

## **Iranian English Teachers' self-efficacy: Do Academic Degree and Experience make a difference?**

**Ramin Akbari\***

Assistant professor of Tarbiat Modares University, I.R. Iran

**Shahab Moradkhani\*\***

MA student of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Tarbiat Modares University, I.R. Iran

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### **Abstract**

Teacher efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to enhance student achievement and bring about positive learning outcomes. The present study was intended to investigate possible relationships between experience/academic degree and teacher efficacy among EFL teachers. Four hundred and forty-seven teachers who participated in this study filled in a survey which included some demographic information as well as Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES). The results of data analysis showed that experienced teachers (with more than three years of teaching experience) had a significantly higher level of global efficacy, efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies compared to their novice counterparts. In contrast, teachers who had English-related academic degrees did not enjoy significantly higher levels of efficacy except in the subcomponent of student engagement. The findings are discussed in the light of different sources of efficacy to which novice/experienced teachers resort and the nature of English-related university programs.

**Key Words:** Teacher Efficacy, Teacher Experience, Teachers' Academic Degree, Novice Teachers, Experienced Teachers.

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\* Tel: 021-82883664, Fax: 021-82883669, E-mail: akbari\_ram@yahoo.com

\*\* Tel: 021-66908252, Fax: 021-82883669, E-mail: sh\_moradkhani2000@yahoo.com

### **1. Introduction**

Before the 1990s, despite the fact that teachers had always constituted one of the main rings of the educational chain, they had been neglected to a large extent in the research agenda. However, in recent years, with the postulation of postmethod pedagogy which empowers language teachers “to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 541) and critical pedagogy which considers teachers as “transformative intellectuals” (Pennycook, 1989, p. 613), more attention has been paid to them. Consequently, some researchers have investigated different characteristics of language teachers such as their pedagogical knowledge base (e.g., Watzke, 2007), professional development (e.g., Ross & Bruce, 2007), and identity (e.g., Tsui, 2007) which affect teachers’ classroom practices and subsequently students’ achievement.

One of the features that has absorbed a good deal of attention recently is teachers’ sense of self-efficacy which is a crucial parameter in determining teachers’ opinion about their job, their classroom activities, and their influence on students’ outcomes. Research shows that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction (Caprara et al., 2003; Caprara et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2002), have stronger commitment to teaching (Evans & Tribble, 1986; Ware & Kitsantas, 2007), and are less vulnerable to burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Shaalvik & Shaalvik, 2007). In addition, efficacious teachers create a better learning atmosphere for their students (Deemer, 2004; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Yost, 2002), and are more innovative in the application of new teaching methods (Wertheim & Leyser, 2002). Greater efficacy also helps teachers use their class time as best as they can (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), set high standards for themselves and persist in the face of obstacles (Ross & Bruce, 2007), foster stronger collegial ties (Friedman & Kass, 2002), and enhance students’ achievement (Caprara et al., 2006; Herman, 2000; Midgley, et al., 1989; Ross, 1992; Shaughnessy, 2004; Tournaki & Podell, 2005; Wallik, 2002). So, it seems that the stronger a teachers’ sense of efficacy, the more qualified s/he will be.

On the other hand, two of the most important criteria used by recruiters to

employ second language teachers are professional experience and educational background (Clark & Paran, 2007). However, not much published research is available to show the influence of these features on improving teachers' quality. The necessity for such a study is seriously felt when one realizes that many of those who are involved in the English teaching profession possess academic degrees in irrelevant majors such as geography, physics, engineering, etc. The present study is a partial attempt to fill this gap with respect to teachers' efficacy beliefs. More precisely, the relationship between English teachers' academic degree/professional experience and their sense of efficacy will be addressed. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

Is there any difference between the self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers?

Is there any difference between the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers who have an English-related degree and those who hold irrelevant degrees?

### **Review of the literature**

The concept of self-efficacy (or simply efficacy) was first proposed by Bandura (1977) within his social cognitive theory and refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p.2). Self-efficacy beliefs do not necessarily reflect people's actual ability, but show their perception of it. Therefore, they may underestimate or overestimate their real abilities (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Four sources have been postulated to be influential in shaping self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977, 1995, 1998). The first one is *enactive or mastery experience*. It is the most powerful source of efficacy and is connected with people's success or failure in doing a task. "Successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established" (Bandura, 1998, p.53). *Vicarious experience*, as the second source of efficacy, has to do with the fact that most people try to select models for themselves from among other persons. In such a case, the successes of the chosen model

enhance individuals' sense of efficacy, especially when there are a lot of similarities between the individual and the selected model. The third source of efficacy is called *social persuasion* which refers to the verbal encouragement people receive from others. If the person who provides verbal persuasion is dependable, individuals' self-efficacy tends to increase. *Physiological and emotional states* constitute the last source of efficacy and pertain to people's physical and affective condition during task completion. For instance, feelings of relaxation are signals of self-assurance and, therefore, enhance self-efficacy, while a racing heart beat or high blood pressure can lead to low efficacy beliefs.

When it comes to the academic setting, teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' judgment on their abilities to motivate students and improve their achievement (Campbell, 1996; Chacón, 2005; Cruz & Arias, 2007; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Ross et al., 1996; Weately, 2005). There are so many factors which may influence this psychological construct, but they can be classified under two broad categories; contextual and demographic factors.

As for the first category, it is said that teacher self-efficacy is a kind of context-specific construct (Chacón, 2005; Dellinger et al., 2008) and is shaped within a particular environment (Friedman & Kass, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). It is supposed to be affected by such factors as the principal leadership and school climate (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). More precisely, if teachers have access to more resources in the school and enjoy the principal's support, they are more likely to have stronger self-efficacy beliefs (Deemer, 2004; Hoy, & Woolfolk, 1993; Tschanne-Moran & Hoy, 2002). In addition, teachers who receive guidance from their colleagues feel more efficacious, regardless of whether it is in the form of supervision (Chester & Beudin, 1996; Coladarci & Breton, 1997), mentoring, or interdisciplinary teams (Warren & Pyne, 1997). Also, the class size can affect teachers' sense of efficacy in that they possess stronger efficacy beliefs if they teach larger classes (Lee et al., 1991; Raudenbush et al., 1992). Students' characteristics might affect teacher efficacy as another contextual factor. For instance, Bejarano (2000) found that students' gender has no effect on teachers' perceived efficacy (i.e.,

teachers are equally efficacious in teaching both males and females). Evans and Tribble (1986), Herman (2000), Taimalu and Öim (2005), and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2002) discovered that teachers are more likely to be efficacious when they teach younger students. Moreover, focusing on students' social class, Lee et al. (1991) and Hoy and Spero (2005) came to the conclusion that more efficacious teachers are those that teach students who come from the high socioeconomic levels of the society. To sum up, it might be inferred that the context in which teachers work, including the principal, the colleagues, and the students' characteristics, can affect their self-efficacy beliefs to a great extent.

The second category (i.e., demographic factors) includes variables such as gender, age, experience, and academic degree. Considering gender, for example, available research indicates that male and female teachers do not differ in their perception of self-efficacy (Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007; Herman, 2000; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Lee et al., 1991; Taimalu & Öim, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The only reviewed study in which a difference was found between male and female teachers' self-efficacy was that conducted by Raudenbush, et al. (1992). Although in their study female teachers had significantly higher level of efficacy than males, this difference was not that much great.

Teachers' age is another investigated variable with relation to self-efficacy. While Campbell (1996) claimed that older teachers feel more efficacious, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2002) could not find any relationship between them. Perhaps this discrepancy could be explained in the light of another variable which covariates with teachers' age; that is, teaching experience. Older teachers are normally considered to have more experience.

However, the literature seems murky as one tries to see the relation between teachers' experience and their efficacy beliefs. Some of the researchers have come to the conclusion that teaching experience has nothing to do with teacher self-efficacy (Bejarano, 2000; Chacón, 2005; Gaith & Shaaban, 1999; Howell, 2006; Lee, et al., 1991; Wallick, 2002). Some others (e.g., Cruz & Arias, 2007; Gaith & Yaghi, 1997;

Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Taimalu & Öim, 2005;) intended to find the difference between the efficacy of prospective and inservice teachers. They concluded that as teachers enter the profession and gain more experience, their beliefs in their ability to control disturbing factors outside the classroom context, known as general teaching efficacy (GTE), decreases, whereas their beliefs in their own ability to teach within the classroom context, called personal teaching efficacy (PTE) improves. Cruz and Arias (2007) attributed the higher GTE for prospective teachers to the support they receive from their tutors and also to the distance from real classroom situations. As these teachers enter the classroom and confront “the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life” (Veenman, 1984, p.143), they discover that educational system is not the sole source for students’ behavior and they are affected by other environmental factors. As a result, their GTE decreases in the course of time. However, these claims were questioned by Huang et al. (2007) who discovered that both GTE and PTE were higher for experienced teachers. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2002, 2007) and Chan (2008) attempted to find the difference between the efficacy of novice and experienced practicing teachers. They found that experienced teachers had significantly higher efficacy than their novice counterparts. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) tried to explain this difference based on the sources of efficacy. Moreover, they found that verbal persuasion significantly predicted novice teachers’ sense of efficacy because “teachers who are struggling in their early years in their careers tend to lean more heavily on the support of their colleagues” (p.953). Experienced teachers, on the contrary, were more likely to take advantage of the strongest source of efficacy (i.e., mastery experience) since they have passed enough time in the career to experience success in their professional lives. As it seems, there is no general agreement on the relationship between teachers’ experience and their self-efficacy beliefs. One of the reasons might be that different researchers have utilized various instruments to measure teachers’ sense of efficacy (e.g., Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Moreover, they have followed different statistical procedures like Pearson correlation coefficient (e.g., Chacón, 2005) or parametric tests (e.g.,

Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Yet, another reason might be that they have had different cut-off points for dividing novice and experienced teachers (e.g., Chan, 2008; Huang et al., 2007). These problems are exacerbated within the realm of English teaching since it suffers from the scarcity of research in this regard. Therefore, it seems that to be able to talk about the relationship between teaching experience and teachers' sense of efficacy with certainty more studies are required.

The last reviewed demographic characteristic is teachers' academic degree. It can be approached from two different perspectives; the level and the relevance of the academic degree. The former refers to whether a teacher has higher or lower academic degree within a subject matter, while the latter addresses the issue if a teacher who teaches a particular subject matter has a degree which is related to it. Considering the level, it seems that as teachers get higher academic degrees or go to graduate schools for further education, their sense of efficacy improves (Campbell, 1996; Cantrell et al., 2003; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). In addition, on-the-job training programs appear to enhance teacher self-efficacy (Chacón, 2005; Taimalu & Õim, 2007; Tucker et al, 2005; Ross & Bruce, 2007). All the mentioned studies, except Chacón (2005), have taken teachers from different disciplines into account. However, when it comes to the relevance of degree, it looks very hard to find a published research which has addressed the problem. It can be due to the fact that, in the case of most subject matters, the relevance of teachers' academic degree seems to be a prerequisite for recruiting them. For example, it is almost impossible for a teacher without an academic degree in mathematics to teach this subject matter in higher levels of education. But, this assumption is not met about language teachers; as mentioned earlier, it is possible for every one with a good command of English to make an English teacher.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Four hundred and forty-seven English teachers (96 male and 351 female)

participated in this study. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 25 years (mean=3.65, SD=3.33). Following Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) and Chan (2008), we chose three years of teaching experience as the cut-off point for dividing novice and experienced teachers. As a result, 253 of the participants were classified as novice and the rest (194 teachers) were categorized as experienced. From among this population, those teachers who had a Bachelor of Art (BA) in English-related majors (i.e., English translation and English literature) or post graduate degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) were considered to have degrees which were relevant to English teaching. Other participants were considered as holding irrelevant degrees. Based on this criterion, 202 teachers had relevant and 245 had irrelevant academic degrees.

#### **Instrument**

Teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES) developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) was used as a criterion to assess teachers' self-efficacy beliefs since its validity has been proved in different contexts (Klassen et al., 2009). This instrument consists of 24 questions answered on a 9 point likert scale ranging from 1-nothing to 9-a great deal. TSES includes three subcomponents (efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for instructional strategies, and efficacy for classroom management) each of which is measured through eight questions. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) guidelines, the instrument can be used in two different ways: first, by calculating the means of participants' answers to all 24 questions. This score, which ranges from 1 to 9, is called global efficacy; second, by calculating the means of the answers for each of the three subcomponents separately which yields three scores for each person ranging from 1 to 9; the higher the score a participant gains, the higher his/her self-efficacy beliefs.

#### **Procedure**

In order to control contextual factors as much as possible, the participants were chosen from a single language institute in Tehran. Five hundred teachers working in



fifteen branches of the institute were contacted and invited to participate in this study. After being assured of the confidentiality of the provided information, they were presented with a two-page survey including a consent letter, some demographic information, and TSES. They were requested to take the survey home, answer the questions, and give it back to the principal of the branch who, in turn, would hand them to the researchers for further analysis. Four hundred and forty seven copies were given back which formed the basis for data analysis.

### Data analysis and results

The obtained information was fed into SPSS (version 16). The values of global efficacy, efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for instructional strategies, and efficacy for classroom management were calculated for each of the participants and the related descriptive statistics are presented in the following table (Table 1).

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of global efficacy, efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies**

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Global efficacy	447	7.21	0.89	4.25	8.92
Efficacy for student engagement	447	6.91	0.99	3.86	8.88
Efficacy for classroom management	447	7.43	0.95	4.12	9
Efficacy for instructional strategies	447	7.30	0.96	3.75	9

Cronbach alpha was used to assess the reliability of the instrument, showing reliability indices of 0.93 for global teacher efficacy, 0.79 for student engagement, 0.86 for classroom management, and 0.87 for instructional strategies which can be considered satisfactory.

To answer the research questions, four sets of two-way ANOVAs were conducted. In each of them, teachers' academic degree and experience were considered as the independent variables both of which had two levels; teachers were

divided into relevant and irrelevant groups based on their academic degree and also into novice and experienced categories based on their teaching experience. In the first two-way ANOVA, teachers' global sense of efficacy was considered as the dependent variable. Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on global efficacy are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on global efficacy

Statistics	Experience		Academic degree	
	Novice	Experienced	Relevant degree	Irrelevant degree
Number	253	194	202	245
Minimum	4.25	5.05	5	4.25
Maximum	8.92	8.79	8.79	8.92
Mean	7.00	7.49	7.34	7.11
S.D.	0.89	0.81	0.87	0.90

The results indicated a significant main effect only for experience ( $F_{(1,443)}=30.26$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with an effect size of 0.64, but neither the main effect for academic degree nor the experience  $\times$  academic degree interaction effect was statistically significant ( $F_{(1,443)}=3.81$ ,  $p=0.058$  and  $F_{(1,443)}=0.03$ ,  $p=0.85$ , respectively). In the following plot (Figure 1), it has been schematically shown that experienced teachers had a significantly higher level of efficacy than their inexperienced counterparts. However, although those teachers who had an English-related academic degree enjoyed a stronger sense of global efficacy compared to their colleagues who had non-English degrees, their difference did not reach the significant level.

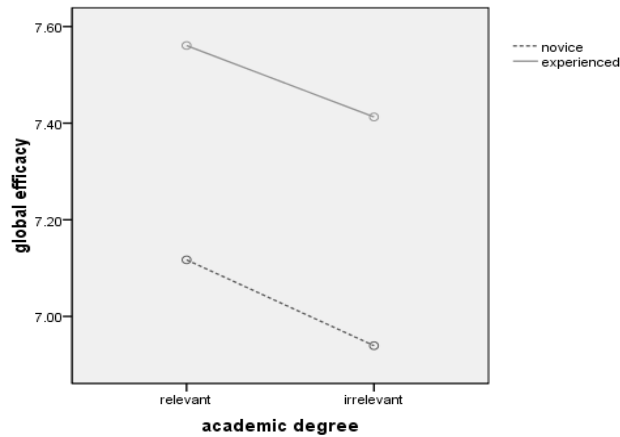


Figure 1: English teachers' academic degree and experience and their sense of global efficacy

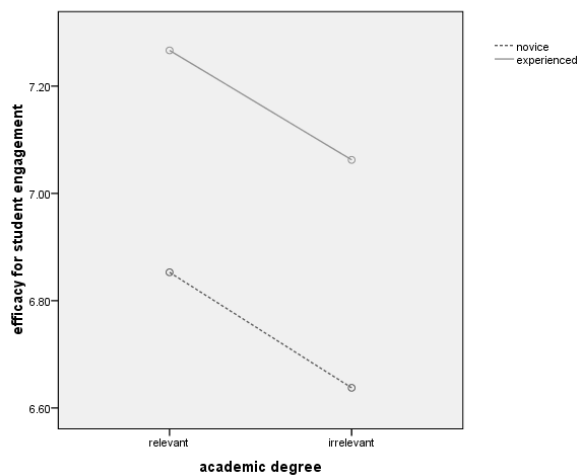
The second two-way ANOVA, was intended to find the effect of teachers' academic degree and experience on their efficacy for student engagement. Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on this subcomponent are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on efficacy for student engagement

Statistics	Experience		Academic degree	
	Novice	Experienced	Relevant degree	Irrelevant degree
Number	253	194	202	245
Minimum	4.38	3.86	3.86	4.38
Maximum	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88
Mean	6.72	7.17	7.06	6.79
S.D.	0.99	0.94	0.96	1.01

The results showed that both the main effects for academic degree and experience were significant ( $F_{(1,443)}=5$ ,  $p<0.05$  and  $F_{(1,443)}=20$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively)

with an effect size of 0.11 for the former and 0.43 for the latter. But, the academic degree  $\times$  experience interaction effect was not significant ( $F_{(1,443)}=0.004$ ,  $p=0.95$ ). As the profile plot (Figure 2) illustrates, experienced teachers felt more efficacious than their novice colleagues. Moreover, those teachers who had English-related degrees enjoyed a significantly higher level of efficacy for student engagement compared to those who had non-English-related degrees.



**Figure 2: English teachers' academic degree and experience and their sense of efficacy for student engagement**

In the third two-way ANOVA, the effect of teachers' academic degree and experience on their sense of efficacy for classroom management was investigated. Descriptive statistics of participants' scores for this subcomponent are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on efficacy for classroom management

Statistics	Experience		Academic degree	
	Novice	Experienced	Relevant degree	Irrelevant degree
Number	253	194	202	245
Minimum	4.12	5.38	4.62	4.12
Maximum	9	9	9	9
Mean	7.22	7.70	7.52	7.35
S.D.	0.97	0.87	0.93	0.97

The results revealed that while the main effect of experience was significant ( $F_{(1,443)}=27.37, p<0.01$ ), neither the main effect of academic degree nor the academic degree  $\times$  experience interaction effect were significant ( $F_{(1,443)}=1.58, p=0.20$  and  $F_{(1,443)}=0.10, p=0.74$ , respectively). The following plot (Figure 3) shows the same pattern as that of global efficacy; English teachers with more experience had a significantly higher level of efficacy for classroom management, while those who had English-related degrees did not enjoy a significantly stronger sense of efficacy in this regard.

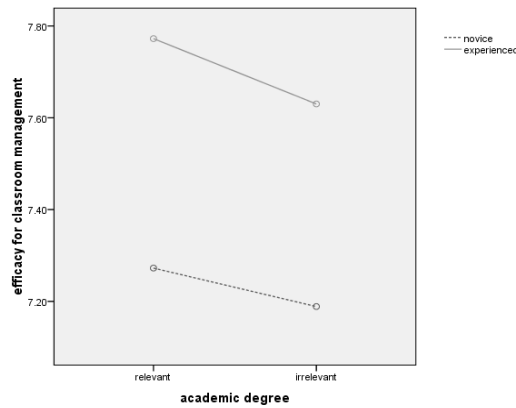


Figure 3: English teachers' academic degree and experience and their sense efficacy for classroom management

Finally, in the last two-way ANOVA, teachers' efficacy for instructional strategies was used as the dependent variable. Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on this subcomponent are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistics for participants' scores on efficacy for instructional strategies**

Statistics	Experience		Academic degree	
	Novice	Experienced	Relevant degree	Irrelevant degree
<b>Number</b>	253	194	202	245
<b>Minimum</b>	3.75	5.14	4.75	3.75
<b>Maximum</b>	8.88	9	9	8.88
<b>Mean</b>	7.08	7.59	7.44	7.19
<b>S.D.</b>	0.97	0.86	0.94	0.97

The results indicated that neither the main effect of academic degree nor the academic degree × experience interaction effect were significant ( $F_{(1,443)}=3.47$ ,  $p=0.06$  and  $F_{(1,443)}=0.50$ ,  $p=0.47$ , respectively), whereas teaching experience had a significant main effect ( $F_{(1,443)}=28.69$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Also, as the following plot shows (Figure 4), experienced teachers had a significantly higher level of efficacy for instructional strategies. But, teachers with English-related academic degrees did not have significantly stronger sense of efficacy in this regard.

In brief, teachers who had English-related academic degrees showed a consistent pattern of having a stronger sense of efficacy than those who possessed non-English-related degrees, yet the difference between the two groups was statistically significant only in the case of efficacy for student engagement. In contrast, compared to their novice counterparts, experienced teachers enjoyed a significantly stronger sense of efficacy in all the subcomponents as well as the global aspect.

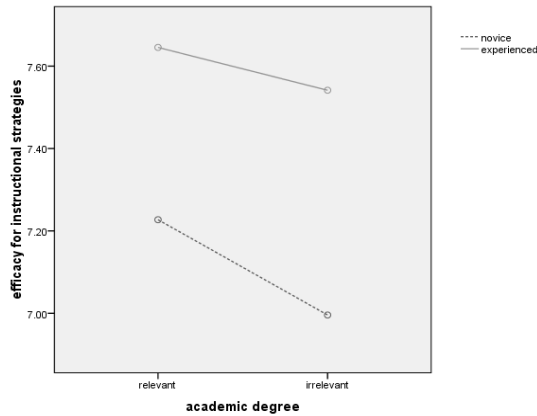


Figure 4: English teachers' academic degree and experience and their sense efficacy for instructional strategies

**Discussion**

In this section, the results of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions presented earlier.

**Research Question 1: The relationship between teachers' experience and their self-efficacy**

The findings are almost in line with Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2002, 2007) who concluded that experienced teachers (with more than three years of teaching experience) have a stronger sense of global efficacy, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for instructional strategies compared to their novice counterparts. This difference in the strength of efficacy beliefs among novice and experienced teachers might be attributed to various sources of efficacy they utilize. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), novice teachers, who are struggling to find their voice as they enter the profession, rely more heavily on the support they receive from their colleagues. Consequently, the most noticeable source of efficacy they resort to is verbal persuasion. Experienced teachers, in contrast, tend to lean more toward the strongest source of efficacy (i.e., mastery experience) which

they have accumulated over years. These successful experiences contribute to strengthening the teachers' sense of efficacy in a cyclical nature, in that, when they succeed in accomplishing a task, they gain greater efficacy which leads to greater efforts and persistence. This, in turn, results in teachers' improved performance which boosts efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Therefore, since mastery experience is the most powerful source of efficacy, it enhances experienced teachers' self-efficacy beliefs to a larger extent in comparison with verbal persuasion which is heavily utilized by novice teachers.

The only discrepancy between the present study and those conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2002, 2007) is that while they did not find any significant difference between novice and experienced teachers' efficacy for student engagement, the present research demonstrated that experienced English teachers feel more efficacious for involving students in class activities. This might be attributed to the difference between the participants in Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2002, 2007) study and those in the present one which was just concerned with English teachers (as opposed to the former ones that chose teachers from different subject matters). Perhaps one of the major differences between teachers of other disciplines and language teachers pertains to the importance the latter group attaches to eliciting students' engagement in classroom activities. The value of student engagement in language classroom has been echoed by recent theories of language teaching such as communicative language teaching (Savignon, 1991), task-based language teaching (Skehan, 1998), and sociocultural theory of learning (Ellis, 2003). Therefore, a general characteristic of an English teacher, which distinguishes him/her from teachers of other subject matters, is his/her ability to engage students in performing classroom tasks. More precisely, one of the crucial factors which makes English teachers judge themselves as qualified persons is their belief in their ability to elicit students' participation in the classroom activities. As a result, this subcomponent of efficacy (i.e., efficacy for student engagement) is a distinguishing parameter between novice and experienced teachers.

Another reason for lower levels of efficacy among inexperienced teachers is that while experienced teachers utilize their accomplishments to enhance their sense of



efficacy, their novice colleagues have to overcome the “reality shock” (Veenman, 1984, p. 143) they experience as they enter the classroom for the first time. The result is that their efficacy drops at the early stages of their career (Fives et al., in press; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Rushton, 2000) and it takes time for them to establish a firm and stable sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

Finally, another factor which might contribute to experienced teachers' stronger sense of efficacy is the larger number of on-the-job training programs they have attended; research shows that participating in training programs throughout the teaching service can enhance teachers' sense of efficacy (Tucker et al., 2005), especially their efficacy for instructional strategies and student engagement (Chacón, 2005).

**Research Question 2: The relationship between teachers' academic degree and their self-efficacy**

The only subcomponent of teacher efficacy in which the main effect of academic degree was significant was the one for student engagement. Even in this case the effect size was not big enough (it was 0.11) to explain a large portion of the variance (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). In order to provide a sound explanation, a closer look should be taken at the nature of self-efficacy. As Dellinger et al. (2008) claim, self-efficacy is a context-specific concept and is shaped within a particular environment. Therefore, “[o]nly in situations of actual teaching can an individual assess the capabilities he or she brings to the task and experience the consequences of those capabilities” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 19). So, self-efficacy beliefs are largely behavior-oriented (Bandura, 1977) and if academic programs are intended to increase preservice teachers' sense of efficacy, they must provide “opportunities for actual experience with instructing and managing children in a variety of contexts with increasing levels of complexity and challenge to provide mastery experience and specific feedback” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 24). Such opportunities might be created through practice-oriented courses rather than theoretical ones. For example, practicum courses which provide a scaffold for student teachers to face increasingly challenging situations in real classroom can

enhance their sense of efficacy (Atay, 2007). Furthermore, to be able to surmount bumpy moments in teaching, efficacious teachers must resort to their personal practical knowledge rather than their theoretical one (Romano, 2006). However, a close inspection of English-related academic programs (English translation, English literature, and TEFL) in Iran reveals that students pass a few courses directly related to the practical side of teaching. Even in those courses (e.g., methodology, teaching skills, and testing), they are usually presented with broad, theoretical underpinnings. Consequently, the share of practice had become less in academic English programs. This is not to say that the present academic programs have nothing to offer with respect to student teachers' sense of efficacy since, as the results of the study show, there is a consistent pattern of stronger (though not statistically significant) efficacy expectations among teachers who hold relevant academic degrees. But, if these programs are going to play a more influential role in educating efficacious teachers, they have to strike a balance between the theoretical side of the coin, which greatly contributes to teachers' theoretical knowledge base, and its practical side, which is mostly effective in enlarging their practical knowledge base (Romano, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The present study was designed to see whether English teachers' experience and academic degree can make a difference in affecting their sense of efficacy. The findings revealed that while experience was a distinguishing factor, academic degree was not. With respect to experience, the study showed that seasoned teachers with more than three years of teaching experience had significantly higher levels of efficacy than their novice colleagues. This might be attributed to a number of factors. First, whereas experienced teachers take advantage of mastery experience as the strongest source of efficacy, novices are more dependent on verbal persuasion. Second, as teachers enter the profession, they face a reality shock which destroys the dream home they have built for themselves and, consequently, as novice teachers, their sense of efficacy undermines. Finally, experienced teachers have attended a larger number of on-the-job training programs; such programs are shown to have an

influential role in enhancing their sense of efficacy.

Considering the second independent variable, which was academic degree, the findings demonstrated that although teachers with English-related academic degrees showed a consistent pattern of having a stronger sense of efficacy compared to their colleagues with non-English-related degrees (e.g., physics, geography, engineering, etc.), just in the case of efficacy for student engagement the difference reached a slightly significant level with a small effect size. This is largely due to the nature of English-related academic programs and self-efficacy as a psychological trait; whereas self-efficacy is mostly behavior-oriented and context-specific and is shaped as teachers are practically involved in classroom activities, English-related academic programs usually focus on the theoretical aspects of language teaching which have little to offer to increase prospective teachers' efficacy expectations.

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