

An Investigation of Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. The research was a descriptive study based on survey model. A total of 291 freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students studying at a state university in Turkey during the fall semester of the academic year 2018-2019 participated in the study. Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), which was originally developed by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and adapted into Turkish by Çapa, Çakıroğlu, and Sarıkaya (2005) was used to determine pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. The self-efficacy beliefs were analyzed by descriptive statistics. Differences in participants' self-efficacy perceptions by class level were analyzed by one-way ANOVA. The Tukey multiple comparison test was used to determine significant differences among the different class levels. Research results revealed that pre-service EFL teachers had relatively high-level teacher self-efficacy perceptions in general and for classroom management, student engagement and instructional strategies subscales. Also, it was found that juniors had significantly higher scores than sophomores in both total scale and student engagement subscale. Total and subscale scores at other class levels did not differ significantly. It was suggested that pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy perceptions should be considered with greater attention in the ELT program at the university and special efforts are required to strengthen seniors' self-efficacy perceptions.

Keywords:

Pre-service EFL teachers, self-efficacy beliefs, pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs

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INTRODUCTION

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) suggest that people's self-efficacy beliefs are the most essential mechanisms of personal agency in terms of human functioning, that is, unless they believe they are capable of making the necessary changes by their own actions, they will not come into action about it. Perceived self-efficacy, which is identified as "the corner stone of social cognitive theory" (Pajares, 1992, p. 308), is defined by Bandura (1995) as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2) and it is suggested that self-efficacy, which is explained as people's beliefs about themselves, has a profound effect on their way of thinking, feeling and motivating themselves. The researcher explains that people's self-efficacy can be developed by four main forms of influence, namely mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models, social persuasion and physiological and emotional states, in order of priorities. Also, the researcher argues that self-efficacy beliefs are manifested in human behavior through four processes which are listed as cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes which are in harmony with each other.

In theory of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) states that the theory "is based on the principal assumption that psychological procedures, whatever their form, serve as means of creating and strengthening expectations of personal efficacy" (p. 193). The researcher suggests that self-efficacy beliefs affect the initiation of a behavior by a person, the amount of effort expended, and the amount of time that a person spends to sustain that effort when encountered with obstacles. In other words, it was indicated that the amount of effort depends on how strong the perceived efficacy is. The researcher clarifies that the efficacy expectation only is not enough for the performance to take place if a person lacks the required capabilities; nevertheless, strong efficacy expectations give a person incentive to act. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998) indicate that self-efficacy is related to "self-perception of competence rather than actual level of competence" (p. 211) and it is different from other concepts of self (eg, self-concept, self-worth, and self-esteem) because it is specific to a certain activity.

Bandura (1993, 1995) points out that efficacy beliefs contributes to academic development in three principal ways, which are students' self-efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master different academic subjects, teachers' self-efficacy to motivate and promote learning in their students, and teachers' collective self-efficacy in accomplishing desired academic progress. Pajares (1992, p. 316) defines teachers' beliefs as "teachers' attitudes about education-about schooling, teaching, learning, and students". Chacón (2005) indicates that teachers' sense of efficacy is one of those important beliefs which has an important effect on teachers' actions in the classroom and student outcomes. The researcher states that "teachers' actions and behaviors are tied to their beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and motivation levels" (p. 257). Woolfolk Hoy and Spero (2005) define teachers' self-efficacy as "teachers' judgements about their abilities to promote students'

learning” (p. 343) and point out its significant effect on teachers’ effort, level of aspiration, and the goals about teaching. According to Bandura (1995), teachers’ talents and their self-efficacy toward teaching are of great significance in creating efficient and positive learning environments and so teachers with low instructional efficacy influence the learning environment in a negative way, which can also affect students’ self-efficacy and cognitive development negatively. Tschanen Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) clearly specify the powerful relationship between teacher efficacy and many educational outcomes such as teachers’ persistence, enthusiasm, commitment and instructional behavior as well as student-related outcomes such as achievement, motivation, and student self-efficacy beliefs.

It has been indicated in literature that the role of teaching experience has an important effect on teachers’ sense of efficacy. For example, Afshar, Rahimi, Ghonchehpour, and Saedpanah (2015) found that years of experience significantly affected EFL teachers’ sense of efficacy. Therefore, the researchers suggest that teachers’ ability in classroom management could be enhanced by more training especially during first years of teaching. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) found that career teachers (teachers with four or more years of experience) had significantly higher overall self-efficacy than novice teachers (teachers with three or fewer years of experience). The researchers explain the lower-level self-efficacy of novice teachers with their relative inexperience. Similarly, in various studies (Aylar & Bostan, 2017; Aytaç, 2018; Çankaya, 2018; Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2017) it was found that experience was an important factor in teachers’ self-efficacy perceptions.

There are some studies in literature that examine pre-service EFL teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs. In a study by Alci and Yüksel (2012) significant correlations were found among performance, teachers’ self-efficacy and metacognition of pre-service ELT (English Language Teaching) students. Alagözlü (2016) found that pre-service English teachers’ self-efficacy, perceived proficiency level and perceived use of pedagogical strategies were high all as predictors of self-concept. In another study by Baykara (2011) it was reported that pre-service EFL teachers had high level of self-efficacy and teacher efficacy perceptions did not differ by gender; however, there was a meaningful difference between first and third grade pre-service teachers in favor of first grade students. Also, a meaningful positive relationship was found between pre-service EFL teachers’ efficacy perceptions and metacognitive learning strategies. Çelik and Zehir Topkaya (2017) found that pre-service English teachers had moderately high teaching efficacy perceptions and they further reported an increase in participants’ teaching efficacy perceptions after field experience. In a study by Çankaya (2018), it was revealed that students teachers had slightly less self-efficacy levels than practicing teachers which indicated the positive effect of experience on self-efficacy.

As Bandura (1995) suggests, formal education should “equip students with intellectual tools, efficacy beliefs, and intrinsic interests” (p. 17) to provide them with a lifelong self-education opportunity. Also, the researcher indicates that teachers’ self-efficacy

beliefs have a great influence on their general orientation toward the educational process and their specific instructional activities in the class. In addition, as mentioned above, Chaco'n (2005) asserts that in order to determine the way teachers understand and organize instruction, research on teachers' beliefs, one of which is teachers' sense of efficacy, is essential. Similarly, Pajares (1992) makes a remark that teachers' and teacher candidates' beliefs should be an area of educational research which requires special interest. From all reasons mentioned above, it is believed to be important that pre-service EFL teachers have a strong sense of efficacy to sustain the required effort to succeed as an English teacher. And we can say that self-efficacy is very important for pre-service EFL teachers as their future work as language teachers will be highly influenced by their efficacy beliefs. In recent years, a great deal of studies (Aldan Karademir & Saracaloğlu, 2017; Akoğuz Yazıcı & Kalkavan, 2016; Bayrakdar, Vural Batık, & Barut, 2016; Berkant, 2017; Ekinçi, 2013; Nakip & Özcan, 2016; Saracaloğlu, Yenice, & Özden, 2013; Sırmacı & Taş, 2016; Taşkın Ekici & Ekici, 2014) have been carried out on Turkish pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs majoring in different departments. Among those studies, a relatively limited number of them (Alagözlü, 2016; Alcı & Yüksel, 2012; Baykara, 2011; Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2017) have addressed Turkish EFL pre-service teachers', or as mentioned in literature ELT students', English self-efficacy beliefs. So, the purpose of this study was to examine pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. With this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the level of perceived self-efficacy belief among pre-service EFL teachers majoring at ELT department?
2. Does pre-service EFL teachers' perceived self-efficacy differ by class level?

METHOD

Research Design

This study was designed as a descriptive study based on survey model and the data were collected via quantitative data collection techniques. The purpose of survey model was to determine the type and level of the variables individually (Karasar, 2005).

Participants

Using a census sampling method, all pre-service EFL teachers majoring at ELT department at a large state university located in Konya, Turkey were invited to participate in this study. The inclusion criteria were being a student at ELT department of the university and willingness to participate in this study. 291 pre-service EFL teachers out of approximately 472 (334 female and 138 male) registered (response rate was 61.6%) majoring at ELT department participated in the study voluntarily. Although the participation in the study seems relatively small, it should be noted that a considerable number of the registered students were non-attendant. In addition, 22.3% of the participants were freshman (n= 65),

26.1% of were sophomores (n= 76), 30.9% were juniors (n= 90), and 20.6% were seniors (n= 60). As a considerable number of previous studies (Akoğuz Yazıcı & Kalkavan, 2016; Baykara, 2011; Berkant, 2017; Çankaya, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Ülper & Bağcı, 2012) revealed no gender differences in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and due to the small proportion of male students at ELT department at the university, gender was not used as a variable although both male and female students participated in the study. All the participants were informed about the study prior to completing the questionnaire.

Instrumentation and procedure

The long and Turkish version of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) which was originally developed by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and adapted into Turkish by Çapa, Çakıroğlu, and Sarıkaya (2005) was used to determine pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy belief in teaching English. This 9-point Likert type scale comprised of three eight-item dimensions (efficacy for classroom management, efficacy for student engagement, and efficacy for instructional strategies) and 24 items totally. The possible highest score is 216 while the possible lowest score is 24. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .84 for factor 1 (efficacy for classroom management), .82 for factor 2 (efficacy for student engagement), .86 for factor 3 (efficacy for instructional strategies), and .93 for the Instrument overall. In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .88 for factor 1, .86 for factor 2, .88 for factor 3, and .95 for the overall instrument.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in the fall semester of the academic year 2017-2018 during the courses at the faculty. It took approximately 10-15 minutes for participants to fill out the questionnaire. Pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs were analyzed by descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The data were tested for normal distribution with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and for homogeneity of variances with Levene's test. Differences in participants' self-efficacy perceptions by class level were analyzed by one-way ANOVA. The Tukey multiple comparison test was used to determine significant differences among the different class levels. The level of significance was set to $p < .05$. The data were analyzed by SPSS 16 software for Windows.

Assumptions and limitations

One of the important limitations of this study is that our findings are based on self-reported data, so they must be interpreted with caution. Also, the results in this study were limited to data obtained from 291 volunteer pre-service ELT teachers studying at only one state university during the winter semester of academic year 2017-2018. Also, it was assumed that all the participants honestly and accurately answered each question in the scale.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that participants' teacher self-efficacy score was 158.79 for the total scale, 52.88 for the classroom management subscale, 52.68 for the student engagement subscale, and 53.24 for the instructional strategies subscale. It could be said that pre-service EFL teachers had relatively high-level teacher self-efficacy perceptions in general.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for EFL pre-service teachers' teacher self-efficacy perception scores (n=291)

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Total	53	216	158.79	24.06
Classroom Management	18	72	52.88	8.85
Student Engagement	11	72	52.68	8.85
Instructional Strategies	14	72	53.24	8.57

Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum, SD=Standard Deviation

Similarly, it can be said that pre-service EFL teachers had relatively high-level self-efficacy perceptions for classroom management, student engagement and instructional strategies subscales. Also, as it was shown in Table 1, pre-service EFL teachers felt themselves as the most efficacious for instructional strategies, followed by classroom management and student engagement respectively.

Table 2

One-way Anova Results for pre-service EFL teachers' teacher self-efficacy perception scores by class level

	Class level	n	Mean	SD	df	F	p
Total	1	65	156.40 ^a	20.85	3-287	2.97	0.03
	2	76	155.37 ^{bc}	27.89			
	3	90	164.99 ^{cb}	20.38			
	4	60	156.43 ^d	25.95			
Classroom Management	1	65	51.97	7.46	3-287	1.77	0.15
	2	76	52.33	10.45			
	3	90	54.64	7.19			
	4	60	51.92	10.03			
Student Engagement	1	65	52.11 ^a	8.01	3-287	3.85	0.01
	2	76	50.89 ^{bc}	10.24			
	3	90	55.19 ^{cb}	7.10			
	4	60	51.78 ^d	9.54			
Instructional Strategies	1	65	52.32	7.96	3-287	2.26	0.08
	2	76	52.14	9.32			
	3	90	55.16	7.92			
	4	60	52.73	8.90			

^{a-d} Similar superscripts in the same column indicate significant differences between the grade level (one-way ANOVA with Tukey, $p < 0.05$).

As shown in Table 2, pre-service EFL teachers' total scale score [$F_{(3-287)} = 2.97$, $p = 0.03$] and student engagement subscale score [$F_{(3-287)} = 3.85$, $p = 0.01$] differed significantly by class level. As it is seen in Table 2, juniors had significantly higher

scores than sophomores in both total scale and student engagement subscale, however, total and student engagement subscale scores at other class levels did not differ significantly ($p>0,05$). Also, classroom management [$F_{(3-287)}= 1.77$ $p=0.15$] and instructional strategies [$F_{(3-287)}= 2.26$ $p=0.08$] subscale scores did not differ significantly by class level.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the level of perceived self-efficacy belief among pre-service EFL teachers majoring at ELT department and to find out if their perceived self-efficacy differed by class level. As to the first aim of the study, pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy perceptions were found relatively high in our study. As one of the three principal ways in which efficacy beliefs contribute to academic development (Bandura, 1995), pre-service EFL teachers' perceived self-efficacy was relatively high in this study. So, it can be said that the participants in our study have the power to motivate their students and they have the ability to support the learners during teaching-learning process. Besides, Bandura (1995) suggests that teachers' talents and self-efficacy perceptions have great importance in creating learning environments suitable for learning. Other studies in literature (Schunk & Pajares, 2001; Tschanen Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) show that self-efficacy has a significant effect on achievement and motivation. Chaco'n (2005) indicates that teachers' sense of efficacy, as one of teachers' important beliefs, has an important effect on teacher practices and student outcomes. Therefore, it is believed that pre-service EFL teachers in our study have an important advantage before starting their career as English teachers and they will probably be successful in creating positive classroom atmosphere which will support students' self-efficacy perceptions and will also affect their students' motivation and achievement positively. Also, it is believed that their high perceived self-efficacy can aid in collective school efficacy as "teachers operate collectively within an interactive social system" (Bandura, 1995, p. 20).

This result was in concordance with a previous study by Alagözülü (2016) reporting that pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy perceptions of their teaching ability were found high. Based on the results, the researcher suggested that pre-service English teachers in the study had the power to face the challenges and adversities during their career as English teachers. Also, this result of the study is in line with the findings of Alcı and Yüksel (2012) who found approximately a similar total self-efficacy score (162.29) which could indicate that ELT students had high-level self-efficacy. Moreover, similar to our results, Baykara (2011) found that pre-service English teachers' teacher efficacy perceptions were high, and the researcher suggested that the participants would create an effective teaching environment when they start their career as an English teacher. In the same way, Çelik and

Zehir Topkaya (2017) reported that pre-service senior EFL teachers were found to hold moderately high teaching efficacy perceptions.

Regarding subscale scores (classroom management, student engagement and instructional strategies subscales) in our study, it was revealed that pre-service EFL teachers had relatively high-level self-efficacy perceptions for classroom management (52.88), student engagement (52.68) and instructional strategies (53.24). Baykara (2011) reported approximately similar self-efficacy scores for classroom management (54.68), student engagement (53.53), and instructional strategies (54.33), which is compatible with our results. As it is clear, in our study participants felt themselves as the most efficacious for instructional strategies. It can be attributed to the fact that pre-service teachers take several courses on instructional strategies or on similar topics at their department, so they could be acquainted with that kind of theoretical knowledge. In line with our results, Çankaya (2018) reported that pre-service EFL teachers considered themselves as the most efficacious about instructional concerns. But in contrast to our study Baykara (2011) found that pre-service EFL teachers considered themselves as the most efficacious about classroom management. In addition, our participants felt themselves as the least efficacious for student engagement although it indicates a relatively high-level efficacy as well. It was an expected result that as pre-service teachers our participants had very limited experience in the field. In line with our results, Çankaya (2018) and Baykara (2011) reported that pre-service EFL teachers considered themselves as the least efficacious about student engagement.

As to the second aim of the study, pre-service EFL teachers' total scale score and student engagement subscale score differed significantly by class level. When examined in detail, it was seen that juniors had significantly higher scores than sophomores in both total scale and student engagement subscale. This was an expected result as we know from literature (Aylar & Bostan, 2017; Aytaç, 2018; Çelik & Zehir Topkaya, 2017) that experience is an important factor in teachers' self-efficacy perceptions. Also, in their study, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) accounted for novice teachers' significantly lower-level self-efficacy by attributing it to their relative inexperience compared to experienced teachers. Expectedly, juniors in our study had significantly higher-level teacher self-efficacy than sophomores probably because they had more experience compared to sophomores. Comparison of the teacher self-efficacy scores by class level showed that total and subscale scores at other class levels did not differ significantly in our study. It was an interesting finding because it was expected that seniors had significantly higher-level teacher self-efficacy than especially freshmen and sophomores. Contrary to the expected, seniors had lower teacher self-efficacy score than juniors though it is not statistically significant, and they also had nearly similar teacher self-efficacy scores to freshmen and sophomores. The reason could be that seniors mainly focus on Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) in the last year of their university education, so they could not be interested in their teaching experience as expected. Excessive exam anxiety and busy studying schedule might affect

pre-service teachers' self-efficacy perceptions as well as their environmental communication, social relationships and artistic, cultural and sporting activities negatively as reported by Sezgin and Duran (2011).

As explained before, seniors (156.43) had similar teacher self-efficacy score to freshmen (156.40) and sophomores (155.37). The high self-efficacy perception of freshmen and sophomores in our study can be explained with their intensive preparatory class education which they needed to complete successfully before starting the program at their department. This yearlong intensive English education might affect their teacher self-efficacy positively as pre-service English teachers. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that freshmen might have unrealistic self-efficacy beliefs. In relation to pre-service teachers' unrealistic beliefs, Pajares (1992) states that "most pre-service teachers have an unrealistic optimism and a self-serving bias" (p. 323). The researcher clarifies that most of the pre-service teachers assume that they have already owned the most important attributions for successful teaching, they believe that they will not face the same problems others have faced before and they will have much better performance in teaching than the other ones. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even these unrealistic beliefs might somewhat contribute to their motivation and actions as well. Because Bandura (1995) states that "people's level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively the case" (p. 2). Also, the researcher remarks that optimistic efficacy beliefs foster human accomplishments and positive well-being. So, it can be said that pre-service teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are expected to make the required effort to succeed.

In contrast to our results, Alci and Yüksel (2012) found that 1st year students' teacher self-efficacy score was significantly lower than that of the third- and fourth-year students. In that study, third and fourth-year ELT students had stronger teacher self-efficacy beliefs which suggested that teacher's self-efficacy increases by time according to the authors. In another study, Baykara (2011) found a meaningful difference between first grade and third grade pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy. Different from our results, it was reported that freshman students had the highest-level self-efficacy beliefs while the juniors had the lowest level of self-efficacy. The researcher explains the first-grade students' high-level teacher self-efficacy with their enthusiasm to choose the ELT department.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There are some possible conclusions to be drawn from the results of our study. One of the conclusions is that preservice EFL teachers had relatively high teacher self-efficacy perceptions. This finding is crucial in terms of pre-service EFL teachers' motivation and performance as language teachers because Bandura (1995) explains that sense of efficacy affects personal goal setting. According to the researcher, people who have a high sense of

efficacy generally visualize success scenarios which guide and support their performance while those who have a low sense of efficacy visualize failure scenarios which affect their performance in a negative way. The researcher also signifies the important role of self-efficacy in self-regulation of motivation, level of stress and depression in difficult situations as well as the activities and environments people choose in their life. Similarly, Chaco'n (2005) specifies that teachers' perceived capabilities to teach seem to have a direct impact on teaching practices.

The other conclusion that can be drawn from the data is the significant difference between juniors and sophomores' teacher self-efficacy perceptions in favor of juniors. Unexpectedly, the results showed no significant difference at other class levels. Seniors were expected to have significantly higher teacher self-efficacy than the other class levels. Based on our results, we suggest that pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy perceptions should be considered with greater attention in the ELT program at the university. In the same way, Pajares (1992) indicates that teacher education programs need to take pre-service teachers' entering beliefs into account. Likewise, Tschannen Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) point out that considering the significant effects of teacher efficacy on teachers' capabilities requires significant changes during the preparation program at the faculty. The researchers suggest that teacher preparation programs could appear like apprenticeships full of mastery experiences rather than a university classroom with vicarious experience and verbal persuasion if teacher self-efficacy is considered seriously in the program. Accordingly, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) emphasize that teacher education programs should provide pre-service teachers more opportunities to practice and chances for mastery experiences and feedback. Çankaya (2018) points out the significant role of teacher education program in enhancing pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. As mastery experiences and vicarious experiences are the most effective ways to develop self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995), it is believed that teaching practices courses starting from the first years of the university education would be effective in creating a strong sense of efficacy in that those courses could provide pre-service teachers both good social models and chances to have successful experiences. In a similar vein, Woolfolk Hoy and Spero (2005) emphasize the important influence of mastery experiences during student teaching and the first year of teaching in developing teacher efficacy. The researchers specify that the first years of teaching can be very important in terms of developing long-term teacher efficacy because of the malleability of the efficacy early in learning according to the theory of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) emphasizes that after strong efficacy expectations are developed by a person, occasional failures will not have a negative influence on self-efficacy. Meanwhile, based on the results it is suggested that special precautions must be taken for the senior students who need to study hard for Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) in order to minimize the negative effects of the exam on their teacher self-efficacy. Social persuasion, which is a way of strengthening people's beliefs (Bandura, 1995), would provide seniors the needed social support to reduce their exam anxiety as it was demonstrated in a study by Tschannen-

Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) that novice teachers' self-efficacy was influenced by contextual factors such as verbal persuasion and the availability of the resources more than the experienced teachers. In addition, Bandura (1977) suggests that verbal persuasion is easy, always available, and contributes to a person's success although its effect could be weaker than the mastery experiences.

As mentioned before, his study was mostly motivated by the limited number of the studies which focus on Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Despite the limitations (limited number of participants, restriction to one university context and the self-reported data), it is believed that our results are useful and provide some new insight in the literature related to the positive effect of pre-service teachers' experience gained through their education at the faculty and the negative effect of Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) on seniors' teacher self-efficacy perceptions. However, it is suggested that the study should be replicated with more participants from different university contexts. Moreover, the investigation of the effect of other factors such as gender, age, background, English proficiency level on teacher efficacy can also contribute to literature.

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