief in resolving future classroom challenges.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has considered literature on the notion of teacher sense self-effectiveness both in mainstream education and in ESL/EFL contexts. It is well established that self-effectiveness has an impact on teacher's competence and learner's learning in different educational contexts around the world. In the field of English language teaching, teachers' pedagogical and language skills are considered crucial factors in enhancing teachers' sense of self-effectiveness. More specifically, non-native English teachers in EFL contexts require to have improved language proficiency which guarantees their effectiveness and self-effectiveness. As EFL/ESL teachers often use CLT techniques to encourage student interaction in classrooms, more up-to-date skills and pedagogical knowledge enable them to influence their learners' learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the sense of an English language teacher's self-effectiveness is largely impacted by various factors. For example, teachers in supportive organizational structures have a high sense of self-effectiveness whereas teachers who lack administrative support and have no voice in organization policies possess a weak sense of self-effectiveness. Similarly, a school culture can add to teachers' sense of self-effectiveness by encouraging professional collaboration and collegial interactions and offering continuous learning opportunities to teachers. Last but not the least, years of teaching experiences and reflection on classroom practices are crucial factors that positively influence ESL/EFL teachers' self-effectiveness. As a consequence of conducive learning milieu, supportive administration, wide array ray of professional learning opportunities, and reflective practices, TESOL professionals become highly efficacious individuals who inspire and motivate their learners to become high achievers in their academic endeavors.

Since EFL contexts differ a great deal from each other due to indigenous languages, cultures, values, it is important that researchers in the field of TESOL further explore the issue of teacher self-effectiveness and unfold its meaning and role in diverse EFL settings. Moreover, there is a lack of research on how EFL teachers' self-effectiveness is impacted by the course syllabus, textbooks, teaching materials and curriculum that are being applied in a specific context, hence further research will add to the body of knowledge. The use of a variety of research methods and tools will yield more interesting data which can provide a better understanding of teacher self-effectiveness in various EFL contexts.

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