

## **Research Note**

# **The Relationship between Personal Beliefs and Teaching Practice of ESL Teachers at an Asian Community Centre in Vancouver: A Qualitative Research in Progress**

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The problem statement of this study addresses three issues. First, the personal beliefs of English teachers about their personal language learning experiences may impact their current teaching behaviors. Second, according to Davies and Pearse (2000), if teachers can share their classroom practice and experience with their co-workers, teaching strategies tend to improve. Third, as Toronto is an international city which attracts a large number of English language learners, improving teaching practice may provide a positive experience and outcome for its students. According to Bernaus, Wilson, and Gardner (2009), teachers who are encouraged are particularly helpful in enhancing the learning experiences of students through different types of teaching and learning activities. This study aims to understand the relationship between the personal beliefs and teaching practices of ESL teachers and how these personal beliefs influence their classroom practice in a community center holding English language learning classes. Furthermore, this study draws attention to the concepts of the personal beliefs of teachers and learning experiences of students, as well as the improvement of English language classrooms.

## **Theoretical Framework**

An important tool for understanding the relationship between the personal beliefs of teachers and their teaching practice is self-efficacy theory. According to Bandura (1977), people should understand their behaviors and beliefs in the practice of teaching. Therefore, Bandura (2001) articulated that individuals select given job tasks based on their perceived capability to execute such tasks. Based on social learning theory, personal efficacy is a derivative of performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and degree of psychological arousal (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, the more a person anchors one's expectations on experiential sources, the greater are the perceived alterations in self-efficacy. The efficacy expectations model as proposed by Bandura (1977) is as shown in Figure 1.

Bandura (1977) reported that self-efficacy theory is the notion that an individual can produce a favorable outcome by executing or pursuing a task for which the individual has inherent competencies. Therefore, the self-efficacy model is associated with the individual perception of the capabilities to achieve set goals. In this context, the expectation that one can master a situation and derive positive results drives people to pursue specific tasks. For Bandura

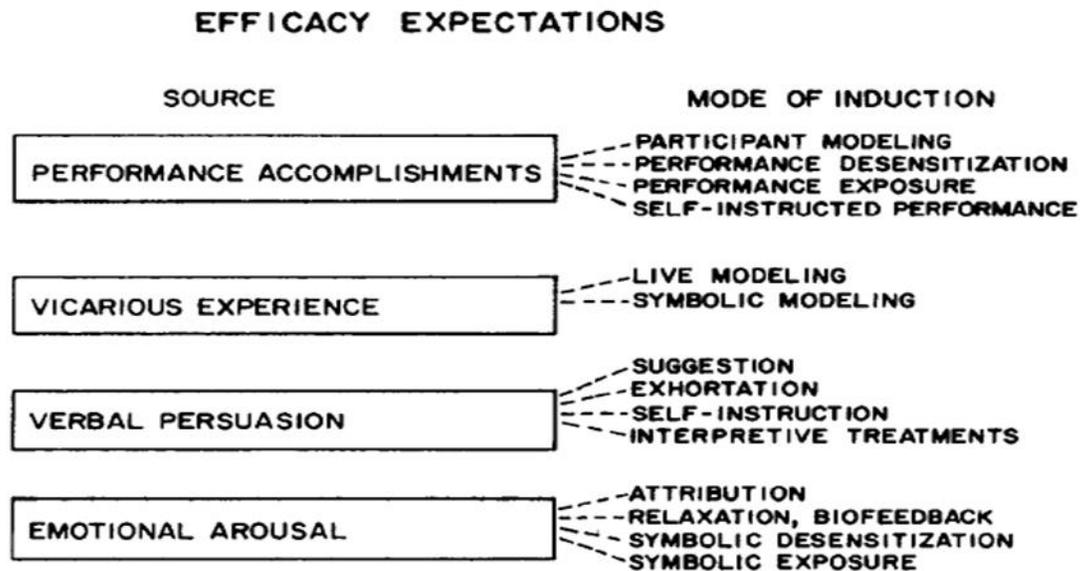


Figure 1. Major sources of efficacy information and the principal sources through which different modes of treatment operate (adapted from Bandura, 1977, p. 197).

(1977), the efficacy and strength of self-efficacy is altered by psychological procedures. Therefore, it is theorized that personal efficacy prospects help initiate the coping behavior of individuals. Furthermore, this determines the length of time such coping persists under obstacles and adversities. Bandura (1986) indicated the importance of the cognitive element in regulating individual behavior. Therefore, individual motivation toward a given task is rooted on cognitive behavior. Moreover, he stated that another cognitive source of motivation occurs through the intervening influences of self-evaluation and goal-setting. Bandura (1977) further reported that expectations alone do not produce desirable performance considering the lack of component capabilities that can culminate to unfavorable outcomes. However, the combination of pertinent skills and incentives determines individual choice and performance efficacy.

## Methodology

The study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

1. What is the relationship between ESL teachers' personal beliefs and their classroom practice at a community centre in Toronto?
2. How do ESL teachers' personal experience and background influence their pedagogies and teaching strategies in an English language learning classroom?

A qualitative research design is employed in this study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). A general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) with in-depth interviews, focus group activities, and member checking interviews are the primary tools in data collection. Qualitative research allows "understanding how people interpret their experience, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). The current study aims to understand the relationship between the personal beliefs and teaching practices of ESL teachers and how these personal beliefs about language teaching and learning influence their

classroom practice in a community center holding English language learning classes. This qualitative approach facilitates the understanding of this relationship (Merriam, 2009). Thomas (2006) refers to a general inductive approach as a methodology that “primarily uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (p. 238). Moreover, a general inductive approach can be easily employed as it is a simple and straightforward methodology for analysis that does not require detailed understanding and knowledge of a particular approach. Furthermore, this approach helps establish research themes by constantly reading and comparing the data in an iterative direction. The general inductive approach also keeps the research organized by providing a “systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data” (p. 238).

The research involves two community centers in the city center of Toronto. These community centers primarily cater to non-native speakers of the English language, including foreign students and new immigrants. The researcher joined the community center as a volunteer in mid-2015 and personally knew all potential participants. The researcher will contact the center administrators to obtain permission for the research via email. The letter will provide information including the rationale and purpose of the study, the nature of data collection process, the declarations on voluntary participation or non-participation, the protection of privacy, and the risks. The same letter will be distributed to potential participants with the permission of the administrators. Once the participants agree with the research, data collection will proceed.

Purposive sampling strategy will be used to invite potential English as a Second Language teachers at two community centers in Toronto, regardless of their employment status. The ideal number of participants is about 15-20 (Creswell, 2008). The demographic information of the participants, such as name and age, will be gathered and reported under pseudonyms.

Data will be primarily collected through individual in-depth interviews and focus group activities with a member checking interview. The researcher is the only interviewer and analyst in this study.

The research procedure is as follows. First, each participant will be invited to a semi-structured, one-on-one, face-to-face interview for 60-90 minutes. During the interview, participants are allowed to express their personal beliefs and understanding of teaching practices in their ESL classroom(s). Second, once all the participants complete the interviews, focus group activities will be assigned. The researcher will invite four to six participants in a focus group to share their personal beliefs and ideas. During the focus group activities, the researcher will serve as a coordinator to mark field notes. Third, after the researcher finishes all the data analysis, a 30-minute member checking interview will follow to confirm the validity and reliability of the results.

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