The relationship of EFL teachers' possible selves development with their self-efficacy and students' achievement

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ABSTRACT

The present study was intended to investigate possible relationships of the development of EFL teachers' possible selves with teacher efficacy and students' achievement. Eighty seven teachers selected from different Language Institutes participated in this study and filled in EFL teachers' Possible Selves Development Questionnaire as well as Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES). The participants were also requested to specify the mean scores of the achievement tests they administered to their students in the previous term. The results of data analysis indicated significant relationships of teachers' possible selves development with their self-efficacy and students' achievement. To investigate which components of possible selves might have more predictive power in predicting teacher's self-efficacy and student's achievement, regression analysis was run. The four subscales of possible selves – ideal, ought-to, actual, and feared selves- were found to be good predictors of teacher self-efficacy and only three subscales of possible selves including ideal, ought-to, and actual selves were strongly correlated with student's achievement. We conclude by suggesting that a sense of self-efficacy as well as a concern for students' achievement should be incorporated into the possible selves of EFL teachers.

Introduction

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.

Literature review

Possible selves theory and language teachers

The present study is theoretically based on two dominant psychological theories; possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius (1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) theory which have already been applied to motivation and L2 self studies by Dornyei, (2005, 2009, 2010) and teacher development by Kubanyiova (2009).

Markus and Nurius (1986) on the one hand distinguished among three main types of possible selves: (1) 'ideal selves that we would very much like to become', (2) 'selves that we could become', and (3) 'selves we are afraid of becoming'. The ideal or hoped-for selves might include 'the successful self, the creative self, the rich self, the thin self, or the loved and admired self', whereas the feared selves could be 'the alone self, the depressed self, the incompetent self, the alcoholic self, the unemployed self, or the bag lady self'. Markus and Nurius (1986) clearly put all these different selves under the label of possible selves, that is, even the ideal, hoped-for self is not completely detached from reality (i.e. it cannot be an utterly implausible fantasy). Interestingly, they also mention 'ought selves' defining it as 'an image of self held by another' (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 958). Thus, Markus and Nurius believed in multiple future-oriented possible selves and outlined the scope of these selves with a number of illustrations but without providing a finite taxonomy.

Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), on the other hand, postulates that these future-oriented selves are motivating because discrepancies between one's current sense of self (actual self) and these future selves result in discomfort, which in turn motivates a person to regulate behaviors in order to reduce that feeling of discomfort. Higgins (1987) acknowledges that this process is not always conscious: "…one's self-discrepancies can be used to assign meaning to events without one's being aware of either the discrepancies or their impact on processing." (Higgins, 1987, p. 324). For example, a man might experience tension if he considers working at a bilingual job over the summer (an ideal self) but cannot currently speak the language fluently (current self), so to reduce that feeling of discomfort, he decides to enroll in an advanced language course. In accordance with possible selves theory and self-discrepancy theory in particular (Higgins, 1987, 1998), Kubanyiova (2009) cleaves possible Language Teacher Self into (1) Ideal Language Teacher Self, which constitutes language-teaching specific identity goals and aspirations of language teachers. It is assumed that, whatever the content of this Ideal Self, the teachers will be motivated to expend effort in order to reduce the discrepancy between the actual and ideal teaching selves; and (2) Ought-to Language Teacher Self, which refers to the representation of responsibilities and obligations language teachers like to fulfill with regard to their work. In contrast to the ideal type of self, the teacher's activity geared at reducing the actual versus ought-to

self discrepancy is motivated by external factors and the primary reason for this motivation is believed to be the teacher's perception of negative consequences, in other words, the teacher's feared language teacher self would develop if the perceived obligations and responsibilities are not fulfilled.

The construct of possible selves as a theoretical framework can be used for a better understanding of language teacher cognition and development. Its particular privilege is in the way it addresses the current gap in the language teacher cognition domain and bridges the various cognitive, motivational, affective and contextual factors which play a role in language teacher conceptual change. Several key identity researchers have emphasized a dynamic future-oriented process of identity development, where identities are explored and created as people gain information about themselves through life experiences (e.g., Berzonsky, 1989; Dunkel, 2000; Grotevant, 1987). As Dunkel (2000) argued, the development of possible selves can serve as an important mechanism in identity development, with the process of generating or "trying on" possible selves being viewed as an integral aspect of identity exploration. In agreement with Dunkel (2000); Dastgoshadeh & Ghafar samar (forthcoming) used possible selves theory as a useful framework for understanding how teachers develop self-knowledge and for contributing to the development of EFL teachers' possible selves model.

Teacher self-efficacy and language teachers

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 relationship between Self-efficacy and Possible Selves

Our fundamental teaching beliefs, practices and principles are compounding factors in identity development, contributing to our sense of purpose, efficacy, self-worth, and value/justification (Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister & Wilson, 1996). Perceived self-efficacy like possible selves is a *future-oriented* (Goddard et al., 2004) and *context specific* (or "person-in-context") construct in that it refers to "peoples' thoughts about their capabilities for performance within a particular encounter, or type of encounters" (Cervone et al., 2004, p. 190).

The identity goals that the teachers adopt permeate all facets of their work as language teachers and impact on (1) what they know, think and believe about teaching, learning, their students or their own self; (2) what they do in the classroom; (3) what

cues from the teaching context they are sensitive to; (4) how they approach their professional development; and (5) how they process any reform input (Kubanyiova, 2009).

In social cognitive theory humans are conceived of as anticipative, purpose oriented and self-evaluating proactive regulators of their motivation and behavior (Bandura, 2001, cited in Bandura & Locke, 2003), who not only react to discrepancy between their internal standards and the actual behavior, but who, primarily, motivate themselves through creating discrepancies to be mastered. More specifically, people exercise proactive self regulation over their functioning by setting themselves challenging goals and mobilizing their internal resources based on their anticipation of what fulfilling those goals will entail. They subsequently respond to feedback on their performance by adjusting their efforts. The extent to which the goals have been accomplished successfully will determine the level of people's self-efficacy, which, in turn, will influence the nature of future goals. People with high self-efficacy will typically set themselves increasingly higher standards as opposed to those with low self-efficacy beliefs. As Bandura and Locke (2003) maintain, "the adoption of further challenges creates new motivating discrepancies to be mastered. Thus, discrepancy reduction is only half of the story and not necessarily the more interesting half" (p. 91).

Two paths, therefore, are likely possible: a. lack of teaching self-efficacy coupled with feelings of powerlessness (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005) and an absence of motivating future teacher selves – either negative or positive – ultimately leads to depression, decreased effort, and burnout; b. lack of teaching self-efficacy paired with feelings of potential for improvement due to motivating future teacher selves impels teachers to undergo development as a route to achieving success as an educator (Wheatley 2005).

Individuals who are otherwise similar feel differently about themselves and choose different courses of action, depending on how they construe themselves—what attributes they think they possess, what roles they presume they are expected to play, what they believe they are capable of, how they view they fare in comparison with others, and how they judge they are viewed by others. Without doubt, these are beliefs and perceptions about self that are heavily rooted in one's past achievement and reinforcement history. Yet it is these subjective convictions about oneself, once established, which play a determining role in individuals' further growth and development (Bandura, 1997; Markus and Nurius, 1986).

The contents of possible selves might, therefore, include different types of values and beliefs including self-efficacy beliefs. It is among the objectives of this study to explore to what extent EFL teachers' possible selves contents are shaped by language and teaching efficacy beliefs and also to investigate the relationship between centrality of these beliefs and students' achievement. It is worth stating that factors influencing a sense of efficacy are different and countless. Say, possible selves development of English language teachers, that is, what shapes their ideal, actual, and feared selves undoubtedly affects their classroom practices, their degree of commitment, and also their students' achievement.

Research questions

The following research questions were proposed to be investigated in this study:

1. Is there any significant relationship between the degrees of possible selves development and self-efficacy of (Iranian) EFL teachers?

2. Is there any significant relationship between (Iranian) EFL teachers' degrees of possible selves development and students' achievement?

Methodology

The participants of the study were 87 EFL teachers, both male and female, teaching at different language institutes/universities in Iran. The data collection measures were: a. the EFL teachers' possible selves development questionnaire developed by the researchers which was used to determine and assess the degree of possible selves development of the teachers. The researchers went through three phases to develop and validate the questionnaire: In phase 1, twenty four interviews were conducted with EFL teachers to explore what actually constitutes the different components of EFL teachers' possible selves. In phase 2, based on the theoretical framework of the study and the results of the content analysis of the interviews and literature review, the instrument was piloted with 40 English language teachers similar to the target group. Finally in phase 3, the revised questionnaire was administered to 380 English language teachers to check its reliability and validity. The total reliability of the questionnaire was calculated via Cronbach's alpha which was found to be 0.91. The validity was also confirmed through two separate steps of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. This questionnaire includes 54 items with four components on a 6-point Likert scale; b. The teacher self-efficacy scale (TES) developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, (2001); it was used to assess self-efficacy based on general personality disposition. Participants responded by indicating their extent of agreement with each of the 24 statements using a nine-point scale of 1 (Nothing), to 9 (A great deal); c. the participants were also requested to specify the mean scores of the achievement tests they administered to their students in the previous term. The two questionnaires were administered to the participants in person, by email, on line or by the supervisor of the schools and language institutes. The explanations provided to the supervisors and teachers were general and based on the instructions of each questionnaire.

Data analyses and results

The statistical methods including descriptive statistics, and correlations were used to answer the research questions. To find out which components of possible selves might have more predictive power in predicting teachers' self-efficacy and students' achievement, regression analyses were run. First, the descriptive statistics for teachers' self-efficacy and the four components of the EFL teachers' possible selves is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Self-efficacy and the Four Components of the EFL teachers' Possible Selves

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Self-efficacy	200.7816	3.79542	87
Ideal	172.8030	3.83916	87
Ought-to	77.9146	4.83303	87
Actual	104.8048	2.51284	87
Feared	26.5172	1.37132	87

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation for teachers' self-efficacy and the four components of the EFL teachers' possible selves including ideal, ought-to, actual, and feared selves respectively.

Second, to investigate the correlation between possible selves development and self-efficacy of the teachers, using Enter method, the variables were put into the analysis. Table 2 below shows the significance level for the regression model obtained based on the collected data of the study.

Table 2. The Regression Model of the Relationships between the Variables

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	df1	df2	Sig. F
Regression Model	.753	.56	.545	4	82	.000

As seen, the results of the regression analysis show that the regression model is valid, as an R^2 of .56 means that 56% of the variance in the observed values of the dependent variable is explained by the model. The independent variable in this study is the model comprised of the four components of the teachers' possible selves and the dependent variable is the teachers' self-efficacy. Table 3 below shows the results of ANOVA for the regression model.

Table 4.15. ANOVA Results for the Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	617.221	4	154.305	26.787	.000
Residual	472.365	82	5.761		
Total	1089.586	86			

a. Predictors: (Constant), factor1, factor 2, factor 3, factor 4
b. Dependent Variable: Self-efficacy

In Table 3, ANOVA tests the null hypothesis that there is no linear relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable. As seen, for this model, when all four predictors are entered, the significance level associated with the observed value of F is 0.000. Thus, the null hypothesis that "There is NO meaningful correlation between Iranian EFL teachers' possible selves development and their self-efficacy" can be rejected. To find out which components of teachers' possible selves might have more predictive power in predicting teachers' self-efficacy, the values of the coefficients in the regression equation presented in Table 4 were calculated.

Table 4. The Values of the Coefficients in the Regression Equation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	87.796	16.969		5.174	.000
Ideal	.185	.090	.169	2.044	.044
Ought-to	.215	.059	.276	3.622	.001
Actual	.294	.104	.207	2.833	.006
Feared	1.242	.219	.478	5.678	.000

Dependent Variable: Self-efficacy

Table 4 displays the values of the coefficients in the regression equation and measures the probability that a linear relationship exists between each predictor variable and the dependent variable.

The regression coefficients including B and Beta for each component were calculated. As observed, the correlation coefficients between possible selves development and teachers' self-efficacy are significant at $P \leq$ 0.05. Thus, the four subscales of possible selves development are good predictors of EFL teachers' self-efficacy.

The relationship between EFL teachers' possible selves development and students' achievement

With regard to the second research question of the study which investigates the relationship between EFL teachers' possible selves development and students' achievement, first, the descriptive statistics for students' achievement and the four components of possible selves is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation for students' achievement and the four components of the possible

selves including ideal, ought-to, actual, and feared selves respectively.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Students' Achievement and the Four Components of the EFL teachers' Possible Selves

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Students' Achievement	17.0575	.95669	87
Ideal	172.8030	3.83916	87
Ought-to	77.9146	4.83303	87
Actual	104.8048	2.51284	87
Feared	26.5172	1.37132	87

Second, to investigate the correlation between EFL teachers' possible selves development and their students' achievement, using Enter method, the variables were put into the analysis. Table 6 below shows the significance level for the regression model obtained based on the collected data of the study.

Table 6. The Regression Model of the Relationships between the Variables

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	df1	df2	Sig. F
Regression Model	.712	.507	.48	4	82	.000

a. Predictors: (constant), factor1, factor 2, factor3, factor 4

As seen, the results of regression analysis show that the regression model is valid as an R^2 of .507 means that 50% of the variance in the observed values of the dependent variable is explained by the model. The independent variable in this study is the model comprised of the four components of the possible selves and the dependent variable is students' achievement. Table 7 below shows the results of ANOVA for the regression model.

Table 7. ANOVA Results for the Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	19.498	4	4.875	21.106	.000
Residual	18.939	82	.231		
Total	38.437	86			

a. Predictors: (Constant), factor1, factor2, factor3, factor4
b. Dependent Variable: Students' achievement

In Table 7, ANOVA tests the null hypothesis that there is no linear relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable. As seen, for this model, when all four predictors are entered, the significance level associated with the observed value of F is 0.000. Thus, the null hypothesis that "There is NO significant correlation between EFL teachers' possible selves development and students' achievement" can be rejected. As it was mentioned before, to assess the relationship between the four components of the possible selves (ideal, ought-to, actual, feared selves) and students' achievement, regression analyses were performed. The values of the coefficients in the regression equation presented in Table 8 were calculated.

Table 8. The Values of the Coefficients in the Regression Equation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-13.167	4.055		-	.002
Ideal	.074	.023	.279	3.247	.002
Ought-to	.089	.032	.260	3.222	.007
Actual	.087	. 030	.301	2.761	.005
Feared	.047	.049	.094	2.897	.341
				.958	

Dependent Variable: Students' achievement

Table 8 displays the values of the coefficients in the regression equation and measures the probability that a linear relationship exists between each predictor variable which is the four components of the possible selves and the dependent variable which is students' achievement in this study.

The regression coefficients including B and Beta for each component were calculated. As observed, the correlation coefficients between factors 1, 2, and 3 of the possible selves development and students' achievement are significant at P$\leq$ 0.05. It is concluded that there is a significant linear relationship between EFL teachers' ideal, ought-to, and actual selves and students' achievement. But with regard to factor 4 representing feared self of the teachers, as observed, the value for this factor is not significant at P$\leq$ 0.05. It is also revealed that there is no significant relationship between EFL teachers' feared self and students' achievement.

Conclusions and discussion

As stated earlier, the present study attempts to investigate the relationship of EFL teachers' possible selves development with their efficacy and students' achievement. The results of regression analysis showed that there were significant relationships between the four components of the EFL teachers' possible selves and their self-efficacy. The findings of the present study showed that teachers' beliefs about their profession, students, and sociopolitical aspects of language learning, etc, which comprise the whole model of EFL teachers' possible selves development are positively correlated with teachers' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a central element of the development of the "self". It refers to teachers' beliefs about their own values, competencies, and accomplishments (Rots, Aelterman, Vierick, & Vermeulen, 2007). The presence of the sense of self-efficacy within ideal, ought-to, and actual selves suggests that it is one of the integral constituents of the possible selves development of EFL teachers.

The four sources of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura (1994) are the identity goals teachers develop with regard to different aspects of their profession. For example, Bandura has described mastery experiences as the most powerful source of information upon which to base efficacy (Bandura 1977).The identity goals that the teachers adopt permeate all facets of their work as language teachers and impact on (1) what they know, think and believe about teaching, learning, their students or their own self; (2) what they do in the classroom; (3) what cues from the teaching context they are sensitive to; (4) how they approach their professional development; and (5) how they process any reform input (Kubanyiova, 2009).

Identity theory has implications not only for self-concept including self-efficacy. When we perform well in a role, this provides us with a sense of control over our environment (Franks and Marolla 1976; Gecas & Schwalbe 1983). R research results in identity theory show that self-verification which occurs through performing a role well makes one feel efficacious (Burke & Stets 1999). Bernat (2008) states that teachers' personal discourses regarding self and language teacher identity may include beliefs about their own competence (self-efficacy beliefs), level of language proficiency, career opportunities, past teaching experiences, and perceptions of self as 'language expert', to name a few.

Regarding the second research question, the findings showed that among the 4 components of possible selves development, ideal, ought-to, and actual have the highest positive correlation with students' achievement. This is hardly surprising since the findings of current research show positive

interrelationships between the different characteristics of language teachers such as their pedagogical knowledge base (e.g., Watzke, 2007), professional development (e.g., Ross & Bruce, 2007), identity (e.g., Tsui, 2007), and teachers' classroom practices and subsequently students' achievement. It was observed that the different components of the EFL teachers' possible selves, except feared self, predicted language learners' achievement. Exploring the content of the different components and sub-components of EFL teachers' possible selves revealed that the teachers expressed their concern about their students' learning which, in turn, resulted in exercising a greater level of effort and efficacy to bring about success in language learning.

What shapes the contents of EFL teachers' possible selves is the hopes, wishes, aspirations, and fears they develop about their profession which, in turn, govern teachers' personal investment in continuing teacher development. These possible language teacher selves differ in their centrality, strength and combinatory patterns but, according to the findings of the present study, two constant factors which should be developed and promoted in these well-articulated selves in almost all contexts are language teacher self-efficacy and concern about students' achievement. Besides, specific teacher education programs (pre-service as well as in-service) will need to incorporate into their syllabuses particular strategies for promoting relevant ideal and ought-to possible selves and also preventing the development of the feared selves.

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