CHAPTER 7

TEACHERS' PERCEIVED STRENGTHS AND THE STRENGTHS PERCEIVED BY OTHER TEACHERS IN THE SAME TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

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Teachers' sense of efficacy is reported to have a considerable impact on teaching and learning processes. This study aims to determine teachers' perceived strengths and the strengths perceived by other teachers sharing the same teaching environment. The study included 25 English Language instructors teaching English as a foreign language at a School of Foreign Languages in a state university. The study utilized a qualitative design in which the participants responded to a form composed of open-ended questions. The form collected data about the teachers' perceived strengths as language teachers as well as the strengths of other teachers sharing the same teaching environment. Data obtained from the study were subjected to content analysis methods. The top-mentioned perceived strengths included being empathetic, being helpful, having good communication skills, adjusting teaching according to the level and needs of students, and having good communication/rapport with students. The top-cited strengths of other teachers included establishing good communicative relationships, being well-organized, being good at/experienced in teaching English, being patient, being a life-long learner, being hardworking, and being open to collaboration. The findings were also analyzed in terms of the consistency between the perceived strengths of teachers and the strengths perceived about them by others. The results showed consistency between perceived strengths and strengths perceived by others in the same teaching environment, yet strengths perceived by other teachers were found to be more varied and higher in number. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs should be explored and increased since self-efficacy enables to establish an effective learning and teaching environment.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' self-efficacy is associated with teaching and learning processes. While research done in previous years focused on investigating the effectiveness of

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teachers by components such as their knowledge of the content area, skills in conveying knowledge, skills in the lesson plan and classroom management, instructional presentation, etc., more recent research has begun to focus on teachers' beliefs and self-regulatory skills, which are considered to be necessary for teaching and learning (Bembenutty, 2007). According to the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), self-efficacy is the most important personal belief in human agency. Self-efficacy, originatied from Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive theory back in 1977, is also one of the most important indicators of student and teacher performance. Social Cognitive Theory according to Bandura (2006) posits that individuals are active actors who can manage their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Bandura (1986) believes that self-efficacy is associated with individuals' organizing their actions in a way that they can control the situation they are in.

While Bandura (1989; p.395) defines self-efficacy as "people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances", Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998; p.22) defines teacher efficacy 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". The terms teacher efficacy, teachers' sense of efficacy, or teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are used interchangeably in the literature.

The literature reports two dimensions of teacher efficacy that are referred as Personal Teaching Efficacy and General Teaching Efficacy (Gibson and Dembo, 1984 and Woolfolk and Hoy, 1990). While General Teaching Efficacy (GTE) is associated with teachers' self-efficacy beliefs associated with thoughts and attitudes towards education, Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE) is associated with teachers' beliefs about serving as influential agents on student learning (Poulou, 2007). On the other hand, teachers' self-efficacy is reported to be predicted by some factors. For instance, according to Tschannen – Moran and Woolfold-Hoy (2007), important predictors of self-efficacy for experienced teachers are contextual factors and support from colleagues while important predictors of self-efficacy for novice teachers are support from colleagues, satisfaction with performance, and resource support.

The role of the concept of teacher self-efficacy has been well-documented in the literature. For instance, Caprara et al. (2006) reported that self-efficacy had an impact on various constructs such as student performance and ability to deal with difficulties; Gibson and Dembo (1984) and Midgley et al. (1989) indicated the effect of self-efficacy on motivation; Mulholland and Wallace (2001) stated that self-efficacy affected teachers' instructional practices and use of innovative

techniques; Bandura (1997) stated that teachers' self-efficacy has effects on the kind of atmosphere they create in the classroom as well as the instructional practices they adopt; Muijs and Rejnolds (2001) reported the considerable impact of teachers' sense of efficacy on student achievement; and Ghasembolanda and Hashimb (2013) investigated the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and self-reported English proficiency and found that teachers' perceived efficacy was positively correlated with self-reported English proficiency. As reported by Ghasembolanda and Hashim (2013)," teachers' perceived efficacy is a multifaceted construct that varies across tasks and contexts where teachers do their teaching" (p.898). Therefore, exploration of English language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs through qualitative methods is considered to provide in-depth data regarding the concept of teacher's self-efficacy. Therefore, this study aims to determine teachers' perceived strengths and the strengths perceived by other teachers sharing the same teaching environment, a prep school of a public university in this context.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative design. It was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages of a public university located in southern Turkey. Around 1000 students who learned English as a foreign language were enrolled in the school where the study was conducted. Data were collected through a questionnaire that is composed of open-ended questions.

The participants were 25 language instructors who taught English as a foreign language. Of all the participants, 20 were Turkish teachers and 5 were foreign teachers who worked in the same institution. The participating teachers were asked to fill in the data collection form by first indicating their strengths as a teacher in one column, and the strengths of other teachers (three colleagues they know) in the same teaching environment in the other column. Since one of the purposes of the study was to find out the consistency of the data collected, the teachers were asked to fill in the data collection form individually and separately, indicate the names of the teachers whose strengths they mentioned, and keep their answers confidential until the data collection process was over. The data collection process was completed within three days, and the names indicated in the data collection forms were kept confidential.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis methods. Analyses included a) top-cited perceived strengths for self, b) top-cited strengths of other teachers in the same teaching environment, and c) consistency between teachers'

perceived strengths and their strengths indicated by other teachers in the same environment.

Initially, the top-cited perceived strengths were analyzed in the data analysis process. Hence, data were read and read by two researchers separately, and how many times a particular strength was mentioned by teachers was counted. The coding framework was generated inductively from the text statements in the data collection form (Rogers and Goodrick, 2010). The codes formed by two researchers were discussed to reach a consensus. The same procedure was followed for the top-cited strengths of other teachers as perceived by their colleagues. Finally, data belonging to randomly chosen five instructors were analyzed in terms of the consistency between the answers. Hence, the data obtained from the data collection form of a teacher were compared with the data obtained from other teachers regarding that specific teacher. Data obtained from the participating teachers' answers were supported with excerpts from the participants' written data.

FINDINGS

In the first part of the data collection form, the participants were asked to write about their own strengths as a teacher. Their responses are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Participating Teachers' Top-cited Perceived Strengths			
My strengths as a teacher			
Strengths	**f**	**Strengths**	**f**
I am empathetic	13	I am creative and imaginative	4
I am helpful	9	I am responsible	4
I have good communication skills	8	I am flexible	4
I am open to collaboration	7	I am disciplined	4
I can adjust my teaching by the levels of my students	6	I have positive attitudes	4
I am aware of my students' needs	6	I keep my lessons amusing-fun	4
I have a good rapport with students	5	I am reliable and honest	3
I am open to new ideas	5	I am organized	3
I love teaching	5	I am aware of the responsibilities of a teacher	3
I am patient	4	I like learning new things	3

As it is shown in Table 1, the perceived strengths of participating teachers included the followings as the top-mentioned items: I am empathetic (f=13), I am helpful (f=9), I have good communication skills (f=8), and I am open to collaboration (f=7). The teachers also mentioned items such as I am aware of my students' needs (f=6), I have good communication/rapport with students (f=5), I am open to new ideas (open-minded) (f=5), and I love teaching (f=5).

Table 2. Top-cited Strengths Mentioned by Other Colleagues			
My strengths as a teacher			
Strengths	**f**	**Strengths**	**f**
S/he established good communicative relationships	22	S/he creates a fun learning environment	7
S/he is well-organized	19	S/he is a good listener	6
S/he is good at/experienced in teaching English	18	S/he is dedicated	6
S/he is patient	11	S/he is energetic	6
S/he is a life-long learner	10	S/he is calm	5
S/he is hardworking	9	S/he uses extra materials to make lessons more effective	5
S/he is open to collaboration	8	S/he is open to communication	5
S/he is empathetic	8	S/he has good time management skills	5
S/he is disciplined	8	S/he is enthusiastic	5
S/he cares about his/her students	7	S/he has good technology skills	5

Table 2 demonstrates the top-cited strengths of colleagues about each other. The top-cited items included the followings: s/he establishes good communicative relationships (f=22), s/he is well-organized (f=19), s/he is good at/experienced in teaching English (f=18), and s/he patient (f=11). Other items included the following strengths: s/he is a life-long learner (f=10), s/he is hardworking (f=9), and s/he is open to collaboration (f=8). Some less frequently mentioned characteristics included the followings: s/he creates a fun learning environment (f=7), s/he is a good listener (f=6), s/he is dedicated (f=6), and s/he is energetic (f=6).

Another purpose of the study was to find out if there was consistency between the teachers' perceived strengths and the strengths mentioned by other teachers sharing the same teaching environment. The number of strengths mentioned by

both sides was also compared. In all the data collected, the number of strengths indicated by others was higher than the number of perceived strengths. Besides, the strengths perceived by teachers were found to be consistent with the strengths indicated by other teachers in the same environment. Some examples are as follows:

Teacher 1 indicated her strengths as a teacher as follows:

a. I create a fun teaching environment.

b. I make lessons fun and understandable.

c. I make sure that everyone understands the topic.

Data provided by her colleagues included the following strengths about Teacher 1:

a. *She uses extra materials to make teaching more effective.*
b. *She makes people enjoy the atmosphere.*
c. *Students like her and listen to her.*
d. *She has very good communication with her students.*
e. *She creates a fun and relaxed teaching environment.*
f. *he makes things fun for everyone.*

Teacher 1 mentioned three strengths of her while her colleagues mentioned six characteristics that they saw as her strengths. As the findings above suggest, the three strengths mentioned by Teacher 1 (a, b, c) are consistent with the strengths indicated by her colleagues (a, b, e, f).

Teacher 2 indicated her strengths as a teacher as follows:

a. *I am so disciplined.*
b. *I use the class time very effectively.*
c. *I always catch up with pacing.*
d. *I can simplify the topics for my students.*

Data provided by her colleagues indicated the following strengths:

a. *She can provide an orderly learning environment.*
b. *She sets rules and ensures that they are followed.*
c. *She has a clear and powerful teaching style.*
d. *Students listen to her and understand her.*
e. *Her students take her as a role model.*

Teacher 2 mentioned four strengths of her while her colleagues mentioned five characteristics that they saw as her strengths. The three strengths indicated by Teacher 2 (a, b, d) were also indicated by other teachers (a, b, c, d).

Excerpt

"*I set clear expectations about what students should do in and out of class to be successful, and I remind them of these on a regular basis. I also remind them regularly about the goals and benefits of the work they're doing now*".

Teacher 3 indicates his strengths as a teacher as follows:

a. *I am open to self-improvement.*
b. *I am sociable.*
c. *I am self-disciplined.*
d. *I am creative and imaginative.*

The strengths indicated by other teachers about Teacher 3 were as follows:

a. *He is energetic.*
b. *He has positive effects on people around him.*
c. *He keeps learning and teaching new things.*
d. *He knows his responsibilities about his job and fulfills them effectively.*
e. *He shares his knowledge with his colleagues willingly.*
f. *He has good communication skills.*
g. *He is reflective.*
h. *He is knowledgeable.*
i. *He is open-minded and creative.*
j. *He is easy-going.*
k. *He is helpful.*

Teacher 3 mentioned four strengths of him while his colleagues mentioned 11 characteristics that they saw as his strengths. Four strengths indicated by Teacher 3 (a, b, c, d) were consistent with the strengths indicated by other teachers in the same environment (b, d, f, i).

Excerpt

"*Teacher 3 makes extra efforts to find outside materials to keep his students engaged and challenged. He is a good role model; one feels his teaching performance even in daily conversations with him*".

Teacher 4 mentioned her strengths as a teacher as follows:

a. *I have good communication skills.*
b. *I am an engaging teacher.*
c. *I include humor and creative activities in my teaching.*
d. *I love teaching.*
e. *I enjoy the lessons myself.*
f. *My students try harder when they see my efforts.*

Data provided by her colleagues indicated the following strengths of Teacher 4.

a. *She helps students a lot.*
b. *She has good classroom management skills.*
c. *She is a loved and respected teacher and colleague.*
d. *She understands her students and helps others to empathize with them.*
e. *Her students have always been different, indicating her influence on them.*
f. *She is punctual.*
g. *She has very important effects on her students.*
h. *She is effective in teaching.*
i. *Her classes are fun.*
j. *She has an amazing effect on her students and colleagues.*

Teacher 4 mentioned six strengths of her while her colleagues mentioned 10 characteristics that they saw as her strengths. Six strengths indicated by Teacher 4 (a, b, c, e, f) were consistent with the strengths mentioned by other teachers in the same environment (b, d, g, h, i, j).

Excerpt

"I still remember the moment when Teacher 4 shifted my perspective about students a few years ago. This is about how humane she can get with students. There was a time where I always expected more of my students. Once, while I was complaining how they were not doing well enough or working hard enough, she – possibly without even realizing – helped me change the way I think about students".

The strengths indicated by Teacher 5 were as follows:

a. *I like my job and I am dedicated.*
b. *I am aware of my responsibilities.*
c. *I like being helpful and useful.*
d. *I am empathetic.*
e. *I try to motivate my students.*
f. *I make sure that everyone is active and engaged.*
g. *I have good communication with my colleagues.*

The strengths indicated by her colleagues were as follows:

a. *She has good work ethics.*
b. *She is good at planning and organizing.*
c. *She helps by providing explanations or instructions.*
d. *She is helpful.*
e. *She cares about her students' success and motivation.*
f. *She has good management skills.*

g. *She has positive attitudes and is empathetic.*
h. *She has good communication skills.*
i. *She is calm.*
j. *She has good IT skills.*
k. *She is well-organized.*

Teacher 5 mentioned seven strengths of her while her colleagues mentioned 11 characteristics that they saw as her strengths. Six strengths indicated by Teacher 5 (a, b, c, e, f, g) were consistent with the strengths indicated by other teachers in the same environment (a, d, e, g, h).

Discussion

This study aimed to determine teachers' perceived strengths and the strengths perceived by other teachers sharing the same teaching environment. The findings showed that the participating teachers were aware of their own strengths, indicating high self-efficacy, and perceived strengths and the strengths perceived by other teachers in the same teaching environment were consistent with each other.

As reported by Ghasemboland and Hashim (2013), "teachers' perceived efficacy is a multifaceted construct that varies across tasks and contexts where teachers do their teaching" (p.898). The findings of this study in this specific context were discussed in line with the top-mentioned strengths perceived by the teachers about themselves, the top-mentioned strengths of the teachers as perceived by their colleagues, and the consistency between the perceived strengths and the strengths perceived by other teachers.

The top-mentioned perceived strengths in this study were found as being empathetic, being helpful, having good communication skills, being open to collaboration, and adjusting teaching according to the level and needs of students. The teachers were found to see these characteristics as the indicators of their own strengths as a teacher, which is considered to indicate their high self-efficacy. Many of these top-mentioned factors were found to focus more on personality characteristics than teaching-related characteristics or competencies. Vorkapić (2015) also reported that when the subject was assessed based on the definition of a good teacher, very few answers were related to competence. Being empathetic and having good communication skills were perceived as a strength by the participants in this study. According to Cooper (2004), empathetic teachers have higher moral standards, have good communication, and encourage their students to establish similar relationships with others. Black et al. (2004) posit that teachers with strong efficacy beliefs build a persuasive communication style

and are considered knowledgeable and confident. The teachers in this study mentioned understanding students' needs and adjusting teaching according to their level as a strength. Alderman (1999) indicates that teachers who have high self-efficacy endeavor to create an effective learning experience through various strategies, methods, and techniques. Brouwers and Tomic (2000) reported that teachers' belief in their ability to provide both cognitive and emotional support to their students and to motivate them to learn more are associated with student participation.

This study found that the strengths perceived by other teachers were higher in number than the strengths perceived by teachers for themselves. The participating teachers mentioned having good communicative relationships, being well-organized, being good at and experienced in teaching English, being patient, and being a life-long learner as the top strengths of their colleagues. Having good communication skills was the top-mentioned item. In their study conducted with teacher candidates, Ozkan et al. (2014) found a positive correlation between communication skills and self-efficacy levels. They also indicated that teachers with lower communication skills contributed to the success of their students less. Being well-organized was another top-mentioned item in this study. Self-efficacy is associated with individuals' organizing their thoughts and behaviors, indicating high self-efficacy levels. Self-efficacy is reported to be a more consistent predictor of the results of the behaviors in comparison to other motivational variables (Schunk and Pajares, 2010). Teachers' thoughts about their colleagues' strengths also indicated being good at and experienced in teaching English. Solar Şekerçi (2011) found that self-efficacy belief was significantly predicted by experience, English competency, and self-reported proficiency. Klassen and Chiu (2010) reported that teachers' years of experience demonstrated a non-linear relationship with self-efficacy factors of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Being patient and being a life-long learner was also among the top-mentioned strengths of a teacher as perceived by other teachers. The literature reported that teachers with high self-efficacy are more tolerant, understanding, and encouraging towards their students, and they are more open to new ideas (Mızrak, 2019).

This study also sought the consistency between the perceived strengths of teachers and the strengths perceived about them by other teachers in the same environment. The results showed consistency between perceived strengths and strengths perceived by others in the same teaching environment, yet strengths perceived by other teachers were found to be more varied and higher in number. Responses of the teachers sharing the same teaching environment about both

their own strengths and the strengths of others reflected high self-efficacy levels and revealed the importance of individual and social characteristics making those teachers effective. These are associated with the involvement of both cognitive constructivism, which is concerned with the individual's construction of knowledge, and social constructivism, which refers to collaborative processes in knowledge building (Windschitl, 2002). The participants in this study emphasized the importance of these collaborative factors both for self and others. Briones et al. (2010) reported a direct influence of support from colleagues on teachers' self-efficacy. The findings of this study revealed evidence for social components of self-efficacy as a highly important factor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates evidence for teachers' high self-efficacy levels through the strengths elicited about themselves as well as other teachers. Given that self-efficacy beliefs are associated with positive teaching behaviors and student outcomes, teachers' self-efficacy should be investigated and increased through awareness-raising activities and teacher-training interventions. Strengthened self-efficacy is considered to reduce stress and burnout and increase the quality of educational practices.

This study was conducted in only one institution and utilized only qualitative data collection and analysis methods, and the findings were based on data obtained from the participants' self-reports. Further studies could investigate the issue through both qualitative and quantitative methods and in various teaching settings.

Acknowledgment

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