

An Iranian Case Study on the Relationship between EFL Teachers' Self-confidence Level and Learners' Speaking Development

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Abstract Self-confidence of English language teachers has been discovered to be a significant factor in learners' achievement. This study aimed to find the relationship between English teachers' self-confidence level and second language (L2) learners' development of conversational skills. The participants of this study were 60 Higher Intermediate L2 learners at Shayan Language Institute in Torbat Heydarie, Iran. A self-confidence questionnaire was used for the present article. The teachers of Shayan institute were asked to answer this questionnaire. Then, two male teachers, one with high self-confidence and one with normal level of self-confidence were selected as the teachers of experimental and control groups, respectively. The course lasted for 12 sessions (6 weeks with two weekly sessions); in each session both teachers provided their students with the same techniques, including conversations, role plays, speaking about pictures, etc. To homogenize the students a conversation-based proficiency test (CPE speaking test) was administered. Afterwards, 30 second language learners were selected and divided into the experimental and control groups. At the end of the course a posttest was administered. The results of t test analysis indicated that participants in the self-confident group could significantly outperform those in the control group. The results of this study can provide pedagogical implications for English teachers to be self-confident and can convey this quality of L2 learners in the class.

Keywords English Teachers, EFL Students, Self-confidence, Speaking Development

1. Introduction

Teachers all over the world are confronted with many new and ongoing needs which lead to increased work pressure and lifestyle changes in the policies and expectations. How

teachers believe in their capabilities to face these problems, according to [21], is significant in their job and consequently in their students' learning. Recently, more and more people are becoming aware of the fact that the base of all reform or developmental activities should concentrate on classroom teachers. It is obvious that having a high quality education needs qualified teachers. As [2] suggest, one of the most important issues among all successful teachers is their self-confidence.

Research on how teachers believe in themselves and its effect on their cognition has been a suitable topic of many educational researches during the last four decades. One of the most important beliefs which apparently affect teacher and student development as [8] argues is teachers' sense of confidence. Recently, teachers' self-confidence (TSC) has demonstrated a profound influence on the daily lives of teachers and students [12]. TSC has been defined as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" [20, p. 22]. High self-confident teachers are more open to new ideas and they are more willing to experiment with new methods at the same time providing the students with new and different learning opportunities or experiences [21].

School environment as an agency for cultivating students' cognitive self-confidence plays a crucial role; and as [4] argues, "the task of creating learning environment conducive to the development of cognitive skills rests heavily on the talents and self-confidence of teachers" (p. 12). Since teachers play an important role in setting the standards and creating the conditions for students' academic results, understanding the key mechanism through which teachers help their students' academic success is critical.

[13] Distinguished between self-confidence and self-esteem. Self-confidence has to do with what we can do based on our efforts; what we are good and bad at and it grows along with the quality of the effort. Self-esteem, on the other hand, is more fundamental and is about the feeling of

being worth something, just because we are who we are, and not because we have done something. Self-confidence refers to a person's perceived ability to tackle situations successfully without depending on others and to have a positive self-evaluation. According to [5] "self-confidence refers to an individual's perceived ability to act effectively in a situation to overcome obstacles and to get things go all right".

The role that self-confidence plays in teaching and learning process has been examined from different perspectives by various researchers in recent years, and a huge amount of literature has been produced in this regard. However, the impact of teacher self-confidence on learners' language development in Iran has not received its due attention. In the present study the main focus is upon the effects of English language teachers' self-confidence on the development of L2 learners' conversational skills. Modern teaching and learning approaches emphasize on the teacher and learners' interactions in the class in that this is teacher who brings something new to the class.

Review of Literature

[18] Argues that different terms such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence are often used interchangeably and inconsistently in the literature as they may refer to different ideas about how people think about themselves.

As [7] and [9] state that, some researchers consider self-concept and self- efficacy as the same construct, however, others consider them as two different elements. For example, [11] distinguished self-concept and self-esteem by stating that 'self-concept' is the cognitive aspect of self, while 'self-esteem' is the affective aspect of self, which refers to one's feelings of self-worth. Self-confidence is not always what we think it is.

Teachers' Beliefs

At this point, it seems appropriate to turn our attention to how teachers' views of themselves as persons and what they believe to be the most appropriate form of social interaction with their learners can influence the learning process. Our view of education has much in common with many aspects of the humanist, particularly as exemplified by statements of the following nature:

Effective teachers create learning atmospheres which are cognitively and affectively expanding; learning atmospheres which enable the learner to become a more adequate and knowledgeable person [14, p.3]

It is clear that this kind of approach places great emphasis on what the teacher as a person brings to the teaching-learning relationship and how the learner can be assisted to develop as a whole person by the provision of a supportive learning environment, which allows individuals to develop in their own way [22].

For the humanistic teacher, teaching is essentially a

personal expression of the self. As [14] claims, "Pupils feel the personal emotional structure of the teacher long before they feel the impact of the intellectual content offered by that teacher" (p. 3). Obviously, this has particular implications with regard to teachers' views of themselves in that a teacher who lacks self-esteem will find it impossible to build the self-esteem of others. This is equally true when it comes to conveying dignity and respect. Similarly, for a teacher who does not accept her learners as they are makes it difficult for them to accept themselves. Thus, "the language teacher needs to convey a sense of self-confidence in using the language whilst at the same time respecting learners' attempts to express themselves and their views in the language" [22, p. 62].

One further quality which is central to the humanistic approach is that of permissiveness. It is defined as "permission to be oneself, to pursue interests and curiosity in search of meaning in one's life, as well as the freedom to have ideas, beliefs and values" [22, p. 62].

Humanistic education is sometimes described as learner-centered teaching. However, such a definition does not justify to the full implications of taking this approach in one's teaching. Whilst it is true that humanistic teachers begin with the premise that everything they say or do has, or could have, a significant impact on the personal growth and development of their learners, it is equally true that in every teaching activity, the teacher defines herself as a person. Humanistic teaching, therefore, is not just learner-centered, but person-centered. A teacher's view of teaching mirrors her view of herself and her teaching behavior reflects her essence as a person [22, p. 62].

One natural consequence of taking such an approach is that we have to accept that teaching is an expression of values and attitudes, not just information or knowledge. Another consequence is that teachers must recognize that they themselves are constantly involved in a lifelong process of learning and change [22].

"The influence of the developmental theories of such psychologists as Maslow and Erickson provides the foundation upon which this approach is based [22, p. 62].

[3] argues that self-confidence plays a crucial role in learner motivation, in terms of expectancy, as it may allow learners to predict and perceive learning goals. In addition, [10] suggests the following which can help to increase learners' self-confidence:

1. Language competence is a changeable aspect of development.
2. An educator can promote to increase confidence in learning.
3. Success can promote positive self-perceptions.
4. Learners' contributions to learning tasks promote learner's interest.

According to [6] and [17], the affective domain is the emotional side of human behavior which includes various personality aspects such as emotion, motivation, attitude, anxiety, personality, and self-confidence. Among these,

self-confidence is one of the most influential variables which affect learning. It is one of the central drives in human beings and can exercise a determining influence on a person's life for good or bad. [10] States that "the concept of self-confidence has a close relationship with self-esteem, as both of them emphasize on the individual's perception of his or her abilities as a person" (p. 211).

Availability of a grammatical competence seems to be the primary ingredient of communicative competence, and indeed the communicative method may succeed best in the first category of school described above, introducing variety and learner engagement in class activities and discussions where teachers (and learners) are confident in their knowledge of the language, acquired through exposure. However, as [15] states for the majority of learners, the issue is not so much communicative competence as the acquisition of a basic or fundamental competence in the language input-rich theoretical methodologies (such as the Whole Language, the task-based, and the comprehensible input and balanced approaches) aim at exposure to the language in meaning-focused situations so as to trigger the formation of a language system by the mind.

Likewise, [16] examined the relationship between student achievement, teacher efficacy, an interaction with assigned coaches on a sample of 18 grade 7 and 8 history teachers in 36 classes. The result of the study indicated that students' achievement was higher in classrooms of teachers who had more contact with their coaches, and in classrooms of teachers with greater confidence in the effectiveness of education. [19] Also showed that self-efficacy was positively related to "extra-role behavior" toward the team and the organization.

While there are ample reasons to view the English teachers' self-confidence as powerful enough to predict conversational performance, it seems that the area has not received the due attention in Iran. This study was designed with the hope that its results could make Iranian teachers aware of their students' internal feelings and beliefs about themselves and the effect they may exert on their performance in conversation classes. To this end, the following research question was addressed:

Is there any relationship between the English teachers' self-confidence and their learners' achievements of conversational skills?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Sixty female and male learners (28 female, 32 male) at lower intermediate-level and six English teachers (2 female and 4 male) at Shayan Language Institute in Torbat Heydarie, Khorasan, Iran were the participants of this study. In the second part, two of the teachers (one with a high confidence level and one with a low confidence level) were selected to assist in the experimental phase of the study.

2.2. Instruments

CPE speaking test was a proficiency test administered at the beginning of the study to determine the homogeneity of the learners in the experimental and control groups. A self-confidence questionnaire (adopted from [1]) was the other instrument of this study. This questionnaire consisted of 13 yes/no questions. In order to evaluate the learners' achievement during the course a pre-test and a post-test were administered at the onset and end of the course. Both tests were in forms of interview including 25 items ranging from introducing themselves and their families to hobbies and favors.

2.3. Procedures

In order to homogenize the participants at the beginning of the course, a proficiency test (i.e., CPE speaking test) was administered to the participants of this study. After data analysis regarding the proficiency test, the participants were divided into two groups: control group and experimental group. The test included some pages with pictures and each candidate was asked to answer the questions by the interlocutor. In the next step, the participant was asked to listen to the interlocutor, while he/she read the question written on a flashcard. The specified time of this step was 2 minutes for every student. Afterwards, it was the participant's turn to ask a question by looking at the picture. Finally, the reliability index of this test was estimated through Cronbach's alpha as 0.78.

Both groups were instructed in the same pedagogic conditions and were provided with the same materials. In order to create similar circumstances, it was decided that both teachers be male and roughly the same age with similar number of years' experience in teaching. The only difference between the two teachers was a psychological factor, that is, the teacher instructing the learners in the experimental group possessed a high level of self-confidence as compared with the teacher for the control group possessing normal level of self-confidence.

After 12 sessions of instruction, a researcher-made posttest in form of an interview based on CPE was administered to assess the participants' speaking abilities.

3. Conclusions

Based on Table 1, the calculated t value is 1.2 and the degree of freedom (df) is 28. So, the t-value is larger than the table value meaning that there is no meaningful difference between both control and experimental groups.

Table 1. The Results of CPE Speaking Test

Groups	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Control	30	18.70	1.70	1.2	28
Experimental	30	19.53	1.83		

Based on the data shown in the table 2 (t-test of posttest), t value is 3.20, and this calculated value is larger than the table value with 28 df, and for $\alpha=.01$ which is 2.7 and so based on our findings, we can come to this conclusion that the treatment (using a self-confident teacher in speaking classes) is considered as an effective tool in EFL and that the experimental teacher has been able to convey this behavioral trait to his students' speaking development.

Table 2. The Experimental and Control Groups' Performance on Speaking Posttest

Groups	N	M	SD	t	df
Control	30	19.31	3.53	3.20	28
Experimental	30	25.71	3.98		

According on the present study we can conclude that self-confidence is a psychological trait which plays an important role in English classes in general, and in the field of speaking skills in specific. The results of this study revealed that self-confident teachers convey a sense of self-confidence to their students and this finding is confirmed by [2] who assert that one of the most important shared characteristics among all successful teachers is their self-confidence.

[6] And [17] argue that self-confidence is one of the most influential variables which affect learning. It is one of the central drives in human beings and can exercise a determining influence on a person's life, for good or bad. [10] Stated that "the concept of self-confidence is closely related to self-esteem; both share a common emphasis on the individual's perception of his or her abilities as a person" (p. 211). These ideas are also reflected in the findings of the present study.

Teachers with high self-confidence try to speak more in L2 motivating their students to communicate with their partners and teachers in L2 and this finding is in agreement with [3] believing that self-confidence is a crucial factor in learner motivation. Hopefully, the present study will encourage others in the field of teaching and linguistics to conduct more studies in this regard. We hope that our findings can also assist international researchers in providing them with better insight towards the teaching circumstances in Iran.

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