

Pre-service English teachers' sense of efficacy with regard to gender and academic GPA

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Abstract

This study aims to find out in what ways pre-service English language teachers feel efficient in teaching and it seeks for whether there is a relationship between self-efficacy of the pre-service teachers and their academic grades, taking into consideration the gender as well. The sample group for this research involves 44 senior students who study at a state university. In order to gather data, the Turkish version of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale is used. This questionnaire includes three underlying groups: efficacy for student engagement; efficacy for instructional strategies; and efficacy for classroom management. Independent samples *t*-test and correlation analyses are run in order to analysis the data. Significant differences can be observed in two categories of the questionnaire between the genders unlike the results of the correlation analyses between the efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers and their grand point average.

Keywords: Classroom management, management strategies, efficacy beliefs, teachers' sense of efficacy;

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1. Introduction

All student teachers start to form a self-belief concerning what kind of a teacher they will be, whether they might face difficulties in controlling the classes and how to tackle the problems or affect the student's success during their university years. All these beliefs link to the competencies of the teachers. If the teachers feel that they are efficient in using their competencies, their teaching may be affected positively. Therefore, teachers having higher self-efficacy will change the new generations.

Self-efficacy mainly arises out from Bandura's social cognitive theory. He claims with his theory that the beliefs people hold about their efficacy influence the choices they make, their aspirations, level of effort and perseverance, resilience to adversity, vulnerability to stress and depression and performance accomplishment (Atay, 2007). That is to say, what goals people consider, how much effort they put into the stress and depression in their environment are all related to their efficacy beliefs. In the teaching context, Gibson and Dembo (1984) define teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as the capabilities to make positive changes in the behaviour and achievements of students.

Efficacy beliefs influence teachers' persistence when things do not go smoothly and their resilience towards the difficulties (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Greater efficacy enables teachers to be less critical of students when they make errors (Ashton & Webb, 1986), to work longer with a student who is struggling (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and to be less inclined to refer a difficult student to special education (Podell & Soodak, 1993). Allinder (1994), for instance, claims that teachers with higher self-efficacy are inclined to have more organised and planned lessons. Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching (Allinder, 1994), have a greater commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992) and are more likely to stay in teaching (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982, cited in Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teachers with higher self-efficacy beliefs have a profound impact on students in terms of achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986), motivation (Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1989) and students' sense of efficacy (Anderson, Greene & Loewen, 1988). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), on the other hand, state that:

... the reverse is also true. Lower efficacy leads to less effort and giving up easily, which leads to poor teaching outcomes, which then produce decreased efficacy. Thus, a teaching performance that was accomplished with a level of effort and persistence influenced by the performer's sense of efficacy, when completed, becomes the past and a source of future beliefs. Over time this process stabilises into a relatively enduring set of efficacy beliefs.

1.1. Related research

In recent studies, teachers' beliefs about their self-efficacy have been investigated in various ways. In her recent study, Ozkara (2019) researched 118 EFL teachers from primary, secondary, high school and universities in Turkey in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs. She used the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and the language teacher self-efficacy beliefs scale (Praver, 2014). According to the result of this study, teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs felt personal accomplishment in their teaching, while there was a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and self-efficacy.

Some studies have looked at the gender variable as well. For instance, Lesha (2017) carried out research with 543 (M = 79 and F = 464) primary school teachers. It yielded a significant difference between male and female teachers on student engagement and classroom management (CM). Male

teachers reported to be more efficient in these two belief areas. Salihoglu and Gurkan's (2016) study with 34 pre-service English teachers resulted in no significant difference between male and female students in their belief systems. Focus group discussions indicated that pre-service teachers were aware of their self-efficacy beliefs and they could detect their problematic areas of their own.

Other studies also showed similar results in choosing effective CM strategies and use of time (Dolgun & Caner, 2018; Incecay, 2012), teachers' level of stress and their satisfaction in teaching (Celik & Zehir, 2017; Ozkara, 2019). There is an agreement in the literature that teacher self-efficacy is context-specific (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000). In other words, teachers might possess different levels of self-efficacy beliefs in different settings or teaching situations (Goddard, Sweetland & Hoy, 2000), in that they re-evaluate their sense of self-efficacy when they experience new challenges such as teaching a new grade and working in a new setting.

In light of these studies, teacher education should be refreshed and thought again. As Pajares (1992) states, 'beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate. The earlier belief is absorbed in the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter'. Pre-service teacher education programmes should provide an effective teaching practicum so that prospective teachers experience how to instruct and manage students in different teaching contexts (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). If teacher education is developed, then in-service teachers will be more satisfied with their teaching and jobs. They also state that teacher training programmes should provide opportunities for the pre-service teachers to experience teaching practice that includes instructing and managing students in different teaching contexts. It is because of the multifaceted nature of learners. That is why teachers' efficacy beliefs should be formed and developed earlier and students should have the opportunity to face real-life experiences in teaching. They should know how to communicate with parents, administrators and students effectively. They also need to be equipped with different strategies for CM and communication breakdowns. Therefore, students can have more practice with teacher practicum.

1.2. Purpose of the study

In this research, adding a new possible related variable, it is aimed to find out differences in senior students in terms of gender and academic grades to perceive how different variables can have relations with the self-efficacy beliefs of prospective teachers. So, this research tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the overall teacher self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service English teachers?
2. Are there any significant differences within the efficacy beliefs of male and female pre-service English teachers?
3. Does academic success correlate significantly with the self-efficacy beliefs of the pre-service teachers?

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research design

This study was quantitative as it aimed to assess if there was any relationship among different variables (gender, academic success and self-efficacy beliefs) and obtain findings; statistical analyses were also conducted (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

2.2. Participants

In reaching participants, convenience sampling (Mackey & Gass, 2015) was preferred because during the study the researcher was studying at the university where the participants were. Participants were 44 volunteer senior students, 10 male (23%) and 34 female (77%), studying in the English language teaching department. Until the research was conducted, senior students had taken a number of pedagogical courses and had completed the first semester having had the school experience. When the researcher obtained the data, they were practicing teaching with internship.

2.3. Data collection tools

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) translated into Turkish was used in order to gather data. This instrument was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001). The Turkish form of the measure was translated by Capa, Cakiroglu and Sarikaya (2005) into Turkish. It is a 9-point Likert scale ranging from nothing to a great deal. There are three factors in this scale. They are 'efficacy for student engagement (SE)', 'efficacy for instructional strategies (IS)' and 'efficacy for classroom management (CM)'. Items in SE are expected to give a view of teachers' beliefs for encouraging learners and motivating them in the learning process. Items in CM subscale are related the teachers' beliefs for preventing or controlling the unwanted behaviours in the classroom.

Finally, items in the IS subscale are expected to give an idea about the teachers' efficacy to use various instruction and evaluation methods. The Turkish adaptation study of the scale yielded valid and reliable results (Gurbuzturk & Sad, 2009). The coefficient alpha values for the Turkish pre-service teachers were 0.82 for SE, 0.86 for IS, 0.84 for CM and 0.93 in total (Capa et al., 2005). In addition, an information form involving grand point average (GPA) score, gender and age of the students was used. The questionnaire and the information form were hand out during the course to the students.

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale¹ (long form)										
Teacher Beliefs		How much can you do?								
<small>Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.</small>		<small>Nothing</small>	<small>Very Little</small>	<small>Some Influence</small>	<small>Quite A Bit</small>	<small>A Great Deal</small>				
1.	How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2.	How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
3.	How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
4.	How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
5.	To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
6.	How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
7.	How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students ?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
8.	How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
9.	How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
10.	How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
11.	To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
12.	How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

Figure 1. Example of the TSES items

2.4. Data analyses

First descriptive statistics were run for the subscales of the questionnaire. Second, independent samples *t*-test was run to observe the mean differences between the male and female student groups for their self-efficacy beliefs. Finally, a person's correlation analysis was applied to see whether there was a significant correlation between the GPA scores and efficacy beliefs of students.

3. Results

This section presents the results on the research questions below.

Research Question 1. *What are the overall teacher self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service English teachers?*

As Table 1 suggests, the overall score of pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy score is 6.46 out of 9. This indicates a fairly high level of efficacy.

Table 1. Overall score for TTSES (N = 44)

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
TTSES for pre-service teachers	3.25	8.71	6.49	0.95

Research Question 2. *Are there any significant differences within the efficacy beliefs of male and female pre-service English teachers?*

Table 2 shows the mean scores for each subgroup of the questionnaire. In all subscales, female students' mean scores were higher compared to male students. As can be inferred from Table 2, there seems to be a significant difference in student engagement ($p = 0.03$), CM ($p = 0.02$) and overall scores ($p = 0.02$) in terms of gender, favouring female students. However, instructional strategies scores do not differ for the gender variable.

Table 2. The results of the *t*-test analysis of student teachers' self-efficacy beliefs by gender

Subscale	Gender	Number	\bar{x}	SD	df	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
SE	Male	10	5.80	0.67	42	-2.199	0.033
	Female	34	6.56	1.02			
CM	Male	10	5.65	0.93	42	-2.408	0.020
	Female	34	6.55	1.06			
IS	Male	10	6.15	0.81	42	-1.820	0.076
	Female	34	6.80	1.03			

Overall	Male	10	5.86	0.59	42	-2.356	0.23
	Female	34	6.63	0.97			

* $p < 0.05$.

Research question 3. *Does academic success correlate significantly with the self-efficacy beliefs of the pre-service teachers?*

As displayed in the scatter plot (Figure 2), there is no statistically significant correlation between GPA and overall self-efficacy score of pre-service teachers, although it was leaning towards the positive relation ($r = 0.023$, $p = 0.88$). Therefore, it can be concluded from the results that pre-service English teachers' sense of efficacy is not significantly related with their general academic grades.

All in all, these results suggest that in this study context, prospective teachers reported being efficacious in teaching. Female students felt more sufficient in student engagement and CM. These results confront Leshu's (2017) study because male teachers felt more efficient in CM and student engagement. Salihoğlu and Gurkan (2016) found no significant difference between male and female students in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs. Finally, this study displayed that there was not a significant connection between students' success in courses and their beliefs.

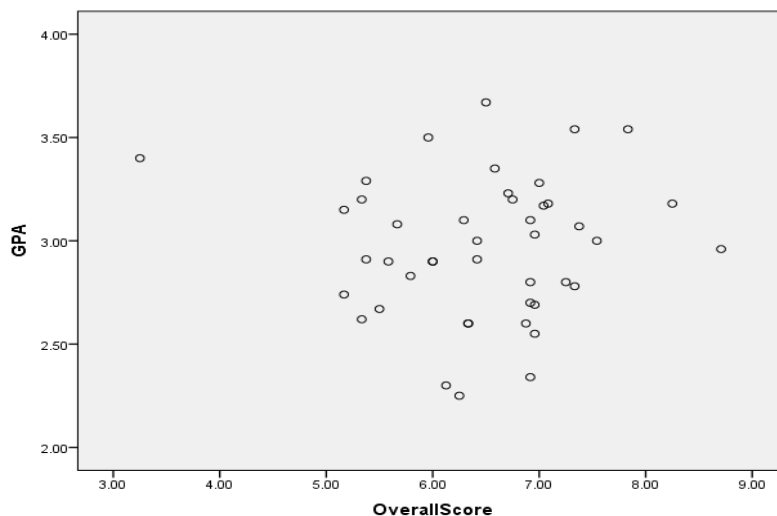


Figure 2. Scatter plot showing the relationship between GPA and overall score for TSES

4. Conclusion

This study sought answers to questions as pre-service English teachers' sense of efficacy beliefs, differences in accordance with gender and its relationship with academic success. A questionnaire was used to obtain data on how student teachers felt in three main areas of teaching: (1) CM, (2) student engagement and (3) instructional strategies. The results showed that the student teachers reported being relatively highly self-efficient. Student engagement and CM scores were

higher in the female group. Finally, the relationship was not significant between the efficacy beliefs of the teachers and their academic success. To conclude, as these students show high self-efficacy beliefs, they can be supported with more practice of teaching so that they can maintain these beliefs and develop strategies to handle the difficulties they can be faced during teaching.

The subjects in the study were limited to 44 pre-service teachers and limited by the disproportionate representation of male and female teachers. A gender-balanced sample could more accurately reflect teacher perceptions of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. For further research, students' numbers can be increased and for triangulation of the research, interviews might be carried out with the participants. Moreover, in-service teachers' sense of efficacy scale can also be studied in terms of collective efficacy, job satisfaction or burnout level.

5. Recommendations

Future research should be carried out to investigate the factor structure of the teachers' sense of efficacy scale using scores from pre-service teachers at different time points during the teacher education process. Attention should be paid to the types of mastery experiences that pre-service teachers receive during teacher education to see if certain types of experiences (i.e., actual teaching experience vs. field observations) affect the outcome (i.e., differentiation of the factor structure) more than others. Future research also should focus on examining the factor structure of the teachers' sense of efficacy scale when using scores from pre-service teachers in culturally diverse settings. Providing additional validity evidence would strengthen the appropriateness of using the teachers' sense of efficacy scale to measure teacher efficacy worldwide and allow for cross-cultural comparisons to be made expanding the cultural appropriateness of the construct.

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