EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Characteristics of Efficacious EFL Learners: The Issues of Gender and Teaching Experience in Focus

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Abstract

During the last decades, increasing attention has been devoted to the notion of self-efficacy and its impact on education. The present study sought to examine Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of efficacious learners. The data were collected from 323 EFL teachers through a first-time self-prepared, validated, and piloted survey (with 100 EFL teachers similar to the main participants, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .08). Overall, the results of the study revealed the multi-dimensional nature of EFL teachers' perceptions with regard to EFL learners' efficacy. First and foremost, in the preliminary step of developing the survey, the results from the exploratory factor analysis led to the emergence of five different factors concerning efficacious EFL learners, namely (1) learning self-regulation, (2) ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, (3) linguistic processing and production, (4) self-

assessment and memory strategies, and (5) risk-taking and communication management. Moreover, the findings from the two-group MANOVA showed that teaching experience and gender did not have any statistically significant effect on the five constructs of teachers' perception of efficacious learners. We would argue that in order for EFL teachers to be more successful, they need to increase their knowledge and understanding of their learners' specific needs and requirements. Teachers need to be aware of the factors affecting the learners' self-efficacy to be able to enhance it. It should be noted that our results provide valuable information for EFL teachers, materials developers, and syllabus designers.

1. Introduction

Due to the emergence of new learning techniques in recent decades, the necessary underlying constructs that students need to master to learn better have also transformed (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020). According to Bandura (1993), for students to learn something, they should believe that they can learn it. In fact, in addition to motivation, they must possess the required confidence to perform different given tasks (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Keller (1999) asserts that effort made by learners can indicate their real motivation, which can affect their future performance. Put differently, one with higher levels of motivation will probably make more effort and accordingly have a better performance. According to Keller (1999), some internal factors, such as self-confidence, can determine the extent of one's efforts. In other words, it is crucial for the learners to believe in that they have the capability to do a learning task successfully (Vattøy, 2020). Otherwise, they would only make a minimum effort. Along the same lines, Lorsbach and Jinks (1999) argue that self-efficacy is regarded to be the most significant motivational construct in learners' belief about what they can accomplish. Teachers can help their students believe in their abilities by focusing on and improving their self-efficacy beliefs (Vattøy & Smith, 2019; Vattøy, 2020).

While the focus of research was more on students' learning outcomes in the past, nowadays, more researchers (e.g., Choi & Tang, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010; Huberman, 1993; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Troman & Raggl, 2008) contend that a wide range of criteria need to be

considered to boost learner performance, one of which is the learners' self-efficacy. This concept has been extended into the field of second language education. A growing body of research has also indicated that learners play an active role in their progress and self-efficacy can affect language learning performance (e.g., Anyadubalu, 2010; Mills et al., 2007; Mills, 2014). Efficacious second language learners try hard, apply different learning strategies, do not worry about making mistakes, enjoy learning the language and try to use it in different situations, simultaneously focus on different language skills, and try innovative methods to learn better.

By the same token, the teachers' individual belief systems can, to a great extent, predict their instructional ability and lead to improvement and growth in their students (Bandura, 1997; Gamlem et al., 2019; Shaw, 2009; Zhu et al., 2018). This may be due to the fact that teachers assess themselves as well as their learners and judge them based on their beliefs regarding self-efficacy (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Reflecting on the self-efficacy of the learners and observing their beliefs and actions can have benefits for both teachers and learners. It will help develop both the teachers' instructional practices and the learners' learning procedures (Bandura, 2006; Daudelin, 1996; Knight, 2011). Against this backdrop, the current study aims to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward the concept of efficacious learners and their characteristics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Bandura (1997) considers self-efficacy as the beliefs that one holds regarding the abilities that are required to gain an achievement. Self-efficacy is the self-perception of ability, and this perception can influence people's feelings, thoughts, motivation, and actions (Bandura, 1997). High self-efficacy can improve learning achievement, remove erroneous emotional reactions, and lead to more dedication to work. Moreover, students with higher self-efficacy experience less stress in school than those students who experience doubt in their usefulness and abilities (Bandura, 1997).

According to Bai et al. (2020), the intricate process of language learning is highly influenced by self-efficacy. Stubbs and Maynard (2017)

also stress that self-efficacy can predict the future success of learners. Bandura (1993) sees self-efficacy as a motivational construct in the social cognitive theory and believes that it is the beliefs that one may hold regarding their ability to effectively and successfully perform a required task. As Bandura (1986) puts it, self-efficacy is the judgments that people have of their own ability to perform an action successfully. Self-efficacy can also affect various aspects of one's general well-being (Bandura, 1993). Efficacy can regulate people's feelings, thoughts, and actions in various situations (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Self-efficacy, as an important motivational construct, can determine the learners' achievement and have a great impact on the kinds of activities selected, the amount of effort put into a specific task, and their perseverance in accomplishing that task (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman et al., 1992). As Stipek (1993) states, during the learning process and in dealing with difficult tasks, learners who possess higher self-efficacy tend to try more to handle the experiment. Conversely, if the learners believe that they do not have the necessary qualifications to do a task, they devote the least amount of effort to the task (Lorsbach & Jinks, 1999).

Self-efficacy is also interwoven with the notion of self-regulation, which is defined as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). Within the domain of education, self-regulation is linked with learners' and teachers' motivation and success (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Delfino et al. (2010) argue that due to the complex nature of teaching in general, teachers are required to self-regulated if they want to practice effective teaching.

2.2 Previous Studies

Several ELT (English Language Teaching) researches (e.g., Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2011; Mills et al., 2007; Rahemi, 2007) have studied the role of self-efficacy in language learning. The majority of these studies were related to the significance of self-efficacy; they found it to be an indispensable part of education that can accurately predict the future success or failure of the learner. To be more specific, Genç, Kuluşaklı, and Aydın (2016) asserted that the learners' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their English learning experience can determine their success or failure. The findings from their study revealed that EFL students had average scores in

their English language learning self-efficacy and strongly believed that motivation could impact the learning process. Also, the pupil's views about language learning were influenced by their self-efficacy. In a different study, Honicke et al. (2019) investigated the interrelationship between self-efficacy and the academic attainment of 478 Australian university students. The results of their study proved the existence of a relationship between the learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their academic achievement. They found those students who possessed better self-efficacy beliefs enjoyed more academic accomplishments. In a recent study, Üner et al. (2020) showed that the self-efficacy beliefs of 1009 Turkish students could determine the future success of those learners.

Furthermore, teachers' beliefs concerning their self-efficacy have also been examined by researchers. For instance, Ghasemboland and Hashim (2013) examined non-native EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs with regard to personal abilities, skills to teach English, and their believed English language expertise in language centers in Iran. Their results revealed that the teachers' efficacy was directly related to their self-reported level of English proficiency. In another study, Tajeddin and Khodaverdi (2011) emphasized the interrelationship between the three variables of gender, teaching experience, and field of study, and teachers' self-efficacy. The survey data collected from 59 EFL teachers showed that these three variables did not exert any influence on the teachers' self-efficacy. Rahimi and Weisi (2018) also explored the probable connection between 150 Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their reflective practices. The results of their study suggested a positive correlation between the two concepts. Moreover, Safari et al.'s (2020) study on 212 Iranian EFL teachers revealed that a positive relationship existed between the teachers' beliefs about their self-efficacy, reflective thinking, and job satisfaction. More specifically, their findings indicated that language teachers who possessed more self-efficacy were also more satisfied with their job as a teacher. Yough (2020) also examined the effects of an intervention program on 209 pre-service English teachers' self-efficacy levels. The results showed that the teachers' self-efficacy could be enhanced after a teacher education program. This means that self-efficacy is teachable and can be improved by effective instruction.

A close look at the previous literature on self-efficacy indicates that despite the accumulated literature on different issues related to self-efficacy among teachers as well as learners, identifying language teachers'

perceptions of self-efficacy and its underlying factors on their learners remains unknown. With regard to verbal persuasion, the third element of self-efficacy in Bandura's (1997) theory, we would like to argue that the social persuasive feedback that learners receive from the teacher based on their performance can enhance or decrease their self-efficacy. Moreover, "comments coming from those who are considered to be more knowledgeable, experienced, or skillful in a given domain (e.g., course instructor) may be regarded as more credible and thus may have more influence on people's self-efficacy beliefs." (Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019). In addition, self-efficacy is intrinsically context-bound and domain-specific, resulting in discrepancies in diverse socio-cultural contexts and fields of studies (Bandura, 1997). Also, the use of an objective scale can help teachers fine-tune the interpretive subjective nature of their perceptions of efficacious EFL learners and achieve intersubjectivity with a balanced view when it comes to negotiating their self-efficacy knowledge. Additionally, from a socio-cultural perspective, a closer look at teacher perceptions through a quantitative lens sheds light on several aspects of teacher professional agency at both individual and collective levels (Hokka et al., 2017). Against this backdrop, the main objective of this study is to explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of efficacious EFL learners. It also aims to examine the influence of the two variables of teachers' gender and teaching experience on their beliefs. Hence, the following research questions were put forth:

1. *What are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners?*
2. *Does gender affect the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners?*
3. *Does teaching experience affect the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners?*

Based on the above research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

➢ *Gender does not have any significant effect on the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners.*
➢ *Teaching experience does not have any significant effect on the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners.*

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

A total of 423 EFL teachers selected through convenience sampling, took part in this study in two different phases. In the first phase, 100 EFL teachers (68 male and 32 female, with an average age of 26) with similar characteristics to the participants of the main study were selected to check the reliability of the questionnaire in a pilot study. In the next phase, 323 EFL teachers (152 males and 171 females, with an average age of 28) who taught English at different institutes in Tehran were selected for the main phase of the study. As depicted in Table 1, they also came from different fields of studies relating to ELT. Although 21 teachers came from non-English fields of studies, they all had passed numerous ELT courses in the institutes they were teaching and were equipped with enough necessary technical information regarding teaching different sub-skills of English. For the selection of the participants, in addition to gender, the teaching experience of the selected teachers was also considered. That is to say, 149 novice teachers, those with lower than three years of teaching experience, and 174 experienced teachers, those with higher than five years of teaching experience, were selected as the main sample of this study. This distinction is based on Freeman's (2001) definition of novice and experienced teachers.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Participants of the Study

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Major	TEFL	143	44 %
	Literature	68	21 %
	Translation	73	22 %
	Linguistics	18	6 %
	Non-English	21	7 %
Degree	B.A.	126	39 %
	M.A.	158	49 %
	Ph.D.	39	12 %
Gender	Male	152	47 %
	Female	171	53 %

Teaching experience	novice	149	46 %
	experienced	174	54 %

3.2 Instrument

The current study used a self-developed efficacious EFL learners scale. In order to design and validate this questionnaire, the related literature about characteristics of efficacious learners was first reviewed. Through consultative sessions with experienced EFL experts, including six Ph.D. holders in Applied Linguistics and six experienced EFL teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience, major distinguishing criteria in characterizing efficacious EFL learners were extracted. They were as follows: (1) self-regulation in the classroom, (2) ambiguity tolerance and adaptability dimension, (3) linguistic processing and production, (4) self-assessment and memory strategies, and (5) Risk-taking and communication management. Next, based on the selected criteria and taking into account Bandura's (1986) questionnaire as a model, 30 items were developed based on a 5- point Likert scale to assess the EFL teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of efficacious EFL learners. An exploratory factor analysis was subsequently run to remove unrelated items. Lastly, the 21 item questionnaire was finalized to answer the research questions of the current study.

In order to explore the factorial structure of efficacious EFL learners scale, its 30 5-point Likert scale items were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the factor extraction method of principal axis factoring (PAF) along with the direct *Oblimin* rotation method. In this analysis, PAF was deployed to yield a factor structure in which common variance was represented and unique variance and error variance were removed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). This was done with the goal of maximizing the extracted variance (i.e., representing the maximum amount of data in the scale). In addition, the *Oblimin* rotation method was also employed since we observed moderate correlation coefficients among the extracted factors in our preliminary EFA.

Before conducting EFA, the appropriateness and suitability of data implementing the data were inspected. First, the normality assumption of the data was checked by examining the skewness and kurtosis measures of the items, with all of them being between -2 and +2. Consequently, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the data met the assumption of normality. Secondly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure was utilized to

assess the sampling adequacy for the analysis. As it is shown in Table 2, the KMO of 0.90, far exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 (Field, 2009; Kaiser, 1970, 1974). Also, Bartlett's test of Sphericity was X^2 (435) = 2785.23, p = .00, which suggested that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for the accurate use of PAF.

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.90
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2785.23
	Df	435
	Sig.	.00

After implementing EFA, with PAF as its extraction method, a nine-factor solution emerged. This factor structure was obtained utilizing the Kaiser Criterion. Having examined the structure matrix more closely (see Table 4), we found that four factors were indicated by two or fewer items. As recommended by Meyers, Gamst, and Guarino (2013), there need to be at least three items per factor for it to be a strong construct; therefore, all factors with only one or two items were removed from the analysis. The previously mentioned criterion rendered a five-factor solution that explained a total of 36.10% of common variance, with those five factors accounting for 24.54 %, 4.14%, 2.89%, 2.48%, and 2.04 % of that common variance, respectively. It should be pointed out that items 11, 1, and 24 were suppressed from the factor solution by SPSS because of their low coefficients (lower than the cuff-off value of .47) and not fully represented by it.

Table 3

Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	7.91	26.37	26.37	7.36	24.54	24.54	4.85
2	1.80	6.00	32.38	1.24	4.14	28.68	5.08
3	1.42	4.74	37.11	0.87	2.89	31.57	4.72
4	1.33	4.44	41.55	0.75	2.48	34.06	4.73
5	1.17	3.89	45.44	0.61	2.04	36.10	2.47

Based on these findings, the final "Efficacious Learners Scale" included the following five components and their related items:

(1) Component 1: "learning self-regulation", which accounted for 24.54 of the total variance. This factor includes the five items listed below (29, 20, 17, 18, and 30; Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81) and reflects the significance of self-regulation as an important aspect of self-efficacy. In other words, the more efficacious EFL learners are self-regulated in the classroom, as they are more certain about their successful outcome and believe in their capabilities.

Item 29: know how to schedule their time to accomplish their learning task
Item 20: organize their learning of the language
Item 17: are usually very good listeners and can acquire through listening
Item 18: are also (usually) good achievers in other fields of education
Item 30: finish assignments by deadline

(2) Component (2): "Ambiguity Tolerance and Adaptability", which accounted for 4.14% of the total variance and includes the five items listed below (16, 2, 15, 12, and 10; Cronbach's Alpha of 0.74).

It represented the necessity to boost one's ambiguity tolerance as a key factor in increasing the self-efficacy of the learners.

Item 16: can easily adapt new/different learning conditions and environments
Item2: can work well with others in the class
Item 15: have a high degree of tolerance for ambiguity
Item12: are motivated thorough tasks which are involving and challenging
Item 10: are usually aware of their own and others' mistakes

(3) Component (3): "Linguistic Processing and Production", which accounted for 2.89% of the total variance. This factor includes the five items listed below (22, 21, 19, 5, and 9; Cronbach's Alpha of 0.78) and implied the necessity of devoting greater attention to using different kinds of learning strategies to enhance the learners' self-efficacy.

Item 22: make their own opportunities for practicing the language inside and outside the classroom
Item 21: are creative, use the language, and play with grammar, words, and sounds
Item 19: find their own way and take charge of their learning
Item 5: look for available opportunities to use the target language in and out of class
Item 9: are conscious enough to notice, categorize, and store features of language and its regularities

(4) Component (4): "Self-assessment and Memory Strategies", which accounted for 2.48% of the total variance. This factor includes the three items listed below (8, 23, and 7; Cronbach's Alpha of 0.72) and reflects the significance of noticing these two techniques in educating more self-efficacious learners.

Item 8: tend to learn the target language through a process of assessing their own failure and success
Item 23: use memory strategies to recall what they are learning
Item 7: are interested in using learning techniques and strategies

(5) Component (5): "Risk-taking and Communication Management", which accounted for 2.04% of the total variance. This factor includes the three items (6, 13, and 25; Cronbach's Alpha of 0.73)

and denoted that efficacious learners are more capable of managing their communication for doing different tasks and have a high level of risk-taking.

Item 6: try to understand the target language without worrying too much about grammar or unknown vocabulary
Item 13: are prepared to experiment by taking risks
Item 25: learn certain strategies that keep conversation going

Table 4

Structure Matrix of the Relationships Between Factors and Items

	Rotated Component Matrix				
	component				
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
q29	.726				
q20	.643				
q17	.631				
q18	.574				
q30	.553				
q16		.565			
q2		.565			
q15		.550			
q12		.532			
q10		.514			
q11					
q27					
q26					
q22			.672		
q21			.653		
q19			.567		
q5			.553		
q9			.529		
q4					
q3					

q1		
q8	.624	
q23	.541	
q7	.497	
q6		.605
q13		.548
q25		.523
q28		
q24		
q14		

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was done in two phases. They are as follows:

Phase 1: Piloting (Small-Scale)

The developed survey was piloted in the first phase of data collection. In order to do so, 100 EFL teachers, similar to the main participants of the study, filled out the survey. The surveys were distributed either in print form or via email. The collected data were later fed into SPSS, and Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the survey. The results of Cronbach's alpha indicated that the internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.80, which indicates high internal consistency.

Phase 2: Main Data Collection (Large-Scale)

In this stage, we used the on-line version of the survey, produced via Google Forms, to facilitate the process of data collection. The survey link was sent to the teachers in three different ways, namely through email, messaging on social networks (e.g., Telegram or WhatsApp), or in person. It needs to be noted that the data were collected both through the on-line and print form of the survey. Also, using the snowball sampling procedure, the participants were kindly asked to share the survey with their other colleagues and friends. In this way, a total of 323 surveys were collected from 30 different language institutes in Tehran (the capital of Iran) after nearly nine months.

3.4 Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to answer this study's research questions. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were reported to answer the first research question and determine the teachers' perceptions of efficacious learners. Also, to answer the second and third research questions, the statistical procedure of MANOVA was utilized to measure the potential effects of gender and teachers' experience level on the different extracted constructs of their perceptions pertinent to an efficacious learner.

4. Results

4.1 Results of Research Question One

The first research question in this study was: *What are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners?*

The results concerning this research question are depicted below in Table 5. As indicated, item 5 in the survey received the highest mean rating score (M = 4.16, SD = .94) from among the teachers, and the majority of them thought that efficacious learners "look for available opportunities to use the target language inside and outside the class". Moreover, with only a little difference, items 22 and 12 were the next most frequent items with mean rating scores of 4.10 (SD = .83) and 4.08 (SD = .82), respectively. As displayed, more than 80% agreed that efficacious learners "create some opportunities for themselves to practice the language" (n = 275). Also, 83% (n = 269) believed that efficacious learners are "motivated thorough involving and challenging tasks". Similarly, 85% contended that these learners "can work well with others in the class" (M = 4.07, SD = .84).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Efficacious EFL Learners Scale (N = 323)

		1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	M	SD
q5	look for available opportunities to use the	1.9	6.5	6.8	43.3	41.5	4.16	.94

	target language in and out of class							
q22	make their own opportunities for practicing the language inside and outside the classroom	0.9	5.3	8.7	52.9	32.2	4.10	.83
q12	are motivated thorough tasks which are involving and challenging	0	6.5	10.2	52	31.3	4.08	.82
q2	can work well with others in the class	0.9	6.5	6.8	55.7	30	4.07	.84
q7	are interested in using learning techniques and strategies	0.3	8	13.9	48.9	28.8	3.98	.88
q21	are creative, use the language, and play with grammar, words, and sounds	0.6	9.3	14.9	47.1	28.2	3.93	.92
q25	learn certain strategies that keep conversation going	0.6	5.9	15.5	56	22	3.93	.81
q19	find their own way and take charge of their learning	1.2	8	10.8	59.1	20.7	3.90	.86
q20	organize their learning of the language	0	8.4	14.9	60.4	16.4	3.85	.79
q23	use memory strategies to recall what they are learning	0.9	6.8	17.6	56.7	18	3.84	.83
q10	are usually aware of their own and others' mistakes	1.5	12.1	11.1	57.3	18	3.78	.93
q8	tend to learn the target language through a process of assessing their own failure and success	0	10.8	22.6	50.5	16.1	3.72	.86
q9	are conscious enough to notice, categorize, and store features of language and its regularities	0.9	15.5	15.2	50.2	18.3	3.69	.97
q17	are usually very good listeners and can acquire through listening	2.8	15.2	12.7	49.8	19.5	3.68	1.04
q30	finish assignments by deadline	1.9	15.5	17.3	43.7	21.7	3.68	1.04
q6	try to understand the target language without worrying too much about grammar or unknown vocabulary	2.2	18.9	13	44.9	21.1	3.64	1.08

q29	know how to schedule their time to accomplish their learning task	1.2	15.2	17.3	50.8	15.5	3.64	.96
q13	are prepared to experiment by taking risks	0.3	13.9	25.4	32.7	16.7	3.63	.93
q16	can easily adapt new/different learning conditions and environments	0,9	14.9	19.5	51.1	13.6	3.62	.93
q15	have a high degree of tolerance for ambiguity	1.9	20.4	19.8	44	13.9	3.48	1.03
q18	are also (usually) good achievers in other fields of education	5	32.8	22.9	31	8.4	3.05	1.08

With very minute differences, items 9 (M = 3.69, SD = .97), 17 (M = 3.68, SD = 1.04), and 30 (M = 3.68, SD = 1.04) received roughly similar mean rating scores. It was observed that nearly half of the teachers believed that efficacious learners pay attention, are good listeners, and are good at meeting deadlines. Moreover, items 6 (SD = 1.08) and 29 (SD = .96) received exactly the same mean rating scores (M = 3.64), denoting that efficacious learners have ambiguity tolerance and know how to schedule their time. The least scored item in the survey was item 18 with a mean rating score of 3.05% (SD = 1.08). As displayed, nearly 40% of the teachers, associated self-efficacy with success in other fields of education.

4.2 Results of Research Question Two

The second research question in this study was: *Does gender affects the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners?*
A two-group MANOVA was used to measure the potential effects of teachers' gender on different extracted constructs of their perceptions pertinent to an efficacious EFL learner. More specifically, this MANOVA was conducted to investigate the effects of gender on the five constructs of *learning self-regulation*, *ambiguity tolerance and adaptability*, *linguistic processing and production*, *self-assessment and memory strategies*, and *risk-taking and communication management*, which were considered as the five main dependent variables (DVs). Pertaining to the measurement of these five DVs, it should be said that all of them were considered as latent composites; hence, the means of students' responses to questions

of each were estimated and used in the MANOVA. Having measured these five DVs, the two groups of teachers, that is, male and female (the independent variable with two levels), were compared to see whether there were differences with regard to the different constructs of their perceptions of an efficacious learner (see Table 6 for more information on the teachers' responses to the different constructs of perceptions related to an efficacious learner).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Gender Groups in Different DVs

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
LearningSelfR	Female	3.62	0.72	171
	Male	3.53	0.66	152
	Average	3.58	0.69	323
AFadaptability	Female	3.85	0.61	171
	Male	3.76	0.58	152
	Average	3.81	0.60	323
LinguisticPP	Female	3.96	0.67	171
	Male	3.95	0.60	152
	Average	3.96	0.64	323
Self-assessmentMS	Female	3.93	0.61	171
	Male	3.75	0.66	152
	Average	3.85	0.64	323
Risk-takingCM	Female	3.80	0.71	171
	Male	3.66	0.68	152
	Average	3.73	0.70	323

Note: LearningSelfR = Learning self-regulation, AFadaptability = Ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, LinguisticPP = Linguistic processing and production, Self-assessmentMS = Self-assessment and memory strategies, Risk-takingCM = Risk-taking and communication management

At the outset of the analysis in this part, the assumption of univariate normality of MANOVA was investigated, and since all the skewness measures were between -2 and +2, this assumption was tenable. Also, the multivariate normality was examined by inspecting the scatterplots; no violations were found. Moreover, Box's test of equality of covariance matrices did not return a significant value, so this assumption was tenable as well (See Table 7).

Table 7

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

Box's M	21.71
F	1.42
df1	15.00
df2	402725.17
Sig.	0.12

Finally, Leven's test of equality of error variances did not yield any significant results on any of the components; consequently, this assumption was satisfied as well (see Table 8).

Table 8

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for Each Construct

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
LearningSelfR	.648	1	321	.422
AFadaptability	.567	1	321	.452
linguisticPP	.090	1	321	.765
self-assessmentMS	.417	1	321	.519
RisktakingCM	.162	1	321	.688

The results of the two-group MANOVA, F (5, 317) = .97, p = .07 (see Table 9), showed that the overall null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two gender groups, male and female, on the five constructs of teachers' perception was not rejected; hence, gender did not have any statistically significant holistic effect on the five constructs of teachers' perception with regard to efficacious learners.

Table 9

Multivariate Tests for Investigating the Holistic Effect of Gender on Five Constructs of Teachers' Perception of Efficacious Learners

Effect		Value	F	df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.98	3854.92	5.00	317.00	0.00	0.98
	Wilks' Lambda	0.02	3854.92	5.00	317.00	0.00	0.98
	Hotelling's Trace	60.80	3854.92	5.00	317.00	0.00	0.98
	Roy's Largest Root	60.80	3854.92	5.00	317.00	0.00	0.98
Gender	Pillai's Trace	0.03	2.10	5.00	317.00	0.07	0.03
	Wilks' Lambda	0.97	2.10	5.00	317.00	0.07	0.03
	Hotelling's Trace	0.03	2.10	5.00	317.00	0.07	0.03
	Roy's Largest Root	0.03	2.10	5.00	317.00	0.07	0.03

4.3 Results of Research Question Three

The third research question in this study was: *Does teaching experience affects the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious EFL learners?*

Another two-group MANOVA was utilized to measure the potential effects of teachers' experience level on the different extracted constructs of their perceptions pertinent to an efficacious EFL learner. All of the five constructs were considered as latent composites, and the means of students' responses to questions of each were estimated and used in the MANOVA. Having measured these five DVs, these two groups of teachers, that is, novice and expert (the independent variable with two levels), were compared to see whether they were different with regard to the different constructs of their perception of an efficacious learner (see Table 10 for more information on teachers' responses in the different constructs of perceptions related to an efficacious learner).

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics of Different Experience Groups on Different DVs

	EXP	Mean	Std. D	N
LearningSelfR	Novice	3.59	.66	149
	Expert	3.57	.73	174
	Average	3.58	.69	323
AFadaptability	Novice	3.79	.62	149
	Expert	3.82	.59	174
	Average	3.81	.60	323
LinguisticPP	Novice	3.94	.66	149
	Expert	3.97	.62	174
	Average	3.96	.64	323
self-assessmentMS	Novice	3.88	.59	149
	Expert	3.82	.67	174
	Average	3.85	.64	323
Risk-takingCM	Novice	3.71	.73	149
	Expert	3.75	.68	174
	Average	3.73	.70	323

Note: LearningSelfR = Learning self-regulation, AFadaptability = Ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, LinguisticPP = Linguistic processing and production, Self-assessmentMS = Self-assessment and memory strategies, Risk-takingCM = Risk-taking and communication management

Prior to the analysis in this part, the assumption of univariate normality of MANOVA was investigated and all the skewness measures were between -2 and +2, so this assumption was tenable. Also, the multivariate normality was examined by inspecting the scatterplots, and no violations were found. Moreover, Box's test of equality of covariance matrices did not return a significant value, so this assumption was tenable as well (see Table 11).

Table 11

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

Box's M	19.66
F	1.25
df1	15.00
df2	394196.15
Sig.	0.22

Leven's test of equality of error variances did not yield any significant results on any of the components, so this assumption was satisfied as well (see Table 12).

Table 12

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for Each Construct

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
LearningSelfR	.83	1	321	.36
AFadaptability	.38	1	321	.53
LinguisticPP	2.63	1	321	.10
Self-assessmentMS	3.88	1	321	.06
RisktakingCM	.78	1	321	.37

The results of the two-group MAMOVA illustrated that the overall multivariate null hypothesis of no significant difference between two experience groups, novice and expert, on the five constructs of teachers' perception was not rejected, F (5, 317) = .99, p = .83 (see Table 13). As a result, it can be argued that experience did not have any statistically significant holistic effect on the five constructs of teachers' perception with regard to efficacious learners.

Table 13

Multivariate Tests for Investigating the Holistic Effect of Experience on Five Constructs of Teachers' Perception of Efficacious Learners

Effect		Value	F	df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.98	3805.07	5.00	317.00	.000	0.98
	Wilks' Lambda	0.02	3805.07	5.00	317.00	.000	0.98
	Hotelling's Trace	60.02	3805.07	5.00	317.00	.000	0.98

	Roy's Largest Root	60.02	3805.07	5.00	317.00	.000	0.98
EXP	Pillai's Trace	0.01	0.42	5.00	317.00	.833	0.01
	Wilks' Lambda	0.99	0.42	5.00	317.00	.833	0.01
	Hotelling's Trace	0.01	0.42	5.00	317.00	.833	0.01
	Roy's Largest Root	0.01	0.42	5.00	317.00	.833	0.01

5. Discussion

The present study examined teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of an efficacious EFL learner considering their gender and teaching experience. The results from a validated questionnaire showed that Iranian EFL teachers consider five different elements as the main characteristics of efficacious EFL learners, namely *learning self-regulation, ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, linguistic processing and production, self-assessment and memory strategies, and risk-taking and communication management*. The findings also indicated that there was no significant relationship between the teachers' gender and teaching experience and their attitudes toward efficacious EFL learners.

A number of the components and themes found in the present study are in line with the general features of good efficacious learners reported in the literature. With regard to self-regulation, items such as being very good listeners and acquiring through listening, being usually good achievers in other fields of education, organizing their learning of the language, knowing how to schedule their time to accomplish their learning task and finishing their assignments by the deadline were also reported in some previous studies (e.g., MonshiToussi et al., 2011; Dembo, 2001; Randi, 2004; Tseng et al., 2006; Zimmerman et al., 2002).

Considering ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, items such as working well with others in the class, being aware of their own and others' mistakes, are motivated through tasks that are involving and challenging, having a high degree of tolerance for ambiguity, and adapting to new/different learning conditions and environments, were supported by the literature (e.g., Dehshiri, 2003; Erten & Topkaya, 2009; Marzban et al.,

2011; Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013; Vahedi & Fatemi, 2016). With respect to linguistic processing and production, the supporting items from the literature are as follows: look for every available opportunity to use the target language inside and outside of the class (Davies, 1980; Ellis, 2004; Ipek, 2009), to find their own way and take charge of their learning (MonshiToussi et al., 2011; Zimmerman et al., 2002), to be creative, use the language, and play with grammar, words, and sounds (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 2003), and to create their own opportunities to practice the language, whether inside or outside the classroom (Ellis, 2003; Long & Robinson, 1998; Nunan, 2004). With regard to the self-assessment and memory strategies dimension, the literature supported items such as using memory strategies to recall (Nation, 2005; Nemati, 2009; Oxford, 1990; Sagarra & Alba, 2006), tending to learn the target language through a process of assessing their own failure and success, and being interested in using learning techniques and strategies (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Ghaslani, 2015; McNamara, 2000; Pat-El et al., 2013). The literature concerning risk-taking and communication management in general also provides support for themes such as trying to understand the target language without worrying too much about grammar or unknown vocabulary, being prepared to experiment by taking risks and learning certain tricks that keep conversation going (Lee & Ng, 2010; Ortega, 2009; Wen & Clement, 2003).

From the results of the present study it could be contended that an efficacious learner is one who has self-regulation, ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, linguistic processing and production, self-assessment and memory strategies, as well as risk-taking and communication management (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman et al., 2002). The data in the present study were collected from English teachers teaching English in private language institutes in Tehran (the capital of Iran). It needs to be noted that the data comes from an EFL context, and this may have an effect on the teachers' perceptions. Had the teachers taught in other contexts, they may have had differing views in this regard. Their views may also have been influenced by the established educational system they themselves grew up with in Iran.

In the present study, it was also observed that there was no logical relationship between one's perceptions of efficacious learners and their gender or teaching experience. Regarding perceptions toward self-efficacy between female and male teachers in different scholastic settings,

previous studies have shown various and, in some cases, contradictory verdicts. Some researchers reported significant discrepancies in self-efficacy perceptions and its different constructs according to gender (e.g., Hackett et al., 1992; Marzban et al., 2012; Seidi, 2018; Erten & Topkaya, 2009; Valiante, 2001), which were not in line with the results of the current study. In contrast, other researchers reported no such relationship (e.g., Kissau, 2006; Mayall, 2002; Partovi & Tafazoli, 2016), which agrees with the results of the current study.

Moreover, with regard to self-efficacy and teaching experience, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) argued that experienced teachers are equipped with a stronger sense of self-efficacy compared to novices. In fact, a teacher's sense of efficacy can be defined as the judgments that they have about their abilities to bring about changes in the students, especially unmotivated ones (Chacón, 2005). More specifically, it can be said that teachers with high self-efficacy feel confident in making changes in difficult students or those who lack motivation. On the contrary, teachers who possess lower levels of self-efficacy experience disappointment in dealing with such pupils. As Bandura (1993) states, teacher self-efficacy can manifest how self-assured a teacher is with their competency to increase the students' learning outcomes. Also, it can influence their attitude toward efficacious learners. Teachers with more self-efficacy are more interested in and committed to teaching and would probably continue their job of teaching (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). On the contrary, teachers with lower levels of efficacy are less dedicated to their job and spend less time engaging in academic issues (Bandura, 1997).

It may be argued that teachers with more teaching experience also have stronger self-efficacy than novice teachers and this may affect their perceptions about efficacious learners. From this point of view, our findings are not in line with the idea of other researchers (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Although, the results of this study do align with the study of Berger et al. (2018) who reported that teaching experience did not affect teachers' perceptions. Additionally, our results also corroborate the findings of Huberman (1992), who also reported that there was no relationship between teaching experience and self-efficacy.

It is worth mentioning that an overall lack of any significant difference with regard to these factors (gender and teaching experience) can be good news. This implies that we would receive beneficial effects

from teacher education courses focusing on raising teacher awareness of different issues, such as the elements of efficacy, which need to be emphasized in language classes. We would like to argue that teacher' professional development programs need to integrate more materials to make teachers aware of the attitude they may hold regarding different concepts. As teachers are the key agents of change in this process, they need to receive more training during their professional development.

Still, the important point is that not only do learners need high self-efficacy, but teachers do too (Woolfolk & Hoy, 2003). While it is intuitively known that effective teachers have a great impact on the learners' success and achievements, the question remains of what low efficacious teachers do to promote academic attainment and academic success? The results of the current study showed that efficacy is teachable and is not determined by gender or teaching experience. Therefore, teachers can greatly benefit from teacher education courses or numerous other educational sources on self-efficacy and ways to enhance it.

6. Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious language learners. The possible roles of the teachers' gender and teaching experience were also explored. The results indicated that teachers considered five main factors as the most important, namely *learning self-regulation, ambiguity tolerance and adaptability, linguistic processing and production, self-assessment and memory strategies,* as well as *risk-taking and communication management*. Moreover, it was observed that no significant relationship existed between the gender and teaching experience of EFL teachers and their perceptions. As lack of self-efficacy is claimed to be one of the major problems of acquiring different language skills (Bandura, 2006), we suggest that EFL teachers become more familiar with the concept of self-efficacy and the important role it plays in language learning. This is vital since students with low self-efficacy will face motivational problems, which in turn will lead to only cursory attempts to learn (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

The results of this study could help crystalize the Iranian EFL teachers' underlying perceptions and attitudes to the construct of self-efficacy. Teacher educators may exploit these results through a clearer picture of the current position of this concept and move forward by raising

their awareness and understanding. Furthermore, teachers need to be equipped with techniques to assist struggling learners who believe they cannot succeed. In this regard, based on the results of the current study as well as existing literature (Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), we would like to suggest a set of strategies to enhance student self-efficacy. They are as follows: 1) Expose the learners to reasonably challenging tasks (not too simple or too hard); 2) Encourage struggling learners to try more and work on new learning strategies; 3) Explicitly call on the learners' previous success; 4) Bolster the students' confidence through regular compliments; 5) Utilize functional attribution statement (vs. dysfunctional ones) and remind the learners every now and then that success is possible and they can reach it through hard work and persistence.

Future studies may exploit the standard, validated, and reliable questionnaire devised for the first time in this study to gauge EFL teachers' perceptions of efficacious learners in different contexts and with diverse participants. Another area of inquiry could be investigating the impact of different teaching methods on the learners' self-efficacy level. It would also be very beneficial if future research is accompanied by qualitative procedures to enrich the findings.

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