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Iranian EFL Teachers' Sources of Self-Efficacy in the Context of New English Curriculum: A Grounded Theory Approach

Elyas Barabadi *
Assistant Professor
University of Bojnord
elyas.ba1364@gmail.com

Hossein Ahmad Barabadi
Assistant Professor
University of Bojnord
habarabadi@gmail.com

Seyyed Ehsan Golparvar
Assistant Professor
University of Bojnord
segolparvar@hotmail.com

Bayat, Mokarrameh
MA Student in TEFL
University of Bojnord
bayatmokarrame@gmail.com

Abstract

Teacher efficacy is an essential psychological variable which is linked to student achievement, motivation, and even student self-efficacy. Moreover, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs play an essential role in the context of reform initiatives by mediating any behavioral change. The relevant literature reports conflicting findings on the sources, however. Such being the case, the present study aimed at speculating on the sources of self-efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers who participated in this study. To this aim, individual interviews were conducted with 18 English language teachers teaching in middle schools up to the point when data saturation was achieved. Moreover, the participating teachers were asked to keep journals in order to keep a record of the significant experiences that captured their attention concerning their self-efficacy beliefs during one semester. The data were analyzed using grounded theory procedures in which open, axial, and selective coding were applied to extract the themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The results of the study indicated that Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy information including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional states played a crucial role in forming Iranian EFL teachers' efficacy beliefs. In addition to these sources, "teacher competence" and "contextual factors" appeared as two other influential factors affecting Iranian EFL teachers' efficacy beliefs.

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* Corresponding author

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English education in Iran has undergone new changes with the introduction of new English textbooks which are based on the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT). The new English curriculum which has been in place since 2013 aims at developing communicative competence among learners through the use of communicative tasks (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014). Some studies have demonstrated a close link between curricular change and teachers' affective states such as stress and self-efficacy. Kyriacou (2011) and Rizqi (2017), for example, identified curricular change as a major factor contributing to the level of stress experienced by teachers. Moreover, teachers' ability to undertake reform initiatives has been linked to teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Bostic & Matney, 2013; Murphy & Torff, 2016). The study of teachers' efficacy beliefs assumes critical importance in the context of reform initiatives since self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in mediating behavioral change. Accordingly, some researchers (Chan, 2008; Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) have argued that positive self-efficacy among teachers play an essential role in improving teacher education and education reform. A study conducted by Razmjoo and Barabadi (2015) in the context of Iran supports this idea. The findings of their study indicated that affective factors were a severe hindrance to the successful implementation of the new English curriculum. Specifically, the results of their study indicated that there was a no-confidence motion among Iranian language teachers concerning the implementation of the new English curriculum. In other words, lack of positive self-efficacy beliefs among English teachers was a major detrimental factor for successful implementation of the new English curriculum.

Although many researchers (e.g., Althauser, 2015; Chesnut & Cullen, 2014; Chan, 2008; Kissau & Algozzine, 2014; Lemon & Garvis, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016; Sandholtz & Ringstaff, 2014; Yoo,

2016) have recently examined teacher self-efficacy in relation to various factors, little research (Phan & Locke, 2015) has been conducted on the EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their sources in foreign contexts. The present study is an attempt to identify different sources of self-efficacy beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers in the context of the new English curriculum.

Self-Efficacy Beliefs

The concept of self-efficacy is derived from Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory that defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). One fundamental concept of the social cognitive theory is reciprocal causation which asserts that human agency can influence future performance as a result of three inter-related forces: environmental factors, individuals' behavior, and internal personal factors such as cognitive, affective, and biological processes. With the same token, individuals' efficacy beliefs are shaped as a result of the dynamic relationship between their past and present performance, external influences, and internal personal factors. Given this, one comes to this conclusion that efficacy beliefs are situation specific which is under the influence of a host of factors such as task difficulty, and the amount of time and resources an individual can invest (Bandura, 1997; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Pajares, 1996). This situation-specific nature of self-efficacy has been identified as one major cause of current debate concerning its meaning and measure (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Notably, these researchers observed that "there are questions about the extent to which teacher efficacy is specific to given contexts and to what extent efficacy beliefs are transferable across contexts." (p. 784).

Sources of Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy beliefs come from four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and

physiological states. The primary source of self-efficacy beliefs is related to individuals' *previous performance or mastery experience*. Having been involved in performing some tasks and activities, individuals interpret the results of their actions, and then they form some beliefs about their ability to perform similar tasks in the future based on these interpretations. That said, individuals' confidence in doing future tasks hinges upon their understanding of past experiences. If viewed as successful, these past experiences lead to positive efficacy beliefs whereas if viewed as a failure, these past experiences lead to negative efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Another source of self-efficacy beliefs is *vicarious experiences*. People can form beliefs about their efficacy by observing model individuals who perform the task. By observing model individuals, people can obtain information required to assess their performance on the same or similar tasks. Although they are not as a power source as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences can become a reliable source of efficacy beliefs in case people do not have confidence in their abilities or when they lack previous experiences.

Moreover, individuals' self-efficacy beliefs will be more prone to the influence of the model if they perceive that the model's characteristics are similar to those of them. In other words, the impact of such experiences varies depending on the extent to which the observer finds similarities with the model "regarding level experience, training, gender, or race" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007, p. 945). The third source of self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997) is *social persuasion*. People can form their self-efficacy beliefs through exposure to verbal and nonverbal judgments that other people make about them. People develop positive efficacy beliefs when they are faced with positive persuasion while their efficacy beliefs deteriorate when they are exposed to negative persuasion. It is worth noting that the impact of social persuasion is not fixed across different socio-cultural contexts (Phan & Locke, 2015). The fourth source of self-efficacy beliefs is *physiological and emotional states.* Individuals may associate their feelings of stress, anxiety, and

tension to low self-efficacy beliefs. As Bandura (1995) puts it "they interpret their stress reactions and tensions as signs of vulnerability to poor performance" (p. 4). Indeed, how people perceive their emotional and physical states is the key factor determining whether that particular state increases or decreases efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1995). Teachers might have different levels of self-efficacy depending on the differential amount of information they receive from these sources as well as their interpretation of these experiences (Chan, 2008).

Literature Review

Recently, there has been a burgeoning interest in exploring the sources of teacher self-efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Phan & Locke, 2015; Usher & Pajares, 2009). Studies investigating the relative importance of sources of self-efficacy have reported conflicting findings (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Mulholland & Wallace, 2001; Palmer, 2011; Martinsa, Costaa, & Onofrea. 2015). In line with Bandura (1997), some studies (Mulholland & Wallace, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007) identified enactive mastery experiences as the most potent source of efficacy beliefs. However, in some other studies, cognitive mastery including content and pedagogical knowledge (Palmer 2006) and social persuasion (Phan & Locke, 2015) were considered as the most effective factor in shaping self-efficacy beliefs. Different reasons can account for this lack of consensus: firstly, each of the significant sources of self-efficacy can be actualized in different forms, and these forms produce differing effects (Palmer, 2011). For example, social persuasion can be actualized in the form of students' encouragement or collegiality, and each of these can have differing effects on efficacy beliefs (Phan & Locke, 2015). Second, where and when these sources of self-efficacy are provided can determine their relative importance (Palmer, 2011). For example, during professional development programs held for pre-service teachers, vicarious experiences, and cognitive content mastery might prove more useful than other sources of self-efficacy while for experienced teachers

who benefit from a wealth of day-to-day teaching experiences, enactive mastery experiences are particularly useful. Another possibility is that the relative importance of the self-efficacy can be context and culture-specific (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Finally, it is possible that different sources of self-efficacy beliefs might work differently for different subject teachers. Phan and Locke's (2015) study, for example, indicated how EFL university teachers in their study benefited uniquely from various sources of self-efficacy.

New research on teacher self-efficacy not only acknowledges Bandura's (1997) traditional sources of efficacy but also it draws our attention to new sources in new cultural contexts. Ho and Hau (2004) argued that research on teacher self-efficacy in general and sources of self-efficacy in particular needs to be conducted in diverse cultural contexts in order to extend the generalizability and cultural adequacy of the construct. Given the culture and context-specificity of self-efficacy and the fact that no study has dealt with the sources of self-efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers after the introduction of the new English curriculum, this study is an attempt to fill this gap by examining language teachers' efficacy beliefs.

Given the inconsistencies in findings related to the sources of self-efficacy and given the fact that the sources of self-efficacy might differ across different cultures and subject areas, the current study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the principal sources of self-efficacy beliefs among Iranian EFL teachers who teach English in public schools?
2. What is the relative importance of each source of self-efficacy information in constructing EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs?
3. What is the interaction among various sources of self-efficacy and how this interaction might influence Iranian language teachers' sense of self-efficacy beliefs?

Method

Design

The present study employed grounded theory for data analysis. According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory is appropriate for "…studying social or social psychological processes within a social setting" (p. 7) because the researcher tries to understand these processes (e.g., self-efficacy) from the participants' point of view. Using flexible procedures for collecting and analyzing qualitative data, the researcher aims at constructing a theory which is grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Although, drawing on Bandura's (1997) classification of sources of self-efficacy might in the first glance appear in conflict with the pure positivistic assumptions of grounded theory, it is in line with Strauss and Corbin' (1998) construction view of grounded theory in which the researcher can use existing theoretical concepts as a point of departure (Charmaz, 2006). These concepts, however, are considered provisional until they find their way into the emerging theory by repeatedly being present in the data. As Corbin and Strauss (1990) put it "grounding concepts in the reality of data thus gives this method theory-observation congruence or compatibility" (p. 7).

Participants

The participants in this study were eighteen language teachers (9 males and nine females) who were teaching English at Iranian public schools (10 in middle schools and 8 in high schools). Except for four of them, the rest of the participants either held MA in TEFL or were MA students of TEFL at the time of data collection. All the participants had received their BA degree from teachers colleges. The participating teachers' years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 30 years with a mean of 16.77. The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 61 years with the mean age of 37.72. The sample included four teachers from Taybad, six teachers from Mashhad, four teachers from Bojnord, and four teachers from Neyshabour in two provinces of North Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi. Almost all the participants had limited experience in

CLT which was initiated in Iranian public schools in 2013. Before this, their teaching experiences had been based on traditional teaching methods. Consistent with maximum variation sampling (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2010) which is common in qualitative research, attempt was made to recruit participants who could create as many differences as possible with regard to gender, teaching experience, and workplaces (i.e. urban, rural and inner-city schools); These differences are likely to affect the implementation of the new curriculum by language teachers (Kim, 2008; Wang, 2006). Data saturation was the guiding principle for recruiting the sample. In the current study, after interviewing 18 language teachers, data saturation was achieved.

Instruments

Interview

According to Charmaz (2006), interviewing makes it possible to explore a particular topic or experience in depth. During intensive interviewing, the participants are encouraged to verbalize their interpretations of their experiences. Using open-ended and non-judgmental questions, the interviewer can invite detailed discussion of the topic by eliciting unanticipated statements and stories from the participants. Qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory well because both of them "…are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, paced yet unrestricted" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28). Indeed, qualitative interviewing enables the researcher to probe into the subjective world of the participant since this kind of interview is flexible and emergent; new ideas and statements emerge during the interview, and the researcher can immediately pursue these leads. It should be noted that grounded theory interviewing differs from other qualitative types of interviewing since it aims at gathering specific data by narrowing the range of interview topics in order to develop the theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006).

Two to three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participating teacher in the first semester of 2016. In the first interview,

the teachers were asked to articulate their ideas, concerns, and attitudes about different aspects of the new English curriculum. The primary purpose of this short interview was to "gain entry" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 66). The second interview was carried out several days after the first interview, and the teachers were asked about their self-efficacy beliefs concerning the implementation of the new English curriculum. To this aim, several questions taken from the literature of self-efficacy beliefs as well as the content of the first interviews were asked. These questions were about different aspects of their teaching and the new English curriculum and how these aspects were related to their self-efficacy beliefs. In the case of six teachers, a third interview was conducted in order to make it possible for teachers to clarify what they had written in their journal entries.

Journaling

In qualitative research, the use of participants' records of their experiences and their interpretations of those experiences like keeping journals (entry) is common (Hood, 2009). In this study, the participants were required to keep a record of the significant experiences that captured their attention to their self-efficacy beliefs once a month throughout one semester in 2017. According to Charmaz (2006), elicited texts such as journal entries can "…foster frank disclosure that a person might not wish to make to an interviewer" (p. 36). Accordingly, more conservative participants are encouraged to reveal their personal experiences related to the topic under investigation (Shepherd, 2006). This makes journaling as a complementary technique to interviewing. In this study, it was up to the participants to write their journals on paper and hand them over or to send them through email.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Consistent with the assumption of the grounded theory that data collection and analysis are interrelated processes (Ary et al., 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), data analysis in the current study began as soon

as the first pieces of data were gathered through the first individual interview and two journal entries. At first, the interview questions and journaling prompts were open-ended and non-judgmental in order to understand the participants' subjective world from their perspective. Using open coding which will be described later, the researchers could come up with many conceptual labels and categories that directed the next interviews and journal \entries. The process of "…going back to the data and forward into analysis" as suggested by Charmaz (2006, p. 23) continued up to the end of the research when the theoretical framework emerged. All the interviews were conducted in Persian since the participants felt more comfortable and the interviews would be less time-consuming. Likewise, the journal entries were written in Persian for the same reasons.

The analysis of data was carried out using three types of coding: open, axial, and selective (Ary et al., 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding which occurs at the beginning of the study aims at labeling and categorizing phenomenon in the data using two analytic procedures: using constant comparative method in which concepts and categories are compared to each other and new pieces of data, and asking questions of data in order to develop core concepts, categories and their properties. In open coding, the researcher compares different events/actions/interactions in order to identify similarities and differences between them. This helps the researcher to form categories and subcategories. The next level of analysis, axial coding, aims at putting the data back together by showing the relationship of categories to their sub-categories which is tested against data. Sub-categories can be linked to a category by using a "coding paradigm" that involves conditions, context, strategies (actions and interactions), and consequences. If we consider “collegiality” as a subcategory of social persuasion, the new data might be carefully analyzed to determine the conditions that give rise to collegiality, the context in which it occurred, the actions and interactions through which collegiality occurred and finally the

consequences of collegiality. The final stage of data analysis is selective coding in which the connections between discrete categories are established in order to build the theoretical framework.

In order to establish the credibility of the findings, data triangulation, peer review, and member checks were used. Data triangulation involved the use of two sources of data, namely, interview and journal entry. Peer review was achieved through consensus among the authors of the study concerning the themes extracted from the raw data. Finally, the participating teachers themselves were asked to express their ideas about the extracted themes and categories (i.e., member checks).

Results

Grounded theory analysis of the data suggests that Iranian EFL teachers' sense of efficacy is affected by six major factors. These sources of self-efficacy included the four categories described by Bandura (1997) as well as two other categories of "contextual factors" and "teacher competence." In what follows, the six categories affecting Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are explained. However, it should be noted that physiological/emotional states are discussed along with other sources of self-efficacy since these states occurred as a result of processing other sources of self-efficacy.

Mastery Experiences

The study teachers frequently mentioned mastery experiences as a significant source of enhancing their self-efficacy. Ali in one journal entry noted:

> On this day, I was teaching "Travelling the world" lesson. Having taught the conversation, I realized that students were interested in four destinations: Iran itself, Africa, Spain, and Italy. So, they were divided into four groups. The members of each group pooled their ideas together. I helped them with English equivalents of the words they wanted to say. The Africa group was impatient to talk about

its wilderness and different wild animals. The Spanish group had a severe talk about sports, especially about football teams…..

In a follow-up interview, Ali also stated that he found this teaching experience delightful since he could enlist the cooperation of almost all the students in the class. Some teachers believed that the use of various supplementary materials such as animations and flashcards could generate heated discussion among students. Saeedeh also in an interview said:

> Before playing the conversation of each lesson, I let my students watch some animations related to the topic. This I think lifted their spirits so that they came to me and said "lady, we did not notice how quickly the class time passed.

The fact that students did not notice the passage of time because of deep involvement was considered as evidence of effective teaching by Saeedeh. She said, "I felt very efficacious because I could awaken the interests of my students." Several teachers claimed that their efficacy beliefs were reinforced toward the end of the academic year as a result of gaining more experience. In an interview, Moeen stated:

> Early in the academic year, I did not have a harmonious relationship with my students since they did not observe classroom rules. So, I could not manage the class well. I felt incompetent, but little by little these tensions became less and my teaching got better.

As this interview excerpt indicates, as the teacher gains more teaching experiences, his instructional practices seem more effective in his view. The influential role of previous experiences was also acknowledged by some language teachers who believed that teaching in higher grade levels was more comfortable for them. In this regard, Zekriya said, "overall, I am quite easy with grade nine students since my teaching experiences in grade seven and eight give me much insight."

In almost all instances of mastery experiences, several participating teachers witnessed an impressive display of negative or positive emotions affecting their beliefs in their teaching ability. In other words, physiological/emotional states accompanied successful or unsuccessful mastery experiences. In what follows, two additional instances of emotional display and its effect on teachers' efficacy beliefs are presented:

Asef wrote:

> I had alphabet letters carved from pieces of wood, and I attached a magnet to each piece. Then I asked students to make different words by moving the carved letters on a metal board. This innovative method made students very active and enthusiastic. I got so pleased, and I thought I had every reason to be proud of my teaching this session.

Yusof wrote:

> I was teaching past progressive tense in a de-contextualized manner. At the end of the session, I realized that many students had not got the point. When leaving the class, mental pressure built up, and I began to conjure up negative thoughts about my teaching ability.

All these instances indicate that mastery experiences can influence language teachers' efficacy beliefs both directly and indirectly. Indirect influence is the result of positive or negative emotions that such experiences can arouse.

Teacher Competence

In the current study, one of the most recurring themes about language teachers' efficacy beliefs was related to a repertoire of skills, knowledge, and abilities that a teacher should possess to feel efficacious. This repertoire included two categories described by Palmer (2006) as cognitive content mastery and cognitive pedagogical mastery as well as two additional categories of "classroom management" and "prior

preparation" for teaching. Following grounded theory guidelines (Charmaz, 2006), we did not try to "force preconceived ideas and theories directly upon our data" (p. 17). Instead, by following leads and clues in the data, specifically, our participants' in vivo codes, we called these four categories as "teacher competence."

For many teachers, the excellent speaking ability was considered as a significant source of self-efficacy. In his discussion of a good language teacher, Taha said: "in a communicative classroom, if you are good at speaking English, well, students put trust in you, and this makes you feel confident in your teaching." Additionally, knowledge of teaching methods and theories was acknowledged as a vital source of self-efficacy. Fariba explains:

> If teacher herself is educated and knowledgeable, she knows which teaching theory or method works best in a particular moment. I think this knowledge increases teacher's self-confidence.

Several teachers, however, believed that teacher's ability actually to use this knowledge matters most. Regarding this, Asef, one of the participating teachers contends:

> If you know how to get this (e.g., English lesson) across to students and at the same time you trust your knowledge, definitely, you will have no problem.

Likewise, Omar said, "the teacher who is knowledgeable has all the aces because such a teacher can answer students' questions." In contrast, teacher's inability to answer students' questions is likely to diminish self-efficacy because "students do not think seriously about him." Most study teachers felt a strong need to update their general English as well as their pedagogical knowledge on a regular basis as an effective way of enhancing their efficacy beliefs. In an interview, Fariba states:

> If I want to rate my teaching on the scale of one to ten, my score would be eight because I always try to be updated and to study new research findings of teaching and learning English.

Closely related to the update issue, some teachers stated that they had unsuccessful teaching experiences concerning teaching new words since they were not familiar with various strategies and techniques for teaching vocabulary. Sana complains in this way:

> Well on this day, I wrote every new word on the board and just gave their Persian equivalents. I did not try anything else because I did not know. There was little English talk. I was so unsatisfied with my teaching.

Although the source of inefficacy in this interview excerpt is an unfortunate mastery experience, the primary cause of this failure was lack of pedagogical content knowledge. In contrast, having the required knowledge makes the teacher feel competent. In this regard, Khaled wrote:

> When teaching some topics such as "My Favorite Food," I think I have good command. Whenever I teach this lesson, I am confident of success.

It seems that the teacher's sense of efficacy varies from one lesson to another depending on how they assess their command of spoken English and English teaching. It is worth noting that teacher knowledge is more likely to enhance teachers' self-efficacy when it is accompanied by effective "classroom management" and "prior preparation." Regarding classroom management, Pariya said:

> I believe teaching especially teaching a foreign language needs good management. It (good management) I think more than compensates for inadequate knowledge.

She further stated that teachers with an adequate level of knowledge and good classroom management do far better than those teachers with profound language knowledge but poor classroom management. In this regard, Omar wrote:

> I have seen this among colleagues whose major was not English, but they had to teach English in school. They acted more successfully than teachers whose major was English.

Almost all study teachers mentioned preparation as a key factor influencing their teaching self-efficacy. More specifically, they stated that whenever they had to do impromptu teaching, they did not feel confident in their teaching whereas careful prior preparation boosted their self-efficacy. Zekriya, for example, attributed his high self-efficacy to prior preparation:

> This year, for teaching each lesson, I downloaded several video clips and worksheets. That is, it should be in such a way that a language teacher goes to class not empty-handed. He should not hastily improvise everything in class.

It should be noted that "teacher competence" as a significant source of self-efficacy information acts both directly and indirectly. As the discussion above indicated, the direct effect is noticeable: the more competent the teacher feels in the four areas, the more efficacious he/she will feel. The indirect effect is achieved when this source leads to successful mastery experiences.

Social Persuasion

One predominant theme emerged from the data analysis was related to social persuasion as a source of self-efficacy information. Almost for all participating teachers, the greatest encouragement that a teacher could receive was from students themselves. This encouragement took two forms: first, students' learning and progress; second, the words of

encouragement that teachers received from their students. From the perspective of several participating teachers, students' learning and progress or the lack thereof played a significant role in enhancing or diminishing their self-efficacy. This point is well described by Sahar as follow:

> Some students can speak very well. This is very inspiring and pleasant experience for a teacher. The opposite is also exact. The students who lag give me a signal that there is something wrong with my teaching.

When asked whether the rewards provided by education authorities such gratitude certificate was valuable or not, Moeen said that such rewards are encouraging, but he added:

> I have higher intentions for my students. You know, when they give me a sense of satisfaction; this makes me confident in my teaching. For example, when they say "teacher, your teaching was great," it is much encouragement for me.

Similarly, Zekriya indicated that how students' "emotional responses" can be interpreted as signs of teaching quality. He said, "the other session, I thought my teaching was not good at all because I could feel the signs of fatigue among many students." The discussion so far indicates that when students display positive emotions whether verbally as admiration and approval of teachers' instructional practices or indirectly through their involvement in class activities, teachers feel very confident about their teaching.

Although students' feedback was the dominant form of social persuasion affecting teachers' self-efficacy, there were several other forms of social persuasion such as collegiality, support from the principal, encouragement from educational authorities, and parents' feedback. Several participants viewed collegiality and feedback from colleagues as a significant source of self-efficacy, but at the same time, they lamented the lack of collegiality among language teachers. Only two

teachers stated that their sense of efficacy improved as a result of the collaborative discussion about their instructional practices. Negin wrote:

> During in-service classes, we could share a wealth of teaching experience. It was great. For example, during break time, we sat together and evaluated the lessons. We exchanged ideas about our teachings. This pooling (of ideas) made me think that I was more capable.

Likewise, Ayesheh comments:

> We have a Telegram group in which we exchange ideas about teaching. Colleagues write exciting posts in the group, and we can read them.

For many teachers, principal's behavior was an important factor affecting their confidence in their teaching. For Salma, "respect and support of the school staff especially the principal" was considered as a significant factor increasing her self-efficacy. In contrast to the significant effect of students and principals' feedback on increasing language teachers' self-efficacy, educational authorities and parents were neutral or at times detrimental to language teachers' efficacy beliefs. For example, Soad complains that:

> In my opinion, the educational department does not pay attention (to my teaching). For example, during the previous academic year, they did not open the door of my classroom even once to see what I was doing.

Similarly, other teachers stated that they did not earn well-deserved recognition from educational authorities and parents for the hard work and effort that they did during the academic year. In their interviews and journal entries, negative phrases and sentences abounded in this regard: "when hard work is done, but it is not seen. This is not okay", "as a human, we expect at least a verbal appreciation by parents or educational department," "lack of professional supervision," and "parents' naïve

expectation." Comments like these highlight several points: first, language teachers hard work is not appreciated by educational authorities and parents as it should be; second, language teachers do not experience professional supervision in which they can obtain constructive and professional comments about their teaching, and thirdly, many parents hold this unrealistic expectation that their children can learn English fully only in the classroom. Accordingly, when their children's proficiency level does not live up to these unrealistic expectations, they place the full responsibility for language teachers. Taken together, these factors tend to decrease language teachers' self-efficacy.

Vicarious Experiences

Although vicarious experiences were viewed as enormous potential for enhancing language teachers' self-efficacy, this potential was not fully realized. Except for one teacher, none of the participating teachers stood a chance of observing other language teachers teach a lesson. Being one of the directors of English teaching festival held annually in North Khorasan, Khaled explains:

> I learned many things as a referee in this festival. I can say I learned 20 different points from the 20 language teachers whose teachings I observed. This experience was awesome. They (teachers) used techniques and methods that one could never think of them. I thought many of these methods as impractical, but when you see another teacher can do it, you tend to believe in yourself.

Another untapped potential for gaining vicarious experiences for participating teachers was in-service programs held for language teachers. Almost all participants expressed their concerns about "the theoretical and impractical" nature of in-service classes. Ali wrote: "the more practical the in-service program, the more competent the teachers will feel." Taha's comment during an interview is exemplary: "well, in-service classes were not effective. They are held only to keep up the appearance". However, a few teachers stated that they could gain a

wealth of experiences because the in-service program instructor himself/herself taught the content of the new English textbooks based on CLT. Fariba describes the in-service classes as follows:

> Well, at first the instructor himself taught one lesson based on CLT and then he made every language teacher follow his lead and teach one lesson in the class. This program was perfect. Just the first session was about theory (of CLT).

For Fariba and other teachers who attended this particular in-service program, having the experience of seeing each other teach in the presence of a competent instructor was very effective in fostering their self-efficacy.

Contextual Factors

The factors listed under this category involve time allocated to English teaching, equipment, students' level of motivation, discipline issues, and the students' makeup in the class. About time allocated to English course, Yusof explains:

> Due to a serious shortage of time, I had to cobble together some lessons. You know, when I cannot live up to my expectations, I lose my confidence. Besides, when in a hurry, I get physically and mentally stressed.

As can be seen in this interview excerpt, shortage of time is linked to his sense of efficacy because it negatively affected both his mastery experiences and consequently his physiological/emotional states. Students' proficiency level was another factor affecting teachers' efficacy beliefs. Hannan's comment is worth mentioning here:

> No matter how hard I tried in this school last year, the weak students could not use English as I expected. Honestly, I had no confidence when I entered the classroom in this school because I knew there was no likely outcome.

This disappointment was mentioned by some other teachers who stated that teaching demotivated students and students with disciplinary problems had a very adverse effect on their teaching self-efficacy. In contrast, a few teachers who were teaching gifted students in individual schools believed that they were "very efficacious because almost all the students could understand the content of the lesson." Put it simply, students who lag and are demotivated cannot provide teachers with positive feedback which is a form of social persuasion. Furthermore, it was indicated that classroom equipment played a crucial role in enhancing or diminishing study teachers' self-efficacy. The availability of high-tech equipment such as smart boards, data projector, and hi-fi systems was considered a prerequisite for effective teaching.

Regarding this, Saeedeh wrote:

> Well, I should confess that I have two different types of teaching in two schools. In the rural school where there is no equipment, I have serious problems getting across the content of the lesson, while in a downtown school where I have all the equipment, my teaching goes very smoothly.

Like other contextual factors, the availability of equipment or the lack thereof can affect teachers' self-efficacy in two ways: first, by enabling/failing teachers to have successful mastery experiences, and second by instilling negative or positive emotions.

Discussion

The findings of the study can be summarized in the following model (see Figure 1). As can be observed, in addition to the four sources of self-efficacy as proposed by Bandura (1997), there are two other factors affecting language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, namely, teacher competence and contextual factors (circles 4 and 6 in the model). To start with circle 1, vicarious experiences were considered as an enormous potential for self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with Phan and

Locke's (2015) study in which eight university language teachers "…never [had] formal experiences of seeing colleagues teach" (p. 79), and hence vicarious experiences did not play a major role in their efficacy beliefs.

Nevertheless, in the case of Iranian language teachers, vicarious experiences are precious potential for self-efficacy beliefs. In few instances during in-service programs in which language teachers could observe the instructor and other language teachers teach some lessons based on CLT (vicarious experiences), language teachers could develop certain instructional practices successfully (mastery experiences) which in turn boosted their self-efficacy. This suggests a nexus between vicarious experiences and mastery experiences. This interactive effect of these two sources was reported by Morris and Usher (2011). The rarity of vicarious experiences can be accounted for by the overall educational culture in Iran. Examining the implementation of the new English curriculum in junior high schools in Iran, Barabadi and Razmjoo (2016) also identified "lack of effective teacher observation" (p. 53) as a significant obstacle for language teachers' professional development, and hence the full implementation of the new English curriculum. The researchers argued that although participating teachers in their study believed that they could benefit from observing other language teachers' classes (e.g., vicarious experiences), the overall culture and atmosphere among Iranian language teachers viewed observation as an intrusive act whose purpose was to pass judgment.

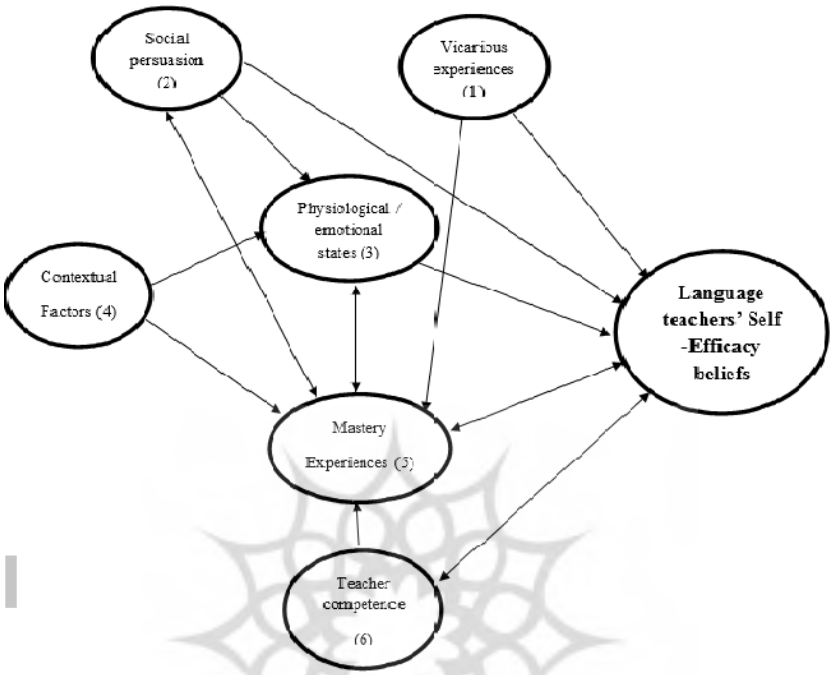

Figure 1. The complex interplay among sources of self-efficacy

Social persuasion especially feedbacks given by students and principal of the school was another major factor affecting language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs both directly and indirectly via instilling positive or negative emotions. For example, a simple comment like "thank you for the teacher, your teaching was great" was enough for the teacher to feel happy the whole day and feel confident about his teaching. This finding is consistent with studies by Rizqi (2017), Howard and Johnson (2004), and Phan and Locke (2015). In Phan and Locke's (2015) study, social persuasion especially positive feedback from students was the most important source of efficacy information for university language teachers. In Rizqi's (2017) study, the key features that helped the participating teacher to cope with job-related stress and remain resilient were "supportive institution and conducive social relationships" (p. 22) especially the positive feedback that she received from her students. Howard and Johnson (2004) similarly indicated that resilient teachers had

"…strong support from colleagues and school leadership" (p. 412). Though these two latter studies were conducted with teacher stress, their results support the influential role of social persuasion in regulating teachers' emotional states including stress, resiliency, and of course self-efficacy.

Circle three in the model describes what Bandura (1997) calls physiological/emotional states. As can be seen in the figure, physiological/emotional states are an essential nexus of self-efficacy information for Iranian language teachers. In other words, these states mediated the effect of other sources including social persuasion, contextual factors, and mastery experiences. This finding is in line with Phan and Locke (2015) who stated that "…negative and positive emotions as a result of the processing of efficacy information from other sources influenced the construction of self-efficacy" (p. 79). For example, it was indicated earlier that how students' words of appreciation (e.g., social persuasion) lifted the spirits of language teachers (e.g., emotional states). Likewise, the availability of equipment and students' level of motivation and proficiency (e.g., contextual factors) appeared particularly likely to induce positive or negative emotions among study teachers. Finally, it was shown that most teachers felt extremely happy after a successful teaching experience (e.g., mastery experience).

Although physiological/emotional states were the result of the processing of efficacy information from other sources for teachers in this study, these states were an influential source of teachers' efficacy beliefs. This finding is not in complete agreement with Phan and Locke (2015) and Morris and Usher (2011) who argued that physiological/emotional states are a supplementary source of teaching self-efficacy. Rather, this source is a major nexus of other sources. Besides, this finding markedly contrasts with findings from studies by Mills (2011) and Palmer (2006) which came to this conclusion that physiological/emotional states did not appear to affect teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. A possible explanation for the role of physiological/emotional states in shaping Iranian EFL

teachers' self-efficacy might be the fact that Iranian people in general and Iranian teachers in particular sound more emotional, and hence are more likely to be affected by positive and negative emotions.

The fourth circle in the model deals with contextual factors. It should be noted that contextual factors are the only category in this model that did not influence teachers' self-efficacy directly. This is the reason why Bandura (1997) contended that contextual factors moderate self-efficacy beliefs. Nonetheless, because of the significant presence and strong effect of contextual factors on language teachers' mastery experiences, they were included as one independent category in the model. In the results section, it was found that how language teachers' efficacy beliefs changed from one school to another just because these schools differed regarding students' makeup (e.g., motivation and proficiency level), and availability of equipment.

The next circle in the model involves mastery experiences. For participating teachers, previous successful and unsuccessful mastery experiences were a significant source of self-efficacy information. This finding is in line with Bandura's (1997) contention that mastery experiences are the most potent source of self-efficacy information. Moreover, this finding seems to be in line with those of other researchers such as Morris (2010), Poulou (2007) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007). It is worth noting that mastery experiences for language teachers in this study grew under the influences of other sources of self-efficacy. The influence of vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and contextual factors on mastery experiences was already discussed.

Regarding the nexus between physiological/emotional states and mastery experiences, the findings of the study suggested that no matter what was the source of positive or negative emotions, study teachers ascribed these emotions to their instructional practices. For example, being in high spirits after receiving praise and encouragement from students made some study teachers believe that teaching was successful. It should be noted that the most substantial influence on study teachers' mastery experiences was "teacher competence" (circle 6 in the model)

which included four components: cognitive content mastery (knowledge of English), cognitive pedagogical mastery (pedagogical knowledge), classroom management ability, and prior preparation. In other words, teachers who believed they were more competent in these four areas believed that they had more successful mastery experiences. Besides, teacher competence was a direct source of self-efficacy information for study teachers. The influential role of cognitive mastery and cognitive pedagogical mastery in shaping teachers' self-efficacy beliefs was confirmed by Phan and Locke (2015), Palmer (2011), and Morris and Usher (2011).

Additionally, classroom management and teachers' preparation were two important factors determining whether language teachers felt competent and hence efficacious or not. The idea that self-efficacy affects teachers' classroom management ability has gained broad acceptance among researchers (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Bullock, Coplan, & Bosacki, 2015; Shoulders, & Krei, 2015). The relationship between teacher self-efficacy and classroom management can be "cyclical" (Henson, 2001) in a sense that effective classroom management behavior is likely to have a major influence on teachers' beliefs in their ability to succeed (Pace, Boykins, & Davis, 2014, Powell, 2009). The findings of the present study support the "cyclical" or mutual relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and classroom management ability.

The findings of the study acknowledge the critical role of context in mediating the availability and the operation of self-efficacy information (Bandura, 1997). As indicated earlier, the four sources of self-efficacy beliefs as proposed by Bandura (1997) along with two other sources including teacher competence and contextual factors were acknowledged by participating teachers in this study. The acknowledgment of all these sources can be accounted for by the demands of the new English curriculum in Iran (Barabadi, 2015). The results of the study carried out

by Barabadi (2015) indicated that Iranian EFL teachers feel a strong need to understand about different pedagogical practices and assessment procedures associated with the new English curriculum which is based on CLT. Thus, it comes as no surprise if "teacher competence" as explained in this paper is regarded as a significant source of self-efficacy. The new English curriculum also has defined new roles for language teachers as facilitators and participants; roles which are entirely different from the traditional role of English teacher as a presenter of grammar and a translator (Barabadi, 2015). Therefore, Iranian language teachers seem to be in need of a model teacher to show them how to adopt new roles. That said, study teachers looked at the in-service program as a chance to observe the instructor or other language teachers teach a lesson to follow the lead (e.g., vicarious experiences). With the emphasis of the new English curriculum on oral/aural skills and communicative tasks and activities, the role of contextual factors such as availability of equipment and allocation of more time are considered as important factors affecting language teachers' self-efficacy. In sum, the findings of the study suggest that although all sources of self-efficacy information play a role in influencing Iranian EFL teacher' efficacy beliefs, mastery experiences play the most important role since almost all other factors affect EFL teachers' mastery experiences.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicated that Iranian EFL teachers participating in this study drew on six significant sources of self-efficacy information to build up their teaching self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional states as proposed by Bandura (1997). Additionally, "teacher competence" and "contextual factors" were identified as influential sources of efficacy beliefs. Given the establishment of the new English curriculum and specific educational and cultural milieu in Iran (Barabadi, 2015), all six sources took on almost equal importance. Additionally, it was indicated that there was a complex interplay among sources of self-

efficacy (see Figure 1) which is consistent with Bandura's (1997) claim that various sources of self-efficacy closely work together to inform individuals' self-efficacy.

Given the critical role of vicarious experiences and social persuasion in enhancing language teachers' self-efficacy, serious attention should be given to language teachers' professional development. English education in Iran needs to introduce "a variety of school-based, practitioner-driven, collaborative, inquiry-based approaches to professional development" (Johnson, 2009) such as Peer Coaching and Teacher Study Groups. Observing other language teachers teach a lesson (e.g., vicarious experiences) or exchanging ideas about their instructional practices (e.g., collegiality) can "…create a meditational space where dialogic mediation, scaffolded learning, and assisted performance" (Johnson, 2009, p. 96) can improve language teachers' pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices. Thus, language teachers themselves, teacher directors, school staff, and educational authorities are recommended to pay more attention to the collaborative nature of teacher professional development which is a foundation for enhancing language teachers' self-efficacy.

In addition to collegiality, other forms of social persuasion such as feedback from parents and school staff were considered an indispensable source of self-efficacy. Principals of the school can play a crucial role in providing teachers with positive feedback both directly and indirectly by encouraging parents to get more involved in their children's schooling by attending parent-teacher conferences. In such conferences, school staff and parents can appreciate the hard work of teachers. This will improve language teachers' efficacy beliefs and hence the efficiency of their instruction.

Another critical step that can be taken by educational authorities to enhance language teachers' efficacy beliefs is to organize some intervention programs for improving teachers' management abilities as an effective way to enhance their self-efficacy beliefs (Pace, Boykins, &

Davis, 2014, Powell, 2009). Moreover, language teachers are strongly recommended to have prior preparation so that they can respond to the pressing demands of an English class which is based on CLT. Finally, all stakeholders including educational authorities, school staff, and parents need to help language teachers to overcome contextual constraints which act as a significant obstacle to teaching effectively.

In this study, individual interviews and journaling were used to gather data. If other data collection techniques such as observation and narrative framework were used, a more comprehensive picture of language teachers' sources of efficacy information would have been obtained. Moreover, since self-efficacy is specifically context-dependent, it is a good idea to examine teachers' self-efficacy beliefs separately across variables such as gender, years of experience, and school type (rural vs. urban). Finally, other researchers can develop a questionnaire based on the findings of this qualitative research and other qualitative studies to examine teachers' efficacy beliefs on a larger scale for generalizability purposes.

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