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The Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction: The Case of Filipino Teachers of English

Ma. Joahna Mante-Estacio, Ph.D.
De La Salle University-Manila

ma.joahna.mante@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract: The teacher as a major component in the literacy learning situation has received much less attention in research when compared to the other two main components which are the materials and the learner. Borrowing some well-established psychological constructs and theories, researchers have recently focus on teacher cognition which covers the “beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives about teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities, and self” (Borg, 2006, p. 314). The current study zeroes-in on one aspect of teacher cognition which is self-efficacy beliefs. It will involve 48 teachers with various years of teaching and years as Graduate School students from a private university in Manila. Administering the 2014 Tschannen-Moran and Johnson’s Teacher Self-Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI) questionnaire on the first day of classes to the participants, an instrument measuring the self-reported efficacy for teaching reading and writing by teachers, the researcher found that overall, participants’ self-efficacy level is average, with females and those who have been teaching for six or more years reporting higher self-efficacy levels. Relevant conclusions and implications are identified and discussed.

Key Words: teachers’ self-efficacy; teacher cognition; literacy instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

There are several issues in the teaching of literacy that could be grouped into three: those that are related to texts or materials (language of the text is too difficult for the intended learners, layout and presentation is unimaginative and dull), those that are identified with the learners (unmotivated readers and writers, limited vocabulary), and those that are context-sensitive (classroom size problems, inappropriate teaching strategies).

Much research has been done to clarify the issues under the first two groups; however, it is only recently that teacher-related issues, which are under the third group, are being addressed by pedagogical

experts and researchers. Arguing that teachers play an instrumental role in the learning process, educational experts and researchers have started to delve in the various concerns that emanate from the teachers’ perspective.

The area of teacher research that has gained some prominence in recent years is that of teacher cognition. Teacher cognition is defined as the “teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives about teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities, and self” (Borg, 2006, p. 314).

Some researchers have borrowed some well-established psychological constructs and theories to help explain these teacher-related issues like self-



efficacy which is rooted in Albert Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory. It states that an individual's belief in his ability to succeed in specific situations or task has a big role in how he approaches goals, tasks, and challenges.

Previous studies claim that teacher self-efficacy is affected by several factors such as teaching experience and gender (Depaepe & Konig, 2018). Moreover, as teachers moved on in their careers, efficacy beliefs became less changeable (Tschannen-Moran et. al., 1998). They further reported that for new teachers, available teaching resources help improve their self-efficacy beliefs while experienced teachers' beliefs are more based on their mastery experiences.

A specific point in teacher self-efficacy beliefs is the teacher's self-efficacy for instruction. The dearth of research in this area provided promising evidence that self-efficacy beliefs mattered in the realm of literacy instruction (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011, p.49). It has been reported that the type of training in reading instruction causes differences in pre service teachers' understandings, beliefs, and decision making. (Maloch, et.al. 2003). The same can be said in writing: there is a difference in the classroom practices of high self-efficacy teachers when compared to those with low self-efficacy. (Graham, Harris, Fink, MacArthur, 2010). They reported that "Teachers scoring the highest in self-efficacy reported to be more positive about the impact of natural learning methods (p.52)

The current study attempts to add empirical proofs to this fairly new yet significant and essential area of teacher self-efficacy. Albeit, small in terms of participants and scope, it attempts to confirm whether the identified variables that affect teacher self-efficacy in general would also affect the participants' self-efficacy as literacy instructors.

The specific questions to be answered by the current study are the following:

1. What is the level of self-efficacy in teaching literacy among the teacher-participants according to their gender, years of teaching, and years in Graduate School?
2. What is the level of self-efficacy in teaching literacy among the teacher-participants in its two dimensions?

2. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory paper describes the participants' level of self-efficacy in literacy instruction. It presents the self-efficacy levels in terms of the participants' gender, years of teaching, and years in Graduate School.

2.1 Participants

Forty eight (48) Graduate School students of an English Language Master's Degree Program in one university in Manila participated. . Of this, 48% are males, and 52% are females. Forty-two (42%) percent are new or in their second year in the Master's program while the rest are in their third to fifth year in the program at the time of data gathering. Their years of teaching experience range from 1-6.

2.2 Instruments

The Teacher Self-Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI) questionnaire was used in the current study. TSELI was created by Tschannen-Moran and Johnson in 2004. It contains 22 questions that are to be answered on a nine-point Likert Scale representing 1-Nothing, to 9-A Great Deal. Example items are: How much can you do to meet the needs of struggling readers? To what extent can you model effective writing strategies? The items are likewise grouped under the two areas which are student engagement, and instructional strategies. Tschannen-Moran and Johnson have reported reliability coefficients and validity evidence for the instrument.

2.3 Procedure

The instrument was administered to the participants on the first meeting of their Teaching Reading class. The entire data was gathered in two different terms of the same academic year. On the average, the participants took ten minutes to answer the instrument. As the questionnaire was answered on the first day, there was no lesson discussed yet that might have affected the way they have answered. Consent of each student was secured by the teacher-researcher.

2.4 Data Analysis

Given that the data involved was gathered through convenience sampling and is generally small



in number, the report will focus on the computed and compared means of the participants' self-efficacy, gender, years of teaching, and years of studying in the Graduate School. Specific questionnaire items which received notable means are likewise reported. The standard deviation was also taken into account to provide a picture regarding the consistency of responses within groups.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results reveal that participants' average self-efficacy based on the nine-point scale is at the moderate level (6.51) with females reporting to have a slightly higher self-efficacy ($N = 29$; $\bar{x} = 6.76$) than males ($N = 19$; $\bar{x} = 6.26$). This result is consistent with previous studies (Sarfo, et.al, 2015).

Meanwhile, scores based on years of teaching show those with the longest experience, Y6+, have the highest mean self-efficacy ratings ($N = 15$; $\bar{x} = 7.08$). Moreover, there is little difference in self-efficacy ratings between newer ($N = 20$; $\bar{x} = 6.62$) and older students ($N = 28$; $\bar{x} = 6.53$).

When the items in the questionnaire are grouped into two to show the two dimensions of self-efficacy in instruction, it can be seen that the participants rated themselves slightly higher in those items referring to instructional strategies (7.75) than those about student engagement (7.5). In terms of specific items, the three questions under instructional strategies which received the highest means are those that refer to teachers as models of effective reading strategy use (7.0), providing writing opportunities as a response to reading (7.2), and effective use of writing as a tool in teaching spelling and grammar (7.4). These items reveal that the participants' belief in their ability to teach literacy is based on their knowledge in giving chances to students to develop their skills and in modeling how literacy skills may be developed. For the student engagement dimension, the top three items are those that reveal the participants' belief that they should provide opportunities for students to apply their prior knowledge to reading tasks (7.4); assisting the students on how they can use context in unlocking word meaning, and that they should integrate the various components of language arts (6.7). These items highlight the perceived importance of using

students' background knowledge and of lesson integration among the participants.

Variable	N	Total scores		Std. error	Min	Max
		Mea	SD			
Male	19	6.26	1.14	0.26	4.23	8.05
Female	29	6.76	1.02	0.19	4.82	8.5
Y0-1	5	6.52	1.24	0.56	5.05	8.05
Y6+	15	7.08	0.99	0.25	5.23	8.5
Y4-5	10	6.25	1.01	0.32	4.55	7.86
Y2-3	17	6.28	1.09	0.26	4.23	7.95
ID116-117	20	6.62	1.01	0.23	4.23	8.5
ID113-115	28	6.53	1.15	0.22	4.55	8.45
TOTAL	48	6.57	1.08	0.16	4.23	8.5

Table 1. Summary statistics of self-efficacy ratings

4. CONCLUSIONS

The participants reported to have average levels of self-efficacy. Those who have been teaching for six years or more have reported higher levels of self-efficacy than those who have been teaching less number of years. In terms of years in Graduate School, there is little difference in the scores reported by the respondents. The same may be said in terms of the two dimensions of self-efficacy where items referring to instructional strategies are given higher scores by the participants. For similar studies in the future, researchers are advised to make studies like this longitudinal to be more accurate, and to complement the use of the TSELI questionnaire with other data gathering methods like FGDs, interviews, and reflective journal writing. Teacher motivation and career stage of a stage might likewise reveal interesting results when used as variables in a similar study.

The results of this small scale research possibly set baseline data that clarify important



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points that can guide teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders on worthy projects and policies that will ultimately improve educational practices.

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