The exploration of the self-efficacy beliefs of English language teachers and student teachers

Pınar Çankaya a *

a Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, 59000, Tekirdağ, Turkey

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Abstract
The primary concern of this paper is to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of practicing English language teachers and student teachers. For this reason, a comprehensive literature review is presented to shed light on the issue investigated. The sampling procedure is random selection which raises reliability and validity of the data collected. The participants consist of 35 practicing teachers and 17 student teachers who are majoring English language teaching (ELT) departments at three different universities. The results revealed that student teachers reported slightly less self-efficacy levels than practicing teachers who rated themselves more self-efficacious. Accordingly, the possible reasons of the low self efficacy beliefs will be discussed.

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Keywords: Self efficacy beliefs; teacher self efficacy

1. Introduction

English is gaining great interest all around the world for many differing purposes from education to job related concerns. For this reason, learning English requires not only an appropriate program but also qualified language teachers. In Turkey, the programs have undergone many changes to keep up with the recent changes in the world. And currently, learners are provided with a longer exposure to English starting from the 2nd grade with an aim to increase the learners’ communicative abilities for appropriate language use in daily speeches. However, still language teaching in Turkey is considered as demanding which is reported by Aktaş (2005) for such reasons as the efficacy of language teachers, student interest and motivation, instructional methods, learning environment and learning materials.

One of the reasons, namely self-efficacy of language teachers is handled in detail in this current research study. To this end, the literature review is going to be organized around two main premises. Firstly, it provides basic definitions and theories regarding with self-efficacy with an emphasis on teacher self-efficacy while the second part covers a set of empirical studies on the issue conducted in various contexts among different groups of participants.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90 -282-250-3034
E-mail address: pcankaya@nku.edu.tr
1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Self-Efficacy: Definition and Defining Qualities

In terms of theoretical background to self-efficacy beliefs, it is worth to note social cognitive theory put forward by Bandura (1997) which maintains that people’s self-efficacy beliefs have an effect on their actions, choices, efforts, stress and accomplishments as well (Akyel & Ortaçtepe, 2015). Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs can be regarded as the core belief of human agency. As Bandura (1997) noted, “Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (p.170).

Additionally, Bandura (1997) stated the importance of self-efficacy beliefs in human functioning by pointing out “people’s level of motivation, affective states, and actions are more based on what they believe than what is objectively true” (p. 2 as cited in Jeongah, 2009). Moving the discussion forward, Pajares (1992) supported that the beliefs people hold can be predictors for their behaviours by saying “self-efficacy perceptions help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have” (p.4). The self-efficacy beliefs of people vary as they are totally related to their inner self image. For this reason, it is quite important to note that low self-efficacy levels cause people to have doubts about their capabilities while high self-efficacy levels help people to get successful results and persistence (Yılmaz, 2004).

1.1.2. Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teachers’ sense of efficacy can be defined as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001, p.223). Regarding these beliefs are mostly concerned with teachers’ own perceived ability with regards to instructional strategy, classroom management and student engagement as reported by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy (2001). As indicated by Bandura (1997), teachers’ beliefs in terms of their instructional abilities have something to do with the learning environment. In this regard, it can be clearly said that self efficacy beliefs of teachers play a vital role in effective teaching and learning process (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001).

The influences of teachers’ beliefs on their instructional and classroom practices have been considerably supported by many researchers (Ghasembolanda &Hashimb, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). Therefore, discovering teachers’ self efficacy beliefs is noteworthy in that it enables one to reach an understanding of the effectiveness of the teaching in classroom settings as teachers “set their goals, determine the amount of effort they invest in achieving these goals, and their level of persistence” based on these beliefs (Ghasembolanda & Hashimb, 2013, p.891).

Teacher efficacy has been reported as effective not only for learners’ outcomes and success (Tournaki & Podell, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) but also directly related to positive teacher behaviours (Bandura, 1997; Yost, 2002 cited in Akyel & Ortaçtepe, 2015). Since teachers’ efficacy beliefs somehow affect their actions, attitudes and instructions in classroom, it can be said that self efficacy is closely related to student achievement and effective teaching (Yılmaz, 2004). Teachers having low self-efficacy levels generally find other influential factors responsible for students’ failure while teachers with high self-efficacy believe that they can achieve teaching even to the most difficult students (Chacón, 2002). There are some influential factors having an effect on self efficacy beliefs of teachers including contextual factors such as school climate, and teaching resources (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2010) or culture and fields of study (Çakıroğlu, et. al, 2005).

Teachers’ sense of efficacy beliefs is grouped in three domains by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy as instructional strategy, classroom management and student engagement (2001). In this regard, student engagement with schoolwork and learning tasks enhances the development of learners in a
positive manner by contributing to students' social and cognitive development (Şekerci, 2011). Because when students are engaged with school work actively, they are more bound to learn effectively. The more students are engaged in learning the more they are likely “to learn, to find the experience rewarding, to graduate, and to pursue higher education” (Şekerci, 2011, p.4). Not only discipline issues but also effective instruction and dealing with students as a group or as an individual are embodied by the ability of classroom management. In this sense, teachers are of the utmost importance for enhancing learning through classroom activities by having effective time management and instruction within a non-threatening but still disciplined atmosphere. Concerning instructional strategy, teachers employ their self-efficacy beliefs during language tasks with regards to effective and comprehensive instruction to guide their learners. In this respect, teachers feel confident enough to make an effective learning environment through instructional practices.

1.1.3. Relevant Studies

The research studies on teacher efficacy vary in accordance with various purposes such as relating teacher efficacy to various demographic and contextual factors (Shim, 2001; Chacón, 2005) like student achievement (Ross, et. al, 2001), classroom management skills (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Henson, 2001), teaching experience (Eslami & Fatahi 2008) and modeling and colleague support (Göker, 2006) in addition to identifying efficacy levels of teachers (Yılmaz, 2004; Ghasembolanda & Hashimb, 2013). As it is seen, regarding the related research studies, the main concern is viewed as the relationship between teachers’ self efficacy beliefs and other factors.

To start, for the relationship between teachers’ self-perceived ability and the level of teacher efficacy, Chacón (2005) carried out a study in which he found a positive correlation between the two while there was no statistically significant relationship between teacher efficacy and other variables involving the methods (communicative or grammar-oriented approaches) and their teaching experience. Non-native English teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and their English language proficiency were questioned in another study conducted by Ghasembolanda and Hashimb (2013) in one Middle-East country with 187 teachers. According to the results, teachers' perceived efficacy was found to be correlated with self-reported English proficiency in a positive way in line with Chacón’s study (2005). However, on the contrary to what the aforementioned studies reported, there was no significant relationship between the self-perceived proficiency level and self-efficacy beliefs of teachers in Shim’s study (2001).

Considering Turkish context, Akyel and Ortaçtepe (2015) acknowledged that, there was not a significant relationship between the teachers’ efficacy and their self-reported teaching behaviour. However, the three dimensions of teacher efficacy beliefs, to name classroom management, student engagement and instruction were found to be significantly correlated to each other and with overall teacher efficacy. Moreover, a thesis study conducted by Şekerci (2011) investigated self efficacy beliefs of instructors at university preparatory schools in addition to the possible effects of such variables as teaching experience, English competency, self reported proficiency and graduate department on efficacy levels. As the results revealed, the participants were found with quite higher overall self efficacy beliefs. In terms of classroom management, they reported themselves more efficacious than instructional strategies and student engagement. Experience, English competency and self reported proficiency variables predicted the overall self efficacy beliefs of participants in a significant manner.

Therefore, investigating teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs in terms of three domains would provide valuable information in terms of the effectiveness of teaching and learning. However, all the aforementioned studies simply attempted to map the relationship between proficiency level and efficacy beliefs. Thus, the exploration of the difference between practicing EFL teachers and student teachers’ efficacy beliefs are of worth investigation so as to offer some insights on efficacy building needs at teacher education programs.
2. Methodology

The present study used survey-type research design as a quantitative research approach as it has a “systematic, focused, and tightly controlled” (Dörnyei, 2007) nature which ensures producing reliable and replicable data (p.34). In this study, the data were collected from practicing and student teachers through a questionnaire with likert scale questions.

2.1. Aim of the study

The main purpose of the current study is to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of both EFL practicing teachers and EFL student teachers and further suggest some implications for building high self-efficacy levels through teacher education programs. Within this purpose, the researcher seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the self-efficacy beliefs of practicing English language teachers?
2. What are the self-efficacy beliefs of student English language teachers?
3. Are there any differences among practicing English language teachers in terms of gender, degree, teaching level and experience?
4. Are there any differences among student teachers in terms of gender, university, learning experience?

2.2. Participants and Setting

The practicing English language teachers in the study were grouped in terms of their gender, educational degree, teaching group and teaching experience. 35 practicing English language teachers from different settings took place in the study, of which 25 were female participants (n=25) and 10 were male participants (n= 10). The majority of them (n= 16) reported to have master’s degree while 12 of them had bachelors in addition to 7 teachers having doctorate degree. In terms of target teaching levels of the teachers, the majority of them (n=23) teach at university level, while 7 of them teach at secondary school and 4 of them work at high school along with only one teacher at primary school. The teaching experiences of teachers rank from 1-3 years (n=9) to 16-over (n= 1) in addition to the majority of them having 7-11 years experience (n= 13).

When it comes to student teachers in the study, the distribution of them was demonstrated in terms of gender and university. Out of the 17 participants, the female participants were 12 while the male participants included in the study were 5 who were all majoring at their second year at ELT department but one fourth year student. The majority of the student teachers (n=14) are from Pamukkale University (PAÜ) while one of them is from Kocaeli University (KU) and two of them are studying at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMÜ).

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to obtain the data, some steps were followed including turning the scale into an online scale for the participants. Additionally, the Google form link was shared with the participants and all participants filled out an on-line version of the questionnaire. The necessary instructions and consent information was provided for them. It was stated that their participation was entirely voluntary; their answers would be used only for academic purposes and kept confidential as anonymous. The data were collected via two-part survey the first part of which included some descriptive information about participants’ gender, teaching and learning experience, academic degree, the teaching group, and university while the second part was Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk’s (2001) Teacher Efficacy Scale
which has been translated into Turkish by Çapa, Çakıroğlu, and Sarıkaya (2005) for determining Turkish teachers’ self-efficacy levels. Having been tested, the scale is a well-established instrument including 24 items with three sub-groups to name “Classroom Management, Students Engagement and Instructional Efficacy”. For each statement, there are 5 choices ranging from “a great deal” to “nothing”. Cronbach’s alpha value was found as $\alpha = .778$, which indicates that the questionnaire is highly reliable (Şekerci, 2011).

The gathered data were analysed by means of the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS, version 20). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to report the demographic data and determine the participants’ self-efficacy levels. Additionally, the self-efficacy beliefs of the participants were demonstrated in a descending order item by item in addition to three domains in the scale. Moreover, the self-efficacy beliefs of student teachers and practicing teachers were compared in terms of such domains as classroom management, student engagement and instructional efficacy.

3. Results

In order to report the results, the research questions were answered based on the findings. The first research question deals with the practicing teachers’ opinions while the second question covers student teachers’ opinions. Being more reader friendly, the tables provide both teachers and student teachers’ beliefs together to make it clearer.

3.1. RQ1. & RQ2. What are the self-efficacy beliefs of practicing English language teachers and student English language teachers?

In order to answer the RQ1 and RQ2, descriptive statistics were computed to report English teachers’ and student teachers’ perspectives on the self-efficacy beliefs.

| Table 1. The Most Reported Items by Practicing Teachers and Student Teachers |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Self-efficacy Items (reported by students) (N=17) | X | SD | Self-efficacy Items (reported by teachers) (N=35) | X | SD |
| .. provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused? (i20) | 4.00 | .707 | .. measure student comprehension of what you have taught? (i10) | 4.37 | .598 |
| .. make your expectations clear about student behavior? (i5) | 3.94 | .748 | .. implement alternative strategies in your classroom (i23) | 4.17 | .664 |
| .. establish a classroom management system with each group of students? (i16) | 3.94 | .899 | .. craft good questions for your students? (i11) | 4.17 | .664 |
| .. respond to difficult questions from your students? (i7) | 3.88 | .928 | .. to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy? (i15) | 4.14 | .692 |
| .. to get children to follow classroom rules (i13) | 3.88 | .600 | .. to get students to believe they can do well in school work? (i6) | 4.00 | .686 |

As demonstrated by Table 1, the most frequently reported items related to self-efficacy beliefs were presented in a descending order with the overall mean score ($M = 3.78$) and ($M = 3.63$) for active teachers and student teachers respectively. The items answering the question ‘How well can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?’, ‘.. make your expectations clear about student behaviour?’, and ‘.. establish a classroom management system with each group of students?’ are among the most reported self-efficacy beliefs.
students?’ were rated the most frequently reported by the student teachers with the mean values of 4.00, 3.94, and 3.94 respectively. On the contrary, the practicing teachers reported themselves as more efficacious for the items ‘.. measure student comprehension of what you have taught?’, ‘.. implement alternative strategies in your classroom’ and ‘.. craft good questions for your students?’ with the mean values of 4.37, 4.17, and 4.17 respectively. These items are included under instructional efficacy which implies that practicing teachers perceive themselves more efficacious in implementing effective classroom instructions.

Table 2 demonstrates the least reported items by the participants in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. The Least Reported Items by Practicing Teachers and Student Teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self- efficacy Items (reported by students ) (N=17)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>..respond to difficult questions from your students? (i7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>.. to help your students value learning? (i9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students? (i17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..establish a classroom management system with each group of students? (i16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students? (i1)</td>
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</table>

The least frequently reported self-efficacy beliefs of participants were presented in a descending rank order. As illustrated by Table 2, the least frequently reported items related to self-efficacy beliefs of practicing teachers were ‘.. assist families in helping their children do well in school’, ‘.. use a variety of assessment strategies’, and ‘.. to foster student creativity’ with the mean values of 2.89, 3.31 and 3.54 respectively. This might explain that teachers mostly feel as less self-efficacious regarding with efficacy engagement strategies in classroom settings. On the other hand, the items ‘How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?’, ‘.. establish a classroom management system with each group of students?’, and ‘.. to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students’ were rated the least frequently reported by the student teachers with the mean values of 3.12, 3.24, and 3.35 respectively which suggests students’ lack of classroom practice.

All in all, Table 3 summarizes the sub-skills of self-efficacy beliefs of both practicing teachers and student teachers based on their respondents. For this reason, descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the descending order of them.

<table>
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<th>Table 3. The Mean Values of Teachers and Students for Sub-categories</th>
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<td><strong>Self- Efficacy Categories</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
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<td>Instructional Efficacy</td>
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<td>Efficacy Engagement</td>
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Table 3 indicates the mean values of the self-efficacy sub-skills which were self-reported by the participants. As it is demonstrated above, while teachers reported to feel more efficacious about classroom management with a mean value of 3.87, student teachers considered themselves as the most efficacious about instructional concerns with the mean value of 3.75. Additionally, both teachers and student teachers were considered as the least efficacious about “Efficacy Engagement” with the mean values 3.60 and 3.61, respectively.

3.2. **RQ3. Are there any differences among practicing English language teachers in terms of gender, degree, teaching level and experience?**

In terms of gender, there was no statistically significant difference among female and male practicing English language teachers with the mean values $M = 3.87$ and $M = 3.73$ respectively. As the analysis revealed female participants self reported themselves as more self-efficacious than male participants.

Concerning other independent variables including degree, teaching level and experience, similar results were observed. Statistically, there was no difference among participants in terms of mentioned variables. However, when the results are analyzed closely, it can be still worth of discussion. To start, in terms of degree of participants, in each domain the participants with doctorate degree ($M = 3.93$) were found more efficacious than other group of participants. Moreover, the mean value of the participants with bachelor degree was computed as 3.60, thus the mean difference may suggest that academic degree and professional development of participants might contribute to building high efficacy levels.

When it comes to teaching experience; interestingly the least experienced participants reported themselves more self efficacious than others with the mean value of 3.81. This might indicate that the least experienced participants (1-3 years) are willing to spend much more effort as they feel more motivated which leads to high self efficacy levels.

Lastly, efficacy beliefs of participants do not differ based on their teaching level. The mean values show that the participants teaching at university level were found more efficacious than other participants with the mean value of 3.78.

3.3. **RQ4. Are there any differences among student teachers in terms of gender, university, learning experience?**

Having reviewed the self efficacy beliefs of student teachers, it might be useful to explore any differences among them based on some variables including gender, university and learning experience. Even though the analyses revealed no statistically significant differences among student teachers in terms of their gender, university and learning experience; it can be still valuable to highlight some important inferences. That is to say, female participants were found more self efficacious than male participants with the mean values of 3.74 and 3.53 respectively. More interestingly, the student teachers studying at ÇOMÜ outperformed the other two universities in each efficacy domains. In general sense student teachers at ÇOMÜ were reported to have 4.16 mean values while the mean value for student teachers at PAÜ was 3.62. This could indicate that student teachers at ÇOMÜ might have some kind of pedagogical or individual support from their educators which further helps them to gain high self efficacy beliefs.
4. Discussion and conclusions

The study set out to shed light on the self-efficacy beliefs of practicing and student teachers. There were two main research questions that this study sought to answer, one focusing the self efficacy beliefs of practicing teachers, while the other covering the self-efficacy levels of students teachers. Further, the next two research questions attempt to explore any differences among participants based on such variables as gender, teaching level, teaching and learning experience, degree, and university.

In general, data analysis of the findings yielded several important points on the sense of self-efficacy beliefs. Initially, in terms of the general self-efficacy beliefs of the participants; practicing teachers outperformed student teachers in terms of their self efficacy beliefs which might indicate that teaching experience is an important predictor for self efficacy beliefs as teachers have adequate classroom practices in real world. This corroborates a similar study by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk’s (2007) which revealed that self efficacy beliefs improved over time through experience. Moreover, generally speaking both teachers and student teachers self-reported themselves as moderately self-efficacious which can be explained by their self-awareness of the skills they have. Moreover, this was also in line with Ghasembolanda and Hashimb’s studies (2013) in addition to Yılmaz’s study (2004) which revealed high sense of self efficacy beliefs of the participants.

The second issue discussed in the current paper was the dimensions of the efficacy beliefs of the participants. While practicing teachers feel the most efficacious about classroom management, student teachers considered themselves as the most efficacious about instructional efficacy. It can be concluded that as teachers have more experience in classroom practices, they self-reported themselves as more efficacious about classroom management. Similarly, in Yılmaz’s study (2004), teachers were found to have a high sense of efficacy for classroom management which is also in line with Ghasembolanda and Hashimb’s studies (2013). On the contrary, Eslami and Fatahi (2008) suggested in their studies that EFL teachers rated themselves as more efficacious in terms of instructional concerns. This suggests that Iranian EFL teachers are more confident of using instructional strategies while in this study Turkish EFL teachers are more confident of handling the discipline and maintaining order effectively in classroom settings.

Considering influencing variables such as gender, degree, teaching and learning experience, and university; there was no statistically difference. Still though, some findings need to be discussed here. Initially, among practicing English language teachers, having a doctorate degree has a positive effect on their efficacy beliefs. This could suggest that academic studies and professional development activities may contribute to an individual’s sense of efficacy belief. Notably, self efficacy beliefs do not differ in terms of teaching experience which is similar to Chacón’s study (2005). But still, an interesting conclusion was observed which showed that the least experienced participants were found more self efficacious than more experienced ones which is not in line with Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk’s (2007) study reporting experience will increase efficacy levels. The reason might be the job satisfaction and motivation of novice teachers at their first years of career which help them develop high efficacy levels.

Concerning student teachers, the most salient result was the overwhelming performance of the participants at ÇOMÜ in all domains of efficacy beliefs which requires a further exploration for the possible reasons. Remarkably, it might be the case that the students at ÇOMÜ may have pedagogical, educational or individual support from their educators which further helps them to gain high self efficacy beliefs.
5. Implications and future research recommendations

The central point here is to draw general conclusions from this current study to highlight the following educational implications. To start, as high self efficacy beliefs will lead to improvement of student learning as well, teacher education programs play a vital role in preparing student teachers to develop high sense of efficacy beliefs. Consequently, teachers having high level of efficacy beliefs tend to believe that even the most difficult students are teachable if the teachers try hard (Chacón, 2002). On the contrary, the teachers who are less efficacious believe that they have nothing to do with unmotivated learners’ failures.

As it is too challenging to change beliefs, self-efficacy development should be improved in pre-service teacher training (Demirel, 2017). In this sense, teaching practicum courses and school experience including micro teaching activities and sample lesson planning and practices need to be paid attention to increase efficacy beliefs of students. Consequently, student teachers could have the opportunity to experience real classroom practices, thus developing instructional and management strategies and skills. Further as Oğuz and Kalkan suggest teacher education programs should offer such opportunities as conference / seminar attendances or certain training programs (2011) which might increase efficacy beliefs. As teacher education programs are expected to provide student teachers with necessary skills, knowledge and abilities; teacher educators are worth of discussion as well. As verbal feedback is one of the sources of self efficacy beliefs, teacher educators should provide positive and encouraging feedback to increase student teachers’ efficacy levels (Pendergast, et al., 2011).

However, it is debatable whether teacher education programs equip future teachers with necessary efficacy skills or not. Building on this argument, the results and main discussion of this paper enable the researchers to pay attention to several significant issues, which provide fertile ground for further exploration in which teacher education programs will be questioned with regards to the extent to which they build efficacy engaging or increasing courses and activities. Accordingly, what might be a new research area is exploring of the possible ways for increasing the self- efficacy beliefs of the teachers through teacher education programs. For this reason, in the process of attempting to understand the self-efficacy beliefs of student teachers not only students but also teacher educators’ opinions need to be investigated in a wider context with a large number of participants. Moreover, the differences in self-efficacy beliefs of individuals can be questioned in a further study bearing in mind motivation, beliefs, attitudes, social back ground, personality, proficiency as some influential variables on efficacy beliefs.

All in all, taking reliability and validity concerns into the account, the results cannot be generalized to a larger group because of the fact that the subjects in this study represent only a limited number of teachers (n = 35) and students (n = 17) and further only quantitative data were collected through questionnaire. While the opinions of the participants can be explained to some extent, still a wider group of participation and some other data collection tools such as classroom observation, focus group interviews, reflection journals, diaries, and field notes should be adopted which might provide valuable and more reliable results. As my last words, the findings may still shed light on the issue under investigation here, but it is of great necessity to pay attention to some other concerns for further consideration including teacher self-efficacy development through training, promoting learner self-efficacy levels, classroom practices for self-efficacy, etc. with an attempt to enhance student teachers’ self efficacy levels through teacher education programs.

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References


İngilizce öğretmen ve öğretmen adaylarının öz yeterlilik inanışlarının incelenmesi

Öz

Anahtar sözcükler: yeterlilik inançları; öğretmen öz yeterliliği

AUTHOR BIODATA
Pınar Çankaya is currently working as an English instructor and pursuing her PhD degree at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Department of Foreign Language Education. Her research interests include language learning strategies, program evaluation, teacher education, testing and assessment in English language education.