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EXPLORING SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN TURKEY[i]

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Abstract:
Analyzing teacher self-efficacy has been a prominent issue in educational research since late 1970s. Teacher efficacy basically refers to teachers' beliefs in their abilities to organize and execute courses of action necessary to bring about desired results (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). This study attempts to examine self-efficacy beliefs of teachers working at primary state schools in Turkey regarding dimensions such as instruction, adapting instruction to individual needs, motivating students, and maintaining discipline. It specifically aims to reveal whether gender and experience have a significant influence on the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Data obtained from the participants' responses to the items in the Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) were analysed using SPSS Version 17.0. Findings of the study suggest that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are improved through gaining professional experience, and that female teachers seem to have lower self-efficacy beliefs than their male colleagues with respect to motivating students, keeping discipline in classroom, and coping with challenges. The study concludes with practical implications of the findings, and a few suggestions for further directions.

Keywords: self-efficacy, experience, gender, teacher

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1. Introduction

Self-efficacy is a self-system that controls most personal activity, including appropriate use of professional knowledge and skills and as it reflects in the ability to exert control over one's motivation, behaviour and social environment (Gavora, 2010: 17). It refers to or an individual's belief in his/her own abilities to deal with various situations, and it can play a role in not only how s/he feels about his or herself but whether or not s/he is successfully achieve his/her goals in life. The concept of self-efficacy is the major component of Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory which highlights the role of observational learning, social experience and reciprocal determinism in developing a personality. Beliefs in one's capabilities organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997: 3). Sources of self-efficacy consist of four dimensions as mastery experience (personal successes are considered to build a robust belief in one's self-efficacy), vicarious experience (presence of a successful role model rises observers' beliefs in themselves), social persuasions (verbal persuasion of people about their potential once they try hard), and emotional states (fear, stress, and anxiety lower the self-efficacy) (Bandura, 1994). In respect of the degree of self-efficacy, high sense of self-efficacy for a given task leads to setting higher goals, and decreases fear of failure; so, people with high self-efficacy are likely to come up with new strategies when the existing ones fail. In response to this, lower sense of self-efficacy is prone to result in avoiding the task or giving up easily when difficulties arise (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995). Likewise, Flammer (1995) suggests that both children and adults with high expectations and optimistic beliefs about the future tend to be mentally and physically more healthy, less depressed, and more motivated to achieve. The following section is intended to outline related literature on teacher self-efficacy.

2. Literature Review

Teacher self-efficacy is the belief that teachers have about their abilities and skills as educator, and it is viewed an important characteristic of the teacher and strongly related to success in teaching (Gavora, 2012). Namely, Orange (2005: 149) advocates that teachers with high self-efficacy are likely to develop the belief that they can reach even the most difficult students and help them learn. Therefore, teacher self-efficacy is an indispensible component of teaching profession and education. Accordingly, teachers who start their careers with low self-efficacy tend to find better instructional strategies to improve their teaching performance over time, thus increasing their sense of efficacy, or to leave the profession once they fail to do so (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007: 18). On the other hand, OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (2008), a wide project aiming effective teaching and learning in schools, was carried out

in 24 countries with the participation of more than 70.000 teachers between the years 2007 and 2008, was partly related to teacher self-efficacy. The report has revealed that self-efficacy levels of novice teachers are significantly lower than experienced teachers especially in 12 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Iceland, Korea, Malta, Slovak Republic, Norway, Poland and Turkey). It has also indicated that teacher self-efficacy is strongly correlated with such teacher level factors participation in collaborative forms of professional development, appraisal and feedback on their work (Cited in TALIS 2013: 36).

A great deal of research has been conducted on the perceptions and beliefs of teacher self- efficacy with the aim of providing deeper insight into the field of teacher education. Berg and Smith (2016: 8) note that in-service teachers with strong teacher self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be more committed (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Trimble, 1986; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007); enthusiastic about teaching (Allinder, 1994; Guskey 1984; Hall, Burley, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1992; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010); more likely to continue to work as a teacher (Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982); tenacious, resilient, and more understanding of less successful students (Ashton & Webb, 1986); more likely to trial pioneering methods and innovative ideas (Allinder, 1994; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Cousins & Walker, 2000; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Meijer & Foster, 1988; Smylie, 1988; Wertheim & Leyser, 2002). They also highlight that those teachers tend to use hands on teaching methods (Riggs & Enochs, 1990), to show evidence of more effective organisation and planning (Allinder, 1994), and to be more satisfied with their job (Klassen et al., 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) found that teachers' sense of personal efficacy is higher in schools where other teachers and administrators have high expectations for students, and where they receive help from their principals in solving instructional and management problems. Gavora (2010) conducted a research on teaching self-efficacy and general teaching efficacy of pre-service teachers enrolled in five-year teacher education programmes at a university in Slovakia, and found that they had positive self-efficacy beliefs. Ghasemboland and Hashim (2013) analysed the efficacy beliefs of non-native English speaking EFL teachers with respect to personal capabilities to teach EFL, and their perceived English language proficiency in language centres in a middle-east country. Their findings indicated that the teachers' perceived efficacy is positively correlated with self-reported English proficiency. In a recent study, Sarfo et al. (2015) explored the relationship between gender and self-efficacy beliefs in instructional strategies, classroom management and student engagement among senior high school teachers in Ghana, and reported that female teachers have stronger self-efficacy beliefs than male teachers. As for Turkey, most of the related research seems to have focused on self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service teachers rather than their in-service colleagues. Özdemir (2008) probed prospective primary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs

regarding different variables, and found that their self-efficacy beliefs differ according to sex, program, and speciality (cited in Doğutaş, 2016). In a similar vein, Taşkın and Hacıömerlioğlu (2010) studied pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs considering gender, and indicated that gender does not significantly influence their self-efficacy perceptions. Analyzing self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers and their performance in the classroom, Özder (2011) concluded that they have a sufficient level of efficacy beliefs, and they describe themselves highly successful in using instructional strategies in class. In a recent survey, Merç (2015) investigated pre-service teachers' perceived self-efficacy, and level of anxiety. He reported certain correlations among the components of the anxiety and self-efficacy beliefs although gender and type of practicum school were not predictors of anxiety and self-efficacy beliefs.

In a different study, Senemoğlu et al. (2009) examined Turkish elementary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in relation to gender, experience and achievement level, and they reported that gender and experience do not significantly influence their self-efficacy beliefs while their level of achievement does. Yüksel (2010) conducted a study with the participation of Turkish EFL teachers working at state primary schools, and found a significant correlation between high levels of self-efficacy and their perceived language proficiency in English. Kozikoğlu (2016) searched the self-efficacy perceptions and professional commitment levels of teachers working at state primary schools, and concluded that there is a positive correlation between teachers' self-efficacy perceptions and their professional commitment. Finally, Doğutaş (2016) carried out a research with a focus on self-efficacy beliefs of teacher candidates attending a state university in Turkey on readiness to teaching profession, and reported that they have strong self-efficacy beliefs.

All in all, in order to bridge the research gap in Turkey, the present study scrutinizes self-efficacy beliefs of teachers working at state primary schools regarding such dimensions as instruction, adapting instruction to individual needs, motivating students, and maintaining discipline. It specifically aims to reveal whether gender and experience have a significant influence on their self-efficacy beliefs. Two research questions were developed: (i) Do self-efficacy beliefs of Turkish primary school teachers significantly differ regarding experience?, and (ii) do self-efficacy beliefs of Turkish primary school teachers significantly differ regarding gender?

The following section outlines research design of the study providing information about sampling, data collection instrument, and data analysis.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

100 teachers working at state primary schools in three provinces in Turkey who are specialised in teaching various subjects (Turkish Language, Mathematics, Music, EFL,

Social Sciences, Science, and Technology etc.) were the participants of the study. They were selected through snowball sampling method, which is noted as allowing researchers to look at the local patterns of relationships and to draw conclusions (Golbeck, 2013:117), and equally divided into two groups as experienced and novice teachers. Demographic information about the participants was also collected through the forms administered to them (e.g. age, gender, experience and educational qualification). Demographic features of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampling

Participants		**Novice teachers (N. 50)**	**Experienced teachers (N. 50)**
Age Range		23-37 ($\overline{x}$: 27,6)	30-60 ($\overline{x}$: 41,6)
Gender	Female	34	24
	Male	16	26
Experience		1 to 5 years	7 to 37
		($\overline{x}$: 3,5 years)	($\overline{x}$: 17,7 years)
Educational Level	BA	43	41
	MA	7	8
	PhD	---	1

As illustrated in Table 1, at the time of the study, novice teachers were aged between 23 and 37 years (mean age of 27.6) while their experienced colleagues were between 30 and 60 (mean age of 41.6). In addition, the former group had an average experience of 3.5 years, and the latter had a mean experience of 17.7 years. Lastly, a balanced distribution was observed among the groups in terms of their level of education; namely, the majority of the teachers in each group held BA degree when they participated in the survey. Data collection instruments employed in this study and data analysis procedure are introduced in the following section.

3.2 Data Collection Tool and Analysis

Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) which is a 24 five-point Likert Items was utilized as a data collection tool after translated into Turkish. Items in the scale were pointed from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). This scale is designed to measure six dimensions of teacher efficacy as:

- Instruction
- Adapting education to students' individual needs
- Motivating students
- Keeping discipline
- Cooperating with colleagues & parents
- Coping with changes & challenges

NTSES was administered to the teachers in different settings. Those who were working at schools in the town centre, for instance, were visited at school, and

requested to fill the survey forms. Those who were working at schools in the country were kindly asked to fill it out and to send it back via email to the researchers. Finally, the teachers who were pursuing their MA in educational sciences at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, Turkey were requested to complete it at the end of their courses at the faculty. It is significant to note that no time limitation was set for completing the scale. The data obtained from the scales were analysed through SPSS Version 17.0 in order to see whether there are statistically significant differences between experienced and novice teachers, and between male and female teachers with regard to their self-efficacy beliefs.

4. Results and Discussion

Findings of the study have suggested that most of the teachers display strong self-efficacy beliefs regardless of gender and experience, confirming the findings previously reported by Senemoğlu et al. (2009), Gavora (2010), taşkın and Hacıömerlioğlu (2010), Ozder (2011), Merç (2015), Sarfo et al. (2015). Nevertheless, some differences were observed between male and female teachers as well as experienced and novice teachers in this concern, as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

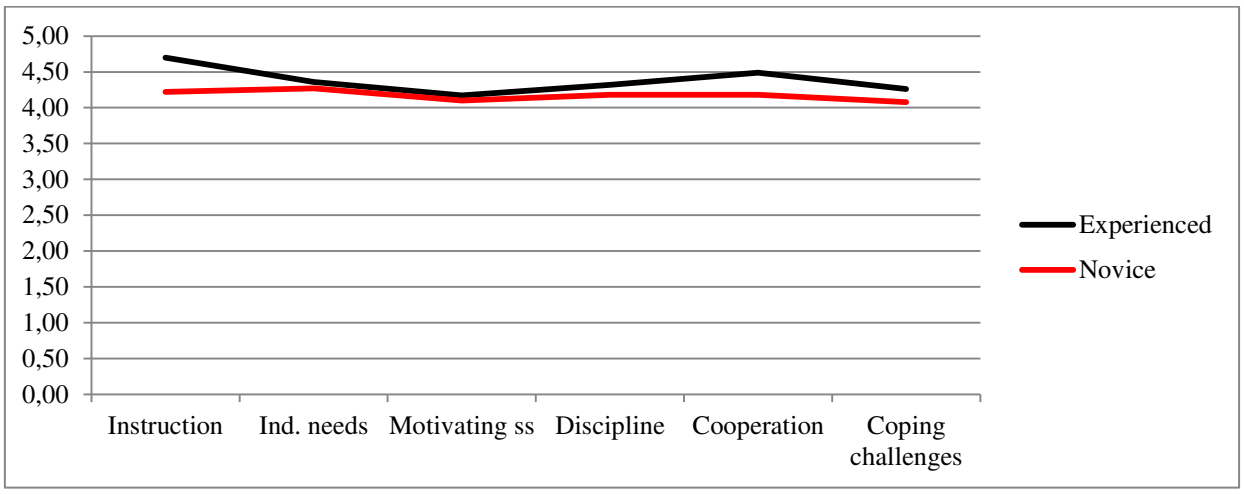

Figure 1: Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding experience

As can be seen in Figure 1, experienced teachers have stronger self-efficacy beliefs than the novice teachers confirming Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) who found that novice teachers have relatively weaker self-efficacy beliefs than the experienced teachers, and contradicting Doğutaş (2016) who concluded that novice teachers have strong self-efficacy beliefs. More specifically, the groups in question significantly differ in their responses to the following items.

- Co-operate well with most parents. (Cooperation with parents)
- Find adequate solutions to conflicts of interest with other teachers. (Coping with challenges)

- Wake the desire to learn even among the lowest-achieving students. (Motivating students)
- Answer students' questions so that they understand difficult problems. (Instruction)
- Adapt instruction to the needs of low-ability students while you also attend to the needs of other students in class. (Students' individual needs)
- Get all students to behave politely and respect the teachers. (Discipline)
- Co-operate effectively and constructively with other teachers, for example, in teaching teams. (Cooperation with colleagues)

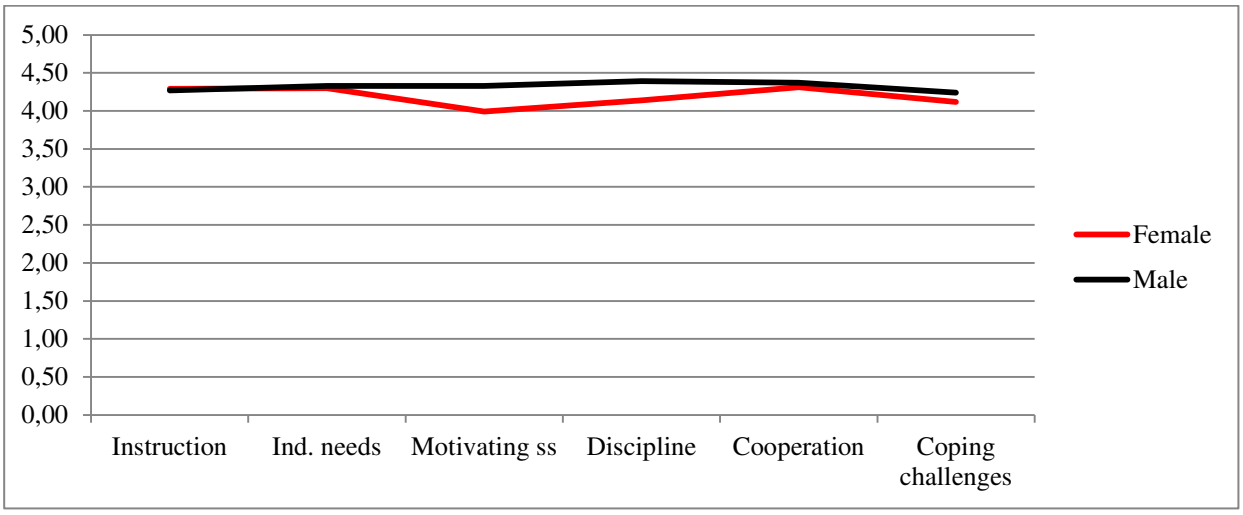

Figure 2: Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding gender

Figure 2 displays that male teachers have stronger self-efficacy beliefs than female teachers contradicting Sarfo et al. (2015) who reported that female teachers have better instructional strategies efficacy than male teachers, and Özdemir (2013) who found female prospective teachers have higher self-efficacy beliefs than male prospective teachers. Teachers' responses have demonstrated that male teachers feel much more confident than their female colleagues with respect to maintaining classroom discipline; namely, the number of male teachers who agree or strongly agree with the statement that I can control even the most aggressive students is relatively higher than that of female teachers.

In order to see whether the above-mentioned differences between the teachers with regard to experience and gender, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 17.0) were used. The related results are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: T-test results of teacher self-efficacy beliefs regarding experience

	Experience	N	$\bar{x}$	SS	Sd	t	p
Instruction	Experienced	50	4.2680	0.69	98	0.26	**.38**
	Novice	50	4.2200	0.77			
Individual needs	Experienced	50	4.3560	0.59	98	0.63	**.28**
	Novice	50	4.2720	0.68			
Motivating students	Experienced	50	4.1650	0.71	98	0.64	**.49**
	Novice	50	4.0550	0.77			
Keeping discipline	Experienced	50	4.3200	0.66	98	0.93	**.43**
	Novice	50	4.1750	0.77			
Cooperation	Experienced	50	4.6000	0.73	98	2.06	**.12**
	Novice	50	4.0800	0.75			
Coping with challenges	Experienced	50	4.2600	0.70	98	1.24	**.23**
	Novice	50	4.0800	0.77			
Total	Experienced	50	4.3042	0.66	98	.86	**.33**
	Male	42	4.3115	0.70			

Indeed, Table 2 includes the response to the first research question of the study which aims to investigate whether self-efficacy beliefs of Turkish primary school teachers significantly differ regarding length of professional experience. In general, no statistically significant difference was found between the experienced and novice teachers in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs. Yet, it has been revealed that the former tend to higher level of self-efficacy than the latter particularly regarding the dimensions of instruction, cooperation with other teachers at school and the students' parents, and coping with challenges.

Likewise, Table 3 provides an answer to the second research question posed in the study with the purpose of seeing whether self-efficacy beliefs of Turkish primary school teachers significantly differ regarding the variable of gender.

Table 3: T-test results of teacher self-efficacy beliefs regarding gender

	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SS	Sd	t	p
Instruction	Female	58	4.2275	0.71	98	0.21	**.38**
	Male	42	4.2666	0.75			
Individual needs	Female	58	4.3034	0.64	98	0.88	**.34**
	Male	42	4.3285	0.64			
Motivating students	Female	58	3.9871	0.73	98	1.98	**.28**
	Male	42	4.3285	0.73			
Keeping discipline	Female	58	4.1422	0.75	98	1.68	**.19**
	Male	42	4.3929	0.65			
Cooperation	Female	58	4.3103	0.82	98	.33	**.57**
	Male	42	4.3651	0.65			
Coping with challenges	Female	58	4.1206	0.73	98	.70	**.47**
	Male	42	4.2381	0.75			
Total	Female	58	4.1861	0.72	98	.82	**.32**
	Male	42	4.3115	0.70			

Considering statistical findings illustrated in Table 3, female and male teachers do not significantly differ in their self-efficacy beliefs. However, the female teachers seem to have lower self-efficacy beliefs than their male colleagues with respect to motivating students, keeping discipline in classroom, and coping with challenges. Practical implications of the study will be discussed in the light of related findings in the following section. Subsequently, limitations of the study and a couple of suggestions for further directions will be presented.

5. Conclusion

In accordance with the findings of the present study, one might conclude that the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, especially those on the dimensions of instruction, cooperation with others and coping with challenges, seem to be improved through gaining professional experience. Similarly, male teachers seem to be more self-confident in motivating students, keeping discipline in classroom, and coping with challenges as opposed to their female colleagues, which might be contributed to the patriarchal structure of the Turkish society in general, or that females are perceived less authoritarian due to the fact that they look physically weaker than their male colleagues. However, we could never know which group could really achieve these without observing them for an appropriate period of time or eliciting opinions of the groups of students they are working with about it. So, the results reported here cannot be generalized to other settings, and more data are needed to come up with more concrete results related to teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their teaching practices.

Nevertheless, taking into consideration the finding that novice teachers tend to have weaker self-efficacy beliefs than experienced teachers, it might be suggested that certain precautions should be taken in undergraduate teacher training programmes so that pre-service teachers/ teacher candidates develop positive self-efficacy beliefs and easily adopt their future profession. In this sense, Özdemir (2008) recommends that various activities and practices that will enable them to appreciate the teaching profession should be included in teacher education programmes. He also suggests that such activities as seminars and tutorials should be held for the teachers in order to help them overcome the problems they are faced in their professional life. Additionally, as suggested by Özder (2011), the internship durations and contents should be revised in order for teacher candidates to benefit from experienced teachers, and to improve the skills related to "*ensuring student engagement in class*".

In a similar vein, Sarfo et al. (2015) recommend that teacher training institutions should emphasize the teaching of instructional practices, student engagement and classroom management practices to the teacher trainees so as to improve their self-efficacy beliefs. In TALIS (2014: 25), teachers are suggested to be open to working together with colleagues and school leaders, to take the initiative to create them if

formal collaborative activities aren't already established, to consider team teaching as a way of approaching classroom management, particularly when there are large numbers of students with behavioural problems in class, and to take advantage of professional development opportunities, especially if they are provided in the school and involve colleagues. Alternatively, in the report, school administrators are suggested to help teachers keep their teaching methods up-to-date, and to develop more collaboration among teachers in their schools in order to encourage them to learn from one another (p. 11). They might also be suggested to provide novice teachers with more help in solving institutional and management problems, and to encourage cooperation between novice and experienced teachers. Finally, considering that teacher self-efficacy is correlated with the amount of stress experienced in teaching (Smylie, 1988), it might be suggested for school administrators to create a stress-free atmosphere at their institution as much as possible.

This study is limited to analysing data obtained from teachers working at state primary schools located in a few cities in Turkey (N. 60); so, a larger number of teachers working at institutions offering different levels of education might be included in a further study. In addition, it might be extended to compare self-efficacy beliefs of teachers working state schools and those who work at private schools. It is also limited in instrumentation; namely, data were collected through only one scale. Hence, in a further study, teachers' perceptions might be analysed using other types of instruments such as interview and observation. Finally, it is limited to the comparison of self-efficacy beliefs of teachers in terms of experience and gender. Thus, it might be furthered to compare the perceptions of teachers regarding different aspects such as educational status, or more specifically, a further study might be carried out with the purpose of revealing factors that cause novice teachers to develop weaker self-efficacy beliefs in comparison to their experienced colleagues.

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