

Self-Directed Learning and Self-Efficacy Belief among Iranian EFL Learners at the advanced Level of Language Proficiency

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Abstract

Iranian EFL students who were studying English at the advanced level in Language Institute in Bandar Abbas, Iran were chosen based on their performance in a TOEFL PBT from among 80 EFL learners to shape the participants of the study. The participants received the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), which has been validated by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) and a standard copy of Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) developed by Guglielmino (1977). The findings of the present study revealed that there was a significant relationship between Self-Efficacy Belief and self-directed learning of Iranian EFL learners at the advanced level of Language Proficiency. The findings of the study could be used by English teachers, and EFL learners in the EFL and ESL context.

Keywords: self-directed learning, self-efficacy belief, learner autonomy

INTRODUCTION

In today's modern world of communication, English language teaching (ELT) has gained an upsurge attention in many foreign countries such as Iran. According to Pishghadam and Naji Meidani (2011), "ELT in Iran has become a widely established field, nurtured by modern theories and backed by a large body of research, all due to the importance of the English language" (p. 21). They also compared the status of English language with other languages and asserted that "Other foreign language fields seem to be deprived of such vast number of resources, innovations, recent models of education, and research-based perspectives in English teaching and learning" (p.21). In fact, English language has found its status in Iran as the most dominant foreign language taught in educational setting and academic environment. Along with the exceptional growth of English as an international language as well as the upsurge interest toward today's growing technology and science transfer, learning English as an effective means of communication has recently become more pronounced in Iran (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi, 2005). Increase in the number of English language institutes and their students as well

as the extended interest of parents to encourage the children to learn English can be taken as the strong evidences for the recent assigned value to English language in Iran.

Learning a language involves some perplex mental processes, like aptitude, self-confidence, self-efficacy, having different levels of motivation, learners' different cognitive styles, and plenty of some other factors. Self-Efficacy Belief (Bandura, 1993, as cited in Haddoune, 2012) as generative capability and Self-directed Learning (Long, 1989, as cited in Francis & Flanigan, 2012) as learning strategies have been studied by researchers in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English Language Teaching (ELT).

Self-efficacy is a learner's belief in his/her ability to succeed in a particular situation or activity (Bandura, 2000). Zimmerman et al. (2010) presented that the students' aspiration can be her belief in her academic efficacy. Hosseini Fatemi and Vahidnia (2013) argued the association between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and self-efficacy and presented that "there exists a significant association between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their intrinsic motivation" (p.79). They also asserted that among subscales of motivation, a motivation is negatively related to students' self-efficacy. Another issue of interest for educationist is self-directed learning which encourages autonomous learning and encourages learners in a deliberate and planned learning, i.e. in any action designed to help learning. Gibbons (2002) defined that self-directed learning is seen as any study from in which individuals have primary responsibility for planning, implementing and even evaluating the effort. (p12). Ramedonck (2003) argued that self-directedness is a domain-specific concept. An individual may demonstrated a low/high level of self-directness in language proficiency. The present study is going to provide insight about effectiveness of self-efficacy belief and self-directed learning among EFL learners as way of improving Language proficiency. The overall purpose of the study is to explore the relationship among self-efficacy belief and self-directed learning among EFL learners at the advanced level of Language proficiency. To do so the present research was designed to explore the significant points in this regard.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Language Proficiency

In foreign language learning, one of the most important factors for the learners is the method which teachers use in their teaching to facilitate learning (Ahmadi Gilani, Ismail & Pourhossein, 2012). They believed that development of various skills of the English language in young generation is an important element in their preparation for effective roles in the society. Despite the recognition of the value of English language learning in the world, there are some obstacles to achieving acceptable standards of teaching and learning in this area. But, learning strategies should be focused on this area and help students to improve their English language learning through gaining strategies (Chareonwongsak, 2002).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was originated from social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura. Social cognitive theory states that the belief each individual has about his capabilities is critical to improvement and mastery. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as “people’s judgments of capability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance. It is concerned not with the skill that one has but with the judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses” (p.391) According to Bandura (2002) increased self-efficacy can positively affect a person’s choice of task, the efforts one puts to complete a task and the persistence till mastery of the task. Tilfarlioglu and Cinkara (2009) asserted that “self-efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes” (p.130). Eslami and Fatahi (2008), examined the efficacy beliefs of nonnative English speaking (NNES) of Iranian EFL teachers. In their study, EFL teachers’ perceptions of their teaching efficacy in terms of personal capabilities to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and their perceived English language proficiency level were examined. The results showed that the teachers’ perceived efficacy was positively correlated with self-reported English proficiency. The findings also revealed that the more efficacious the teachers felt, the more inclined they were to use communicative-based strategies.

Self-directed Learning

In the 1970’s, Knowles and other educators such as Carl Rogers were the pioneers of promoting the idea of that education needed to back off teacher-centered classes in which directed learning was fashion of the day, towards learner-centered contexts or facilitated learning. Supporters of this approach suggested that education should adjust to the needs and wants of learners rather than the other way around. In this view, teachers’ role will change; they need to move out of the role of ‘the leader of orchestra’ and to that of ‘facilitator on the side’ in which learning become more in the form of collaborative between the teacher and students and also among the students themselves. Meanwhile, students are encouraged to become more involved or self-directing in their learning. The notion of self-directed learning is based on the humanistic paradigm, the underlying assumption of which is that education should focus on the development of the individual.

According to Herod (2002), in self-directed learning “the goal of education becomes more about process which lines in the development of critical thinking skills, and maturation as a person and a citizen than the content, which pertains to acquisition of subject-based knowledge/skills.” (p.10). Also, Barer-Stein and Draper (1988) suggested:

This approach focused on encouraging people to explore the depths of their feelings, building self-concept, and valuing human life. The goal was to maximize human potential, building on the innate goodness of the individual, with the support of empathetic teachers as facilitators and partners in learning This philosophy is especially evident in adult education programs today which value learning as a process and which encourage discussion and self-discovery (p. 61).

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

The present study focuses on the following research question:

Q: Is there any significant relationship between Self-Efficacy Belief and Self-directed learning among Iranian EFL learners at advanced level of Language proficiency?

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Self-Efficacy Belief and Self-directed learning among Iranian EFL learners at the advanced level of Language proficiency.

METHOD

Participants

The EFL Iranian participants taking part in the present study were 60 EFL Iranian students who were studying English at the advanced level in a private Language Institute in Bandar Abbas. Both male and female students participated in the current study and their age ranges from 18 to 30 years old. The participants will be selected based on the results of the learners' performance on a standardized paper based TOEFL which will be given to 80 advanced students and those who are scored 1 SD below and above the mean will be asked to take part in the study. This ensures if the learners know enough English and can answer the questions in the Questionnaires appropriately.

Instruments

In the current study, one standard test as pre-test and two questionnaires were used to collect required data. The pre-test, paper based TOEFL was administered to determine the participants' level of proficiency. One of the questionnaires was on self-efficacy (The General Self-Efficacy written by Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1979) and another was a Self-Directed Learning questionnaire developed by (Guglielmino, 1977).

Procedure

In order to study the null hypothesis of this research study, and to investigate any significant relationship among the aforementioned variables, the present study was conducted in a private language institute in Bandar Abbas. At first 80 advanced EFL students studying English in a language institute in Bandar Abbas received a standardized paper based TOEFL. Then, based on the learners' performance we selected 60 EFL learners studying in the advanced level. The test was given to the participants and those who were scored 1 Standard Deviation (1SD) below and above the mean were asked to take part in the study. The participants were both males and females with the age range of 18-30. The selected learners received the two questionnaires of Self-Efficacy Belief and Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale. The data were collected and analyzed via SPSS software; version 21, and then reported and checked against the research questions of the study.

Design

The present study enjoyed an Ex post Facto Design. The reason is that, based on Hatch and Lazaraton (1991), there was no treatment involved in the study, nor was the study concerned with the leaning process the participants might have gone through as a significant factor. No control was implemented over the effect of independent variables of the study on the dependent variable .None of the variables of the study were manipulated to cause changes, either. What was of paramount importance then was the type and strength of the connection between variables of the study; therefore an Ex Post Facto Design was the appropriate design for the accomplishment of the purpose of the study (Field, 2009).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics was used to calculated the mean and standard deviation of the TOEFL test which was used. Also the reliability of TOEFL test used was calculated through running KR-21. Pearson correlation was conducted to analyze data to indicate the relationship among self-directed learning and Self-Efficacy Belief among Advanced EFL learners. Also the reliability, and construct validity of the questionnaires used were calculated through running KR-21 and factor analysis, respectively and compared with the reported ones in the literature.

TOEFL Test of General Language Proficiency

As the students were at the advanced level in the institute, the TOEFL (PBT version, May 2010, released by the ETS) was administered to 80 subjects. Based on the mean plus and minus one standard deviation, 60 subjects were selected to participate in the main study. The TOEFL test enjoyed a reliability of .91.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of TOEFL

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance | KR-21 |
|-------|----|-------|----------------|----------|-------|
| TOEFL | 80 | 52.19 | 16.193 | 262.211 | .91 |

Analysis of the Research Question

RQ: Is there any statistically significant relationship between Self-Efficacy Belief and self-directed learning among Iranian EFL learners at Advanced level of language proficiency?

A Pearson correlation was run to find the relationship between self-efficacy belief and self-directed learning among Iranian EFL learners at Advanced level of language proficiency and the results showed that there was a significant relationship between self-directed learning and self-efficacy belief of Iranian EFL learners ($r(58) = .81, P < .05$ representing a large effect size). Thus, the null-hypothesis as "there is no statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy belief and self-directed learning among Iranian EFL learners at Advanced level of language proficiency was rejected.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation; Self-Efficacy with Self-directed Learning

| | Pearson Correlation | Self-Efficacy |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Self-Directed Learning | .813** | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | N | 60 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

KR-21 Reliability

Test reliability is one of the main concepts for any academic test. As Bachman and Palmer (2010) imply, a test is not valid unless it is reliable. One of the common methods of calculating test reliability is employing Kuder-Richarson 21 (KR-21) formula. In this formula, the reliability could be calculated through using the number of test items, mean, and standard deviation of the test scores (Bachman and Palmer, 2010).The KR-21 reliability indices for the self-directed learning (.68) and self-efficacy (.82) are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. KR-21 Reliability Index

| | N | Mean | Variance | KR-21 |
|------------------------|----|-------|----------|-------|
| Self-Directed Learning | 60 | 8.84 | 2.621 | 0.68 |
| Self-Efficacy Belief | 60 | 40.20 | 69.313 | 0.82 |

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The central aim of this thesis was to investigate the relationship among self-efficacy belief and self-directed learning among EFL learners at advanced Level of Language Proficiency in a private language institute in Bandar Abbas city. The researcher hopes that the results of the present study could shed more lights on this area, and teachers would hopefully take what has been presented here and apply it to their own situations in order to improve their students and improve their learning styles and strategies in the EFL development.

The findings of the present study revealed that there was a significant relationship between self-directed learning and self-efficacy belief of Iranian advanced EFL learners. Findings of the study are in line with the findings of other researchers recorded in the literature. The finding asserts the positive relationship between EFL learners' self-directed learning and self-efficacy belief. This study is in line with Sharifi and Ahangary's (2015) study on the correlation between Iranian advanced EFL learners' self-regulation capacity and their self-efficacy. Having run the correlations analysis, the results revealed that there was a significant correlation between participants' emotional intelligence and their self-regulation capacity. Broadbent and Poon (2015) also found that self-directed learning strategies and academic achievement in online higher education learning environments have a significant relationship.

Bonyadi, Nikou, and Shahbaz (2012) in their study concerning the relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their language learning strategy use, found that

self-efficacy belief can be defined as any strategy that requires students to judge their own language abilities or language performance. Magogwe and Oliver (2007), in their study concerning the relationship between self-efficacy and self-directed learning argued that accurate self-directed learning may lead learners to more efficacies to perform a task.

Zheng, Young, Brewer, and Wagner (2013) examined the effect of self-efficacy belief on school students' achievement in math and English, as the courses needing critical thinking, at the beginning and end of school year. The results of their study indicated that self-efficacy was a strong predictor of math and English achievement and critical thinking enhancement. Lai and Gu (2011) presented that there is a high correlation between achievement-related self-system factors in relation to children's critical thinking. In line with the previous research on the relationship between critical thinking and self-efficacy, Nemat Tabrizi and Jafari (2015) found that significant relationships between critical thinking and reading comprehension at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. Also they found that there were significant relationships between self-efficacy and reading comprehension at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels, and thirdly, there were significant relationships between critical thinking and self-efficacy at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. Clarke (2014) also asserts that self-efficacy belief accompanied with critical thinking and second language reading ability are highly connected as learners with high self-efficacy and critical thinking ability enjoy better reading ability compared to the learners with low self-efficacy or low critical thinking ability.

This finding is in line with the previous findings in the literature pertained to the relationship between EFL learners' self-directed learning and self-efficacy belief (Barkley, 2006; Bonyadi, et al., 2012; Broadbent & Poon, 2015; Elder, 2007; Lai, 2013; Lai & Gu, 2011; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Meshkat & Hassanzade, 2014; Nemat Tabrizi & Jafari, 2015; Naseri & Zaferanieh, 2012; Sadeghy & Mansouri, 2014; Sharifi & Ahangary, 2015; Zheng, et al., 2013), one can conclude that learning styles such as self-efficacy belief, learning strategies such as self-directed learning are in close connection and positive correlation for the advanced EFL learners .

According to the results of the present study, some implications for teaching and learning can be suggested. The present findings could be employed by second language teachers to make the learners more aware of what they are dealing with. The assumption is being aware of learning styles facilitates learning (Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010), and learners must pay attention to the features of input they are exposed to and notice the gap between the target like forms in it and the current state of their linguistic knowledge. This could be done through a kind of cognitive comparison which has been seen as one of the crucial processes in language acquisition (Rostami, 2014). Oakley (2011), within the framework of SLA pays attention to the role learning styles play in L2 development. Although he does not merely focus on self-efficacy and self-directed learning, he emphasizes the significant relationship between such factors and second language development. English teachers and learners could employ the present findings

and focus on the mismatch between input they receive and their current learning. This way the classroom interactions could be enriched and would help subsequent L2 development of the learners. Materials developers in the ELT domain also could employ the findings of the present study and those of the similar ones to present tasks in which learners' awareness toward learning is enhanced. Such tasks may help the learners move towards self-correction, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

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