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Iranian EFL Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy: Farhangian Versus Non-Farhangian Graduates

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ABSTRACT

In order to expand the line of study inspecting teacher-related variables, the present research set out to investigate how differences in educational settings might affect Iranian EFL teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their perceptions in terms of its boosting/diminishing sources. Data were obtained from 124 Iranian EFL teachers through a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that teachers who studied at Farhangian Teacher Education University feel more efficacious than their colleagues who did not graduate from teacher education universities in both overall domains of self-efficacy, including classroom management, student engagement, and instructional strategies. Likewise, previous successful teaching experience appears to be the strongest factor of self-efficacy among Farhangian graduates, while non-Farhangian graduates consider constructive feedback as the most powerful factor. In contrast, an inappropriate educational context was reported to be the main diminishing source by Farhangian graduates, whereas unsuitable pre-service training was the major weakening factor for non-Farhanian graduates.

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Introduction

Among different shareholders in any educational setting, teachers should be regarded as key figures who can influence students' success or failure, and the whole system (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This crucial role is probably more vital in the context of English language learning, where good relationships, high-quality communication between teachers and students, attention to students' learning, along with affective needs, are of great importance (Roohani & Dayeri, 2019). However, to perform their roles, teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should have positive beliefs toward themselves, their learners, and the instructional context (Greenier et al., 2021). In social sciences, these positive beliefs are referred to as self-efficacy, and teachers' self-efficacy (TSE) is defined as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 22). The positive results of this psychological construct are represented in three levels of classroom context: learners' academic adjustment, classroom processes quality, and teachers' well-being (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016).

Regarding the first level, studies have shown that TSE at least partly clarifies students' more desirable academic achievement (Malmberg et al., 2014). In addition, students who have efficient teachers are highly inspired to continue their education and have a constructive attitude toward their learning (Robertson & Dunsmuir, 2013). Likewise, TSE is linked with high-quality classroom processes. In other words, teachers with a greater sense of self-efficacy can cope with a high workload appropriately (Mok & Moore, 2019) and think they can have a deep impact on students' learning despite destructive external factors (Zee & Koomen, 2016). These types of teachers typically employ a wider range of creative pedagogical strategies (Thurlings et al., 2015), which results in their students' greater classroom involvement. A high sense of self-efficacy also influences teachers' psychological and emotional well-being; for instance, self-efficacious teachers are less affected by work tension and discomfort (Namaziandost et al., 2022) and less likely to undergo teacher burnout (Li, 2023). Instead, they have a stronger sense of job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2015) and professional commitment (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007).

Consequently, there is a lot of evidence showing the beneficial role of TSE on different aspects of teachers' performance and student academic achievement (e.g., Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023; Klassen & Durksen, 2014; Lu & Lee, 2024). Following the studies concentrating on the results of TSE, another line of research grew rapidly, focusing on the factors that possibly expand this belief-driven construct. Indeed, once findings indicated that TSE can reliably predict several positive factors connected to the classroom environment, educational experts embarked on verifying the variables that can enhance TSE.

Taking up this antecedent-based research paradigm, the present investigation aimed at examining the impact of the context of study on two groups of Iranian EFL teachers' sense of self-efficacy, more specifically, Farhangian Teacher Education University graduates and graduates from other

universities across the country. The research was partly inspired by the view that TSE is both context-specific and subject matter – , in other words, specific subjects taught by teachers (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). That is, teachers might feel less competent and efficacious when they have not attended technical teaching and training courses in teacher education universities. On the other hand, previous studies have paid scant attention to educational contexts that might affect Iranian EFL teachers' TSE (Moradkhani & Haghi, 2017). Since Farhangian University is a specialized teacher training university in Iran where student teachers are presented with vast technical knowledge and can practice their innovative beliefs through practicum courses, it is important to see whether studying in this unique context can equip EFL teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy compared to other universities. In the current study, an attempt was made to address this gap and enhance understanding of the mechanisms by which contextual differences can impact teachers' efficacy beliefs, with a special concentration on EFL teachers. For this purpose, the researchers addressed the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between Farhangian and non-Farhangian graduate EFL teachers' sense of self-efficacy?
2. What factors contribute to a high/low sense of self-efficacy among Farhangian and non-Farhangian graduate EFL teachers?

A brief note of previous works

Teachers' self-efficacy (TSE)

The concept of self-efficacy was introduced by Bandura (1982), who defined it as people's beliefs regarding their capabilities to create selected levels of performance that influence decisive events in their lives. The ways people think, feel, and inspire themselves, or their cognitive, affective, and motivational behaviors, are directly connected to their self-efficacy beliefs. These beliefs can control individuals from various aspects, including objectives and plans, determination in facing difficulties, effort to achieve goals, and challenges of a special situation (Bandura, 2006). According to Shoulders and Krei (2016), self-efficacy is a cognitive process that supports people in managing their activities and enhancing their productivity and effectiveness. On the other hand, it is believed that personal effectiveness is molded by the dynamic interaction between previous and current performance, external forces, and internal individual traits. Accordingly, it can be concluded that efficacy beliefs are situation-driven, influenced by various features such as job complexity and availability of required time and resources (Alibakhshi et al., 2021; Malmir & Mohammadi, 2018).

Self-efficacy has attracted great attention in teacher education since it is necessary for teachers to expand teacher-student engagement, resulting in positive outcomes (Choi & Lee, 2018; Salehizadeh et al., 2020). Bandura (2003) defines TSE as the extent to which teachers think they can exercise influence on students' performance. Therefore, what is highlighted in Bandura's social cognitive theory is individuals' perceptions of their potential instead of their real/actualized potential because perceptions and beliefs significantly impact how one's capacity is recognized and developed.

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) hypothesized that TSE, along with teachers' judgment of their capabilities, would provoke desired outcomes of students' achievement and accountability, even among those who are troublesome or uninterested. Williams (2009) acknowledged TSE as teachers' self-confidence in their capabilities toward planning and organizing productive teaching and learning situations. Consistent with this definition, teachers with high authority in their teaching practices show a high amount of TSE. In other words, the achievement of professional development plans encompasses constructive results for TSE (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Likewise, Bandura (1997) contended that since beliefs about self-efficacy were reflexive and coordinated within the course of obvious capacities given unequivocal assignments, they were predictors of performance. Moreover, self-efficacy can be one of the best predictors of behavior to fulfill the commission.

As indicated by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), rather than a general concept, TSE is task, context, and domain-specific. Accordingly, this construct has been explored in different educational domains, including EFL, which has been recognized as unique (Chiang, 2008). Since EFL is task and domain-specific (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), it is inspiring to explore the sources and origins of EFL teachers' self-efficacy.

TSE: Sources and origin

According to Bandura (1998), self-efficacy can be constructed by four main sources of processing information, namely mastery experience or enactive self-mastery, vicarious experience, also called role-modeling, social or verbal persuasion, and arousal or physiological/emotional state. Enactive mastery experience, which is regarded as the most significant source, deals with the authentic experience of taking a necessary action. A person's frequent successes, specifically those accompanied by overwhelming difficulty, generate strong self-efficacy beliefs that make small changes in the capabilities to control events appropriately (Bandura, 1997). In the educational field, when teachers ascribe learners' achievement to their pedagogical practice, their self-efficacy is expected to rise. On the contrary, TSE drops if they think their teaching activities do not make any constructive changes in learners' performance. Palmer (2006) believes that, along with enactive mastery experience, teachers can improve their cognitive mastery experience through involvement in formal/informal professional development actions such as reading academic books and articles, attending conferences, and conducting action research. Vicarious experience is obtained by observing events modeled by others. This kind of experience allows the observers to evaluate their capabilities while comparing them with the achievements of others (Bandura, 1997). The impacts on self-efficacy vary with the role model's skills. For instance, observing the performance of successful teachers can persuade novice teachers to accept that they can be successful in comparable situations as well. Conversely, news of experienced teachers' failures can lower novice teachers' self-efficacy as they might consider the task unmanageable. Therefore, the effect size of vicarious experience is directly connected to the amount of resemblance teachers notice between themselves and their role models.

The third source, social or verbal persuasion, is connected to verbal judgments received from others, such as managers, colleagues, or students. Successful persuasion fosters individuals' beliefs in their abilities and guarantees that the envisioned success is attainable. On the other hand, negative persuasion might defeat self-beliefs. However, the effect of verbal persuasion mainly rests on the credit that individuals assign to the source of feedback; it means that it is more effective when given by an expert or trustworthy person. The most helpful results of social persuasion are starting the task, trying new strategies, and attempting hard to succeed (Zhang et al., 2023). The last source, people's physiological/emotional state, implies how people feel while doing a task. Feeling anxiety and excitement while teaching a particular subject gives information about self-efficacy perception and improves the feeling of proficiency. Therefore, trying to lower stress and change negative, debilitating conditions to positive and facilitative ones plays an important role in modifying perceived self-efficacy views (Bandura, 1997).

Related Studies

Investigations have yielded mixed results regarding teachers' attributes and their self-efficacy. For example, Klassen and Durksen (2014) argued that male teachers have higher TSE when confronting stressful workloads. Some other investigations (e.g., Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007) discovered no significant difference between teachers' self-efficacy in terms of their gender, while Naseri & Karimvand (2011) found that female EFL teachers had higher self-efficacy compared to the male participants. The outcomes are also inconsistent regarding teachers' age. Campbell (1996) declared that older EFL teachers are more efficacious, whereas Pearman et al. (2021) found no connection between TSE and age. Some inconsistencies have been detected in terms of teachers' working experience; though, it might be claimed that teachers with higher years of teaching experience are more efficacious than novice ones (Gratacós et al., 2021), the influence of experience levels out throughout time because, as teachers gain more experience, their sense of self-efficacy becomes relatively stable.

Concerning classroom management, several studies (e.g., Lap et al., 2022; Varghese et al., 2016) have shown that instructors with high self-reports of attachment security and classroom management efficacy are predicted to support integrating or cooperating classroom management tactics more than teachers low in self-efficacy. Moreover, no significant difference has been reported among undergraduate and postgraduate teachers' classroom management skills in EFL and mainstream education contexts (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2010). Yet little is known about school or interpersonal variables associated with teachers' management of a real classroom atmosphere.

Detailed analysis of the research in EFL fields confirmed that highly efficacious teachers have high levels of professional development, effective teaching (Author et al., 2021), linguistic and intrapersonal intelligence (Azari Noughabi & Amirian, 2021), instructional strategies and quality teaching practices (Choi & Lee, 2018). It was similarly verified that efficacious EFL teachers can deal with their emotions (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019), have teaching commitment and job satisfaction

(Fathi & Savadi Rostami, 2018), and enjoy a great level of psychological well-being (Fathi et al., 2021). Lap et al. (2022) also showed that teachers who have a greater level of self-efficacy can manage their classes more confidently. Furthermore, speaking competence and teaching experience had a negative relationship with EFL student teachers' self-efficacy and lesson-delivery competence in Luo and Li's (2024) microteaching training study.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 124 Iranian EFL teachers (79 females and 45 males) who were chosen through a convenience sampling technique. Of this sample, 57 teachers graduated from Farhangian Teacher Education University, and 67 studied at other universities that were not specialized in teacher education. To control the intervening effect of regional variations, all the teachers came from Tehran Province, including the capital city, and all of them were teaching English in high schools. The participants ranged in age from 23 to 51, with a mean age of 34.52 years ($SD = 7.71$ years). Eighty-eight of the respondents had undergraduate academic degrees, while the rest ($n = 36$) self-reported having postgraduate degrees. Their years of teaching experience differed from less than a year to 24 years ($M = 9.26$, $SD = 6.03$). Four Farhangian graduates and three non-Farhangian graduates participated in a follow-up online semi-structured interview voluntarily. They were informed that they might be requested to attend a follow-up interview. The demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Farhangian and Non-Farhangian Graduate EFL Teachers

	Gender		Age		Academic Degree		Teaching experience	
	Males	Females	M	SD	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	M	SD
Farhangian graduates	21	36	32.53	7.25	42	15	7.16	4.14
Non-Farhangian graduates	24	43	36.82	8.17	46	21	11.37	7.92

Instruments

To answer the first research question in the quantitative phase of the study, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), which is the most frequently employed and verified instrument, was run online. The questionnaire is made up of two sections. The first section is designed to collect some demographic information about the participants (e.g., age, gender, academic degree, teaching experience, etc.). The second section,

which comprises 24 items, measures teachers' sense of self-efficacy within three domains of instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "nothing" to (5) "a great deal". Although the validity and reliability of the scale have been assured through different studies (e.g., Tsigilis et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2023) and its cross-cultural validation has been done in five countries (Klassen & Durksen, 2014), it was piloted with a sample of twenty EFL teachers from both groups who differed from the real participants. The outcomes of a Scale Test run on these data disclosed that they were reliable enough to be used in the final study ($\alpha=.87$).

To address the second research question in the qualitative phase and to identify the factors that improved or declined teachers' sense of self-efficacy, 7 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 volunteer teachers (4 Farhangian and 3 non-Farhangian graduates). An interview guide comprising open-ended questions was also developed to help the interviewees express their ideas freely. First, two ELT university professors were requested to examine the initial draft of this interview guide meticulously and give their feedback. Then, based on their feedback, two pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers from both groups who were not supposed to participate in the final interview. The interview guide required some modifications based on the professors' remarks and the problems emerging during the pilot interviews, including inspiring/downgrading origins of TSE and wording of the questions. The final version of the interview included 3 questions as follows:

1. What factors have contributed most to your sense of self-efficacy in classroom management, and why do you think so?
2. What factors have contributed most to your sense of self-efficacy in getting your students engaged in classroom activities to become autonomous learners, and why do you think so?
3. What factors have contributed most to your sense of self-efficacy in using appropriate instructional strategies based on the students' proficiency level, and why do you think so?

Data collection and analysis procedure

A mixed-methods design was adopted in the current study. In the quantitative phase, about 170 online closed-ended questionnaires were distributed among Farhangian and non-Farhangian EFL teacher graduates who were teaching in different parts of Tehran Province. Through the emails that were sent to the participants, the purpose of the research was explained, and they were assured that participating in this research project was completely voluntary, and they would remain anonymous and could leave the study at any stage. Moreover, it was mentioned that the collected data would be kept confidential. Out of 170 distributed scales, 132 completed ones (77.64%) were returned. A close inspection revealed that eight questionnaires must be

excluded from the original data pool and further analysis since the teachers had failed to answer all the items or forgotten to specify their place of study. Finally, the data collected from 124 questionnaires were fed into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23. The normality of distribution and reliability of responses were checked by conducting the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) and Cronbach alpha tests, respectively. The KS indices and Cronbach's alpha for overall teacher self-efficacy and its three domains are presented in Table 2. The values range from 0.74 to 0.87, demonstrating that the answers to the Scale items had a rather high internal consistency. Likewise, the p-values of KS indices were all greater than 0.05, indicating that the data enjoyed a normal distribution. Furthermore, to examine the difference between Farhangian and non-Farhangian graduates' overall sense of self-efficacy, along with three domains of the TSES Scale, four sets of independent samples t-tests were run.

Table 2. The Normal Distribution and Reliability of the Answers to the TSES Scale Items

	Overall self- efficacy	Classroom management	Student engagement	Instructional strategies
KS	0.17	0.11	0.24	0.14
Sig.				
Alpha	0.87	0.84	0.86	0.89

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 volunteer teachers from both groups in their native language (Farsi), and each of them lasted between 20 and 30 min. All these interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to analyze the transcripts, an inductive approach (Merriam, 2009) was adopted. To be exact, the transcripts were studied iteratively and categorized into meaningful units. Each category should show an element that, based on teachers' responses, could make their sense of self-efficacy stronger or weaker. Therefore, the categories were divided into two wide domains in terms of their positive or negative function in increasing self-efficacy. Then, the segments with similar themes were bunched together and labeled in a way to represent the thematic content of that cluster. Subsequently, these clusters were further gathered under some categories according to their thematic similarity and were named in light of their constituent clusters. Before doing the qualitative analysis, the researchers held some meetings to rehearse the analytical procedure for clustering and segmentation by concentrating on the data that came from the pilot interviews. Then, they analyzed the final transcripts independently and resolved the areas of disagreement through discussion.

Results

To compare Farhangian and non-Farhangian graduate EFL teachers' sense of self-efficacy based on their responses to the TSES Scale, four sets of independent samples t-tests were run as all pre-assumptions of conducting a parametric test were met. As Table 3 represents, Farhangian graduates scored significantly higher than their non-Farhangian counterparts in the overall sense of self-efficacy; $t(122) = 3.62$, $p = 0.00$, classroom management; $t(122) = 2.82$, $p = 0.00$, student engagement; $t(122) = 2.56$, $p = 0.00$, and instructional strategies; $t(122) = 3.95$, $p = 0.01$. Effect size indices, obtained by Cohen's d formula, showed that the biggest difference between the groups was registered in the case of self-efficacy for classroom management ($d = 0.89$), followed by instructional strategies ($d = 0.74$) and overall self-efficacy ($d = 0.52$) in that order. The smallest effect size was recorded in teachers' sense of self-efficacy for student engagement ($d = 0.16$).

Therefore, Farhangian graduates had a stronger position regarding their overall self-efficacy. In terms of the three subscales, the place of study exerted its biggest impact on the sense of self-efficacy for classroom management, showing that Farhangian graduates are more capable of managing their classes. Additionally, the difference between these two groups was large enough regarding self-efficacy for instructional strategies, meaning that, compared to the other group, Farhangian graduates were more efficacious in using pedagogical techniques. Finally, the smallest but still significant difference was found in the case of self-efficacy for student engagement. This reveals that Farhangian graduates were only slightly more efficacious than non-Farhangian graduates in engaging their students.

Table 3. Farhangian and Non-Farhangian graduate EFL Teachers' answers to the TSES Scale Items

	Farhan gian graduats	Non-Farhangian graduates		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i> <i>f</i>	Sig. (2- taile d)	<i>d</i>
	M	S D	M	S D			
Overall self- efficacy	3.63	0 . 4 5	3.12	0 . 3 9	- 3 . 4	1 2 2 4	0.00 . 8 9
Classroom manageme nt	4.12	0 . 4 1	2.82	0 . 3 7 9	- 4 . 0 9	1 2 2 4	0.00 . 7 4
Student engagemen t	2.86	0 . .	2.56	0 . .	- 2 . 2	1 2 2	0.00 . .

		5		5	7		5	
		2		8	3		2	
Instructional strategies	3.05	0	3.95	0	-	1	0.01	0
		.		.	2	2		.
		4		5	.	2		1
		5		7	9			6
					0			

In the qualitative phase of the study, a total of 40 TSE boosting segments were detected in Farhangian EFL graduates' interview transcripts, whereas 21 similar segments were identified in other teachers' answers. All the segments were gathered under four major categories, explained below. To protect the participants' identity, pseudonyms were used whenever a quote was cited from them.

Previous successful teaching experience

This category, comprising a single cluster, deals with the positive effect of teachers' prior successful performance on their feelings about their pedagogical capability. It was the factor that was mostly cited by Farhangian graduates, making up 51.32% of all the segments derived from their interviews. For non-Farhangian graduates, however, this was the second most frequently cited self-efficacy-enhancing source, accounting for 41.10% of all the segments. The constructive relationship between previous successful teaching experience during practicum courses in Farhangian University and TSE enhancement is demonstrated through Reza's (one of the participants) comment:

One of the main factors that have helped me in successful classroom management is passing internships and learning teaching techniques from experienced teachers while teaching.

Constructive feedback

This category includes two clusters that deal with the role of helpful feedback teachers receive from their students and colleagues in enhancing their self-efficacy. While constructive feedback was the most frequently mentioned cause of TSE among non-Farhangian graduates (constituting 31.10% of all the segments), it was the second contributing factor (26.28%) for Farhangian graduates. The main cluster within this category was the positive feedback teachers received from their students, who were completely satisfied with their English classes. Commenting on this issue, Ali stated:

Throughout the school year, I receive encouraging and appreciative comments from my students about their satisfaction with my teaching style. They are very satisfied with my teaching method, use of technology, and new teaching strategies, and believe that they have made significant progress in learning English.

Collegial support as a cluster within this classification was mainly pointed out by Farhangian graduates. This reveals that non-Farhangian graduates might not experience the same widespread support from their colleagues in public or private schools. Regarding the constructive effect of collegial support, Nazanin said:

In the school where I teach, most of the English teachers, like me, have studied at Farhangian University, so there is a good supportive atmosphere among colleagues. I consult them whenever I have a problem in teaching or with specific students, and get useful advice from them.

Pre-Service preparation and training

This category involves different ways used by teachers to make themselves ready for teaching. There was a big difference between the two groups concerning attributing their sense of self-efficacy to this category. Non-Farhangian graduates only cited one sample of this category (while Farhangian graduates attributed 17.16% of the factors enhancing their TSE to this category. The first cluster within this category, previous training, was related to the positive function of pre-service teacher education programs in boosting TSE. In Arash’s words:

Now, I can use various instructional strategies in my classes due to being exposed to most of them during different training courses at Farhangian University. I am using many of these strategies in my classes and have witnessed their effectiveness.

The second cluster is previous preparation. It means that allocating enough time to design detailed lesson plans and appropriate preparation is more likely to result in feeling efficacious. Fatemeh’s comment is enlightening in this regard:

Designing a specialized lesson plan that incorporates efficient technologies and diverse activities to involve students requires appropriate training and practice, which, fortunately, we are well-equipped for thanks to the educational courses of Farhangian University.

Perfect instructional models

This category, which had the lowest frequency in both Farhangian (5.24%) and non-Farhangian graduates’(3.97%) interviews, contains one cluster dealing with the positive effect of observing the successful teaching performance of other instructors in growing TSE. This constructive impact is clearly illustrated in the extract from Mohammad’s interview:

During my first teaching year, I observed my colleagues’ classes who taught the same classes as I did. These observations were very helpful since I could learn different instructional and management techniques from these observations, which are being used in my classes now.

Table 4 depicts the order and frequency of the four TSE boosting factors for both Farhangian and non-Farhangian EFL graduates.

Table 4. The Order and Frequency of TSE Boosting Factors: Farhangian vs. Non-Farhangian Graduate EFL Teachers

Farhangian graduates	Non-Farhangian graduates
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Categories	Frequencies (%)	Categories	Frequencies (%)
1. Previous successful teaching experience	51.32	1. Constructive feedback	52.66
2. Constructive feedback	26.28	2. Previous successful teaching experience	31.10
3. Pre-Service preparation and training	17.16	3. Pre-Service preparation and training	12.27
4. Perfect instructional models	5.24	4. Perfect instructional models	3.97
Total	100%	Total	100%

Moreover, 16 detected segments could be assigned to TSE detrimental factors, with 11 of them (68.75%) being distinguished in non-Farhangian graduate EFL teachers' interview data. These segments were classified under three main categories, explained below.

Unsuitable pre-service training

This TSE diminishing factor was only mentioned by non-Farhangian graduates. More specifically, these teachers attributed their low sense of self-efficacy to the lack of inappropriate pre-service or in-service training in 59.13% of the cases. Yasmin's comments point out how this category is mainly responsible for her low TSE:

Because I didn't study at a teacher training university, I am not familiar with new teaching techniques and methods of involving students in classroom activities. The training courses that were designed for us by the Ministry of Education before the start of teaching were not sufficient and did not have proper content. We must solve our teaching problems by consulting with colleagues and by self-study and research.

Inappropriate educational context

This category contains all the factors within the educational conditions that are damaging to the TSE. Four clusters were classified under this category: lack of homogeneity in terms of students' language proficiency, inappropriate textbooks, a high number of students in classes, and a shortage of time. While 79% of all clusters were found in Farhangian graduates' interview transcripts, 25% of teachers who graduated from other universities mentioned these clusters as their self-efficacy decreasing factors. The following four extracts demonstrate how these factors may destructively impact TSE:

Most of my classes have more than 35 students, and I can't properly involve all of them in class activities and monitor their assignments. (Davood)

Unfortunately, students are not homogeneous in terms of language proficiency. Therefore, it is not possible to design and implement an activity that is equally useful for all students. (Mahdi)

The maximum time allocated to teaching English in my classes is 90 minutes a week, which is not enough for language learning at all. (Parsa)

Textbooks are not attractive to students at all, and their topics are limited. We do not have discretion in choosing textbooks, and we have to teach within their framework. (Naheed)

Lack of motivation

While motivation can significantly enhance teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, its shortage might have diminishing effects on it. This category was the last reported factor by both Farhangian (15.04 %) and non-Farhangian graduates (15.76%). The excerpt from the interview data shows how this cluster can decrease TSE:

Sometimes I lose my motivation to teach, facing a lack of time and proper teaching materials, inappropriate textbooks, uncooperative school authorities, and unmotivated students. (Nikan)

Table 5 represents the order and frequency of the three TSE diminishing factors for both Farhangian and non-Farhangian EFL graduates.

Table 5. The Order and Frequency of TSE Diminishing Factors: Farhangian vs. Non-Farhangian Graduate EFL Teachers

Farhangian graduates		Non-Farhangian graduates	
Categories	Frequencies (%)	Categories	Frequencies (%)
1. <i>Inappropriate educational context</i>	84.96	1. <i>Unsuitable pre-service training</i>	59.13
2. <i>Lack of motivation</i>	15.04	2. <i>Inappropriate educational context</i>	25.11
		3. <i>Lack of motivation</i>	15.76
Total	100%	Total	100%

Discussion

The current study aimed to probe the difference between two groups of EFL teachers (Farhangian and non-Farhangian graduates) in their sense of self-efficacy and the attributing factors to this sense in their views. The findings of both quantitative and qualitative phases are considered complementary. That is, Farhangian graduates’ higher scores in overall self-efficacy and all its subscales, including classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement, are discussed based on the elements that were extracted from the interview transcripts as the main sources of their self-efficacy. Some additional justifications for higher self-efficacy are presented based on the related literature and the contextual differences between teacher education and other universities in Iran. This second line of reasoning relates to factors that may have affected teachers’ self-efficacy but were not stated in the interviews.

The noticeably greater self-efficacy among Farhangian graduates can be largely attributed to the number of boosting/diminishing TSE sources both groups of teachers are exposed to. More specifically, EFL teachers who graduated from Farhangian Teacher Education University reported self-efficacy-enhancing factors two times more than their colleagues who graduated from other universities. Regarding TSE diminishing elements, however, a reverse trend was detected, with over 68% of these factors being stated by non-Farhangian graduates. These remarkable differences between these two groups of teachers, considering their contact with weakening/strengthening sources of TSE, show that variables related to educational contexts in teacher education universities are more contributing to TSE development. Attributing the four boosting factors to various sources of TSE further illuminates Farhangian graduates' higher self-efficacy. Three factors (i.e., constructive feedback, previous successful teaching experience, and perfect instructional models) are respectively consistent with the three sources of self-efficacy offered by Bandura (1998), including verbal persuasion, enactive mastery experience, and vicarious experiences. On the other hand, the pre-service preparation and training deal with the cognitive mastery experience proposed by Palmer (2006). Similar findings were described by Liu et al. (2023), who investigated TSE among Iranian EFL teachers. The greater influence of verbal persuasion can be explained by referring to the other-oriented essence of Asian cultures (Kim & Park, 2006). Consistent with Iranian beliefs, teachers tend to give more value to other-oriented (e.g. constructive feedback) instead of self-oriented (e.g. pre-service preparation and training) factors. Pajares (2007) also credited that cultural values greatly influence TSE development.

Moreover, even though constructive feedback was considered the second source for strengthening Farhangian graduates' TSE, it was made up of the feedback they received from both their students and colleagues. On the contrary, for non-Farhangian graduates, it was limited to the persuasion given by the students. Bandura (1998) maintains that the effect of feedback mainly relies on the credit that individuals assign to their provider. Previous studies have verified that teachers have higher self-efficacy if they enjoy cooperative relationships with their counterparts (Balci et al., 2019; Walker & Slear, 2011), and since self-efficacy is a subject-driven construct (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2020), teachers need to receive feedback from someone who specializes in that specific subject matter. Along with the higher variety of boosting elements that make Farhangian graduates' sense of self-efficacy, the greater frequency of factors to which they are exposed can also illuminate their stronger TSE. Specifically, almost 51% of all TSE sources stated by interviewed Farhangian graduates come merely from previous successful teaching experience they gained through the practicum courses, while about 31% of this factor constitutes non-Farhangian graduates' TSE. These results are in line with Eginli and Solhi's (2021) investigation, in which they asserted that practicum experience makes significant changes in three subcategories of pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, student engagement, applying instructional strategies, and classroom management.

Regarding the TSE dwindling factors reported by interviewees, it appears that the current status of the educational situation in Iranian universities that are not specialized for teacher education does not support TSE enrichment. The inappropriate pre-service training, which is the first weakening factor mentioned by non-Farhangian graduates, shows that EFL students are not equipped with the practical skills to give them real-world experience necessary for dealing with the situations that happen in the real classroom (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003). As mentioned by Richards & Clough (2004), the utmost advantage of the training programs is field-related preparation, where prospective teachers contextualize the learned theories and knowledge with students and tasks during training. The results of the present research revealed that teachers who graduated from non-Farhangian universities had lower self-efficacy in terms of managing their classes compared to applying instructional strategies and involving their students in classroom activities and learning English. These findings are different from those of Nugroho (2017), who found that the sixth-semester EFL student-teachers who were studying in teacher education universities judged their skills in engaging and motivating students and their use of effective teaching strategies to be lower than their skills in managing the class. The discrepancy between the current findings and previous research on classroom management self-efficacy warrants further investigation.

Both Farhangian and non-Farhangian EFL graduates mentioned inappropriate educational context as a diminishing TSE factor. One cluster in this category was classroom size. Even though investigations in mainstream education have revealed that instructors have higher efficacy while teaching larger groups of students (e.g., Raudenbush et al., 1992), a similar trend was not experienced in the EFL context, possibly because of the subject matter nature. That is, in agreement with the fundamental principles of communicative language teaching, instructors in both settings are highly motivated to have pair and group work (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014); nevertheless, this is not always practical in all large classes, henceforth reducing teachers' self-efficacy, particularly efficacy for classroom management and student engagement.

Likewise, lack of homogeneity in learners' English proficiency was another cluster mentioned by interviewees. According to Moradkhani and Haghi (2017), this issue has an undesirable impact, especially on the sense of self-efficacy for instructional strategies. The harmful effect of inappropriate textbooks and the shortage of time on low self-efficacy is not unexpected either. As mentioned by both groups of teachers, the curriculum in Iranian schools is authorized by the Ministry of Education, which does not consider teachers' agencies, and the textbooks are designed without taking teachers' and students' concerns into account. The consequence is unexciting content and an idealistic curriculum, bringing about many problems when implemented in the real classroom context.

Conclusion

Previous studies have indicated that strong TSE can make constructive progress in several aspects of the classroom context (Zee & Koomen, 2016). As self-efficacy is both subject and context-specific,

the current study attempted to compare its enhancing factors rooted in studying at teacher education and other educational contexts among EFL teachers. The results have both theoretical and practical implications. The findings verified variety of exposure to self-efficacy causes is significant in boosting TSE and EFL teachers who graduate from Farhangian Teacher Education University are privileged in this regard. Teachers are more efficacious if they have successful teaching experience, constructive feedback, previous arrangements, and appropriate instructional models. In the context of this study, it was revealed that having previous teaching experience was more important than instructional models, and receiving constructive feedback from different sources, especially trustworthy colleagues, is essential for teachers. Therefore, teachers are recommended to observe their colleagues' classes to gain indirect experience. To achieve this goal, an atmosphere of collegueship should rule educational contexts so that teachers consider observation sessions as an opportunity for professional development. As the findings of the study demonstrated the higher level of TSE in both its overall and subscales among Farhangian University graduates, participating in appropriate professional development programs seems necessary for teachers. The existing literature shows that as a consequence of attending such programs, teachers can have a higher sense of self-efficacy (Van der Scheer & Visscher, 2016).

As an under-studied area, further comparative investigations are required to have a better understanding of the function of contextual variables in molding TSE. Longitudinal research that focuses on changes in TSE over time across different contexts is of particular interest. Our interpretation of the sources of EFL teachers' self-efficacy was exclusively based on the data collected through individual interviews with teachers. There are also lots of other variables, such as teachers' socioeconomic status, personality, and teaching experience in need more investigation to discover how they can shape TSE beliefs. Supposing that TSE is a dependable index of better performance, the outcomes of this line of inquiry can have encouraging implications for the development of teaching effectiveness.

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