

TESOL Teacher Education: Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Their Preparedness and Efficacy in the Classroom

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This study examined the teacher education of novice teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL). A survey and follow-up interviews were employed to investigate novice teachers' perceptions about four aspects of their teacher preparation: (a) degree of preparedness to teach after graduating from a teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) program, (b) preparedness after classroom experience (up to 3 years), (c) sense of efficacy to complete teaching practices in adult ESOL classrooms, and (d) perceptions of what was useful to them in the TESOL program. Accredited ESOL teachers with less than 3 years of experience ($N = 115$) completed a questionnaire that explored their perceptions of preparedness and efficacy to teach in adult ESOL programs in Ontario, Canada. Eight teachers participated in follow-up semistructured interviews. Findings show that although, overall, novice teachers increased their perceptions of preparedness by gaining experience in the classroom, their sense of efficacy to perform within certain teaching expectations was task specific and highly situated. The practicum and "real" teaching experiences were found to be the most influential aspects of the induction programs. These findings have implications for teacher educators, TESOL institutions, and accreditation bodies that are committed to preparing qualified teachers for adult ESOL programs.

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The first years of practice are noted as a critical time for teachers. Teacher attrition often occurs in the early years of teaching and is highest among novice teachers within their first 5 years of teaching

(Moon, 2007), with approximately 40%–50% of novice teachers in North America reported to leave the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Maciejewski, 2007). During this period, novice teachers face the reality of the profession and decide whether teaching is the right career choice for them. For teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), this time has been characterized as a period of anxiety and a time of critical development (Farrell, 2009). It is also during the early years of teaching that teachers form their efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). After this initial career stage, teachers either strengthen their efficacy beliefs or leave the profession (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Given the fragility of these early years in a teacher's career, the issues of what teachers take away from induction programs, and how such programs prepare novice teachers for the tasks they are expected to accomplish in their teaching, become of paramount significance. A wealth of research supports the notion that well-prepared and knowledgeable teachers have a significant impact on student achievement (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000). The significance of the early years of teaching and issues related to novice teachers has received much attention in school-based education with children (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2003; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). However, little is known about the transition from preservice to in-service and the efficacy beliefs of novice teachers of language to adults (see Farrell, 2008). The purpose of this study is to address this gap. The research reported in this paper examined the perceptions of novice ESOL teachers about their preparation and efficacy to teach in adult ESOL classrooms. First, the conceptual framework, which draws on research in language teacher education and teacher self-efficacy beliefs, is presented. Then, the study, its methodology, participants, sources of data, and findings are described. Finally, the implications of the findings for policy and practice in language teacher education programs are discussed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Language Teacher Education

A key issue in second language teacher education is what teachers need to learn in teacher education and how this learning impacts their language teaching practices. Pivotal to this issue has been research concerned with establishing a common understanding of the core knowledge base that teachers need to develop in order to succeed as teachers. Traditionally, a shared knowledge base has been

viewed as consisting of certain domains of knowledge, such as pedagogical skills and linguistic expertise (e.g., Day, 1993; Lafayette, 1993; Richards, 1998). This perspective has since been reassessed to include a recognition that teacher learning is situated in a context and is constructed by individuals as they interact with the social and professional conditions of the environments in which they learn and teach (Johnson, 2006, 2009). Freeman and Johnson (1998) make a significant contribution by emphasizing the *activity* of teaching, which consists of three interrelated aspects: (a) the teacher-learner, (b) the social context, and (c) the pedagogical process. Their seminal work is the start of a new direction in second language teacher education that views teacher learning as highly situated and context dependent (Johnson, 2006, 2009).

In line with this focus on teacher knowledge as situated, a number of key issues have emerged that examine how teachers draw on what they know as opposed to what they are taught. These include an examination of the teaching process (e.g., Golombek, 1998; Tsui, 2003), knowledge (e.g., Gatlinton, 1999; Johnston & Goetsch, 2000), cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006), and beliefs (e.g., Almarza, 1996; Crandall, 2000; Farrell, 1999; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Peacock, 2001) that teachers hold about language teaching and learning and how their knowledge and beliefs guide their teaching practices (e.g., Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004; Freeman & Johnson, 2005; Tsui, 2003). Teachers' beliefs and perceptions about their teaching skills have a strong impact on their teaching effectiveness (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008) and, as such, merit investigation. In this article, this line of inquiry is captured by an examination of teacher preparedness and self-efficacy beliefs.

Teacher Preparedness and Self-Efficacy Beliefs

The focus on teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy draws support from research in (elementary and secondary) school-based teacher education. This focus is underpinned by research and theory in self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998), influenced by the work of Bandura (1977), define teacher self-efficacy as a teacher's beliefs about if and how he or she is able to implement a particular teaching task in a specific context. Teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy have significant implications for student learning. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs have been positively correlated with teacher persistence and level of success (Bandura, 1997), student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Eslami & Azizullah, 2008; Ross, 1992), student motivation (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), and

students' sense of efficacy (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988). Teachers' sense of efficacy has also been associated with the quality of classroom practices such as planning and organization as well as their efforts, aspirations, and investment in teaching (Allinder, 1994).

Bandura (1997) highlights that teacher self-efficacy is not consistent across various subject matter nor across various tasks. Self-efficacy beliefs are not stable and may fluctuate across time and space (Bong, 2006; Dellinger, Bobbett, Oliver, & Ellett, 2008). In this sense, teacher self-efficacy is highly situated and context-specific. Teachers make self-efficacy appraisals after they evaluate the complexity of the task and understand what skills are required to succeed in performing each task (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008). They analyze the teaching knowledge base required for each task in the specific context. In doing so, they often consider factors such as availability of resources and student characteristics (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). It is important to realize that self-efficacy appraisals are teachers' perceptions of their capabilities and competence and not their actual level of teaching competence (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Recognizing that self-efficacy beliefs are context specific (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Bong, 2006), scholars have examined teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in various subject areas such as science and math (e.g., Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, 2007), in special education (e.g., Podell & Soodak, 1993; Soodak & Podell, 1993, 1996, 1998), and in various teaching contexts such as culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Siwatu, 2007), resolving cultural conflicts (e.g., Siwatu & Starker, 2010), and teaching in urban and suburban schools (e.g., Siwatu, 2011). Self-efficacy theory and research has been used as a powerful tool to understand the processes of teacher learning in elementary and secondary teacher programs. Some research has explored aspects of self-efficacy in foreign language teaching settings (e.g., Atay, 2007; Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). For instance, Atay (2007) examined change in self-efficacy of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers during teacher education and found that the practicum had a positive influence on self-efficacy in some areas of practice and a negative effect in others. Also with EFL teachers, Chacon (2005) and Eslami and Fatahi (2008) confirmed that self-efficacy varied across tasks and teaching expectations and was linked to the teachers' self-assessment of their language proficiency. However, there is a gap in the existing literature about how novice teachers of ESOL perceive their own preparation and self-efficacy and how these factors play a role in supporting their development as language teachers. Given the situated nature of self-efficacy, the lack of research is noteworthy. This study addresses this gap.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate novice ESOL teachers' perceptions of their preparedness and efficacy to teach in adult English as a second language (ESL) classrooms after completing a teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) induction program. In particular, this research examines whether and how induction programs assist novice ESOL teachers in making the transition from preservice teachers to practicing ESOL teachers. The questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What is novice teachers' sense of preparedness to teach in adult ESOL classrooms after completing a TESOL induction program?
2. What are novice teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy to perform various teaching tasks in adult ESOL classrooms after completing a TESOL induction program?
3. What aspects and content of a TESOL induction program do novice teachers find useful and why?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in two phases: an online questionnaire and a set of follow-up interviews. The online questionnaire was designed primarily to explore the participants' perceptions of preparedness and efficacy to teach in adult ESOL classrooms in Ontario, Canada. The questionnaire began with information about the research and a request for informed consent. It included three sections. In the first section, items were designed to elicit demographic information. Teachers were asked about their professional background, including teaching qualifications and work experience. In the second section, participants were asked to identify how well they felt their teacher education had prepared them to teach in adult ESOL classrooms by responding on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all prepared*) to 10 (*extremely well prepared*). Additional questions elicited information on participants' sense of efficacy as language teachers by rating how confident they were in their abilities to complete various teaching practices expected of adult ESOL teachers. The teaching practices were drawn from the TESOL program accreditation requirements set by the

provincial accreditation body, TESL Ontario. TESOL programs accredited by TESL Ontario include 250 hours of in-class instruction and a 50-hour practicum consisting of 30 hours of observation and 20 hours of practice teaching. Responses to the list of the 20 teaching items, included in Table 3, was subjected to reliability analysis indicating a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .95. In the final section, participants were asked to share general attitudes and beliefs about the overall usefulness of their teacher education program and the value of specific content and program features. The survey was piloted with three practicing and accredited ESOL teachers, and the final version was distributed among potential participants via the professional accreditation body and personal contacts of the researchers.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they would be interested in participating in follow-up interviews. From this group, participants were selected on the basis of their responses to the online questionnaire, with a particular focus on questions related to preparedness. The criteria used for selection was as follows: (a) individuals who indicated preparedness upon graduation at the higher end of the scale (8–10), (b) individuals who indicated preparedness at the lower end of the scale (1–3), and (c) individuals whose responses for preparedness upon graduation and preparedness after gaining teaching experience showed a marked difference from the others, either as a reduction or an increase in preparedness. Interviews were carried out in person or by phone and were audiotaped and transcribed. Participants responded to a set of seven core questions and four customized questions designed to probe the particular responses of the participants. The first set of questions asked participants to elaborate on their personal experiences when they first started teaching and the type of support they received or did not receive; these questions also further elicited their suggestions for TESOL program development. The customized questions probed for reasons and factors that may have contributed to strong or weak assessments of preparedness upon graduation or an increase or decrease over time. This article includes the data gathered in the customized questions.¹

Participants

A total of 115 novice teachers completed the survey, and 66 teachers volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews. Based on their responses to the questions about their perceptions of preparedness, 8 teachers were selected from the group of 66 to participate in the

¹ The survey is available at www.yorku.ca/surveys/survey.php?sid=1089.

interviews. All the participants were accredited TESOL teachers practicing within their first 3 years. Based on the demographic information, the following profile emerged: 95 respondents (84%) were female and 18 (16%) were male, 85 (75%) had completed a bachelor degree, 25 (22%) had a master's degree, and 4 (3%) had completed a doctorate. The age of the participants was fairly well distributed, with 20%–32%, or between 23 and 36 of the respondents, falling in one of four age ranges: younger than 31 years old, 31–40, 41–50, and over 50. Their teaching experience was also distributed evenly in the following ranges: 36 teachers (31%) had less than 3 months of teaching experience, 28 (24%) had 4–12 months, 24 (21%) had 1–2 years, and 27 (23%) had 2–3 years. With regard to intensity of their TESOL training, 73 (63%) of the respondents had completed their TESOL programs full time, and the remaining 42 (37%) did so part time. Table 1 summarizes the profile of the survey participants. For three of the categories, one or two respondents declined to give the information, and the number is indicated.

Data Analysis and Results

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, means, and standard deviations) calculated for the sense of preparedness and efficacy questionnaire data. This article reports on quantitative analysis of the responses to the following survey questions: (a) After you completed your TESOL certificate

TABLE 1
Profile of the Participants

Gender (<i>n</i> = 113)	Age (<i>n</i> = 114)	Education (<i>n</i> = 114)	Intensity of program (<i>n</i> = 115)	Teaching experience (<i>n</i> = 115)
Female (<i>n</i> = 95) 84%	Under 30 (<i>n</i> = 28) 25%	Bachelor degree (<i>n</i> = 85) 75%	Full time (<i>n</i> = 73) 63%	< 3 months (<i>n</i> = 36) 31%
Male (<i>n</i> = 18) 16%	31–40 (<i>n</i> = 27) 24%	Master's degree (<i>n</i> = 25) 22%	Part time (<i>n</i> = 42) 37%	4–12 months (<i>n</i> = 28) 24%
	41–50 (<i>n</i> = 23) 20%	Doctorate (<i>n</i> = 4) 3%		1–2 years (<i>n</i> = 24) 21%
	Over 50 (<i>n</i> = 36) 32%			2–3 years (<i>n</i> = 27) 23%

program, how prepared did you feel to teach ESOL to adults? (b) How prepared do you *now* feel to teach ESOL to adults? and (c) Please rate your effectiveness *now* as a teacher to perform teaching expectations (outlined in Table 3) in an adult ESOL classroom. For the third question, participants were asked to rate their sense of preparedness and efficacy on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 represented *not at all prepared/effective* and 10 *extremely well prepared/effective*. The term *preparedness* is used in this study as a general term to refer to teachers' overall sense of preparedness to teach, and the term *efficacy* to refer to specific classroom expectations.

Qualitative analysis included identifying themes from the open-ended questions on the questionnaire and the interview data probing teachers' reasons for changes in preparedness. All interviews were transcribed in full. Analysis of the interview data and open-ended questions of the survey included reading the transcripts for content analysis (Creswell, 2003) to derive codes that were later organized into themes. The open-ended survey questions that were qualitatively analyzed were as follows: (a) What aspects (characteristics such as duration, intensity, instructors, practicum, etc.) of the TESOL certificate program you attended did you find the most useful? What was the least useful? (b) What content (topics covered in the program, such as grammar, teaching the skills, theory, etc.) in the TESOL program you attended did you find the most useful? What was the least useful? The themes that related to the research questions are discussed in this article.

Preparedness to Teach in Adult ESOL Programs

Analysis of the responses to the question of preparedness indicates that the average preparedness of the 115 participating teachers to teach in adult ESOL programs after completing a TESOL certificate program was 6.7, on a scale of 0 to 10, with a standard deviation of 2. Analysis of participants' assessment of their level of preparedness at the time of the study reveals an average increase of 1.2 points, from 6.7 to 7.9, with a standard deviation of 1.8. Paired samples *t*-test analysis showed this increase to be statistically significant: $t(114) = -6.7$, $p = .000$, $d = -0.624$. This analysis shows development, as reflected in an increased sense of preparedness, from the time they graduated to a point at which they had gained some experience in the classroom.

Further analysis shows the frequency and distribution of the 115 participants' responses from 0 to 10 for both of the open-ended questions (see Figure 1).

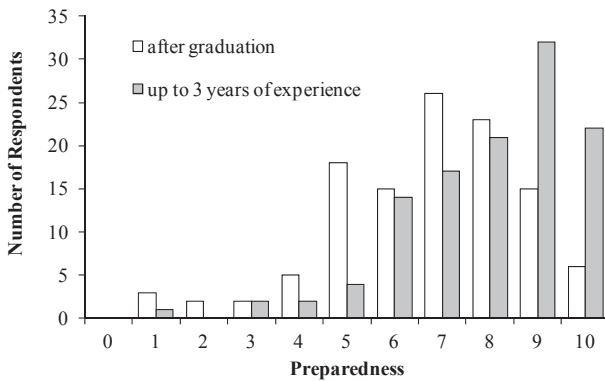


FIGURE 1. Distribution of responses to preparedness at time of study and after graduation.

At the time of the study 7 (6%) of the teachers indicated they were not adequately prepared (i.e., they selected 1, 2, or 3) to teach in adult ESOL programs, and 44 (38%) reported they were very well prepared to teach (8, 9, or 10). More than half (68, or 59%) of participating novice teachers indicated an increase in their sense of preparedness from the time they completed their TESOL certification program until the time of the study, with 9 (13%) of this group reporting an increase of more than 4 points. Of the others, 30 (26%) showed no change and 17 (15%) indicated that their sense of preparedness had in fact decreased.

Figure 2 shows the responses of participants on their sense of preparedness after completion of their TESOL program and gaining up to 3 years of teaching experience. It should be noted that the number of participants ($N = 115$) is more than the number of dots shown due to the similarity of responses. The number of responses above the line is more than the number below the line, which indicates that teaching experience, in general, increases teachers' perceived sense of preparedness. Had there been no observed progress in respondents' sense of preparedness from graduation up to the time of the study, all responses would have fallen on the 45-degree line.

The data from the follow-up interview support these findings. The interviews probed for more information from those participants who had indicated levels of preparedness at either end of the continuum from 0 to 10 or those that indicated a change, either an increase or decrease, greater than the mean change of 1.22. Table 2 summarizes the profiles of these eight individuals, identified by pseudonym, and their survey responses.

When asked to elaborate on their sense of preparedness and the changes, if any, between graduation and the present time, participants

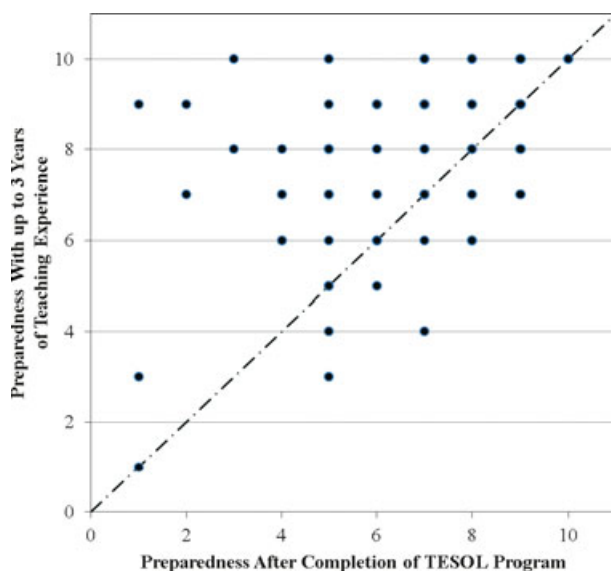


FIGURE 2. Perceived preparedness after completion of TESOL program and at time of study.

TABLE 2
Sense of Preparedness and Change

Name	At graduation	At time of study	Change
Kate	3	8	+ 5
Farin	5	9	+ 4
Karen	7	10	+ 3
Katrina	5	3	- 2
Elizabeth	9	7	- 2
Rita	7	4	- 3
Zack	10	10	0
Jack	1	1	0

gave a variety of responses. However, a number of common themes were evident. Those who had indicated an increase in their sense of preparedness, Kate, Farin, and Karen, commented on the value of the classroom experience and contact with the students. Kate indicated that “living the real experience of teaching in the real classroom” had helped increase her sense of preparedness after graduation. Karen mentioned that “getting comfortable in the classroom” after gaining some teaching experience significantly contributed to the increase in her sense of preparedness. Farin felt validated by the positive feedback that she received from students, which in turned helped boost her

confidence about herself and her abilities as a teacher. Both Karen and Kate also talked about practical aspects of their teaching, knowing how to find resources and how to plan. They reported feeling more prepared once they knew where and how to find appropriate resources for their classrooms and how to design more effective lesson plans. For Karen, specifically, learning how to improve her teaching “when things don’t go well in the classroom” was significant in increasing her perceived sense of preparedness. She reported that she now had the “notion that not everything works all the time” but because she had a better sense of the classroom dynamics, compared to when she started to teach, she was not concerned.

The participants who indicated a decrease also gave a range of responses. Both Katrina and Rita, who indicated a decrease of 2 points and 3 points, respectively, in preparedness, described feeling frustrated with the opportunities for work as an ESOL teacher. Katrina had very little experience, limited to a volunteer period of a couple of hours a week in the 4 months since graduating, and her responses focused on the quality of the program she attended rather than her experience in the classroom. Because she was not able to secure a teaching position, she expressed concern that “the knowledge just disappears, even though [she was] certified.” At the time of the interview, she was working as a bank manager and not teaching or volunteering. Rita also described being discouraged after not being able to find a teaching job and felt that material and teaching strategies were constantly changing so that it was difficult for her to keep up her sense of preparation. Both Katrina and Rita felt they had lost their confidence in their abilities to teach when they did not find a teaching position immediately after graduation. Their diminishing confidence contributed to their perceived decrease in their sense of preparedness to teach. Elizabeth also showed a decrease of 2 points from 9 to 7 and cited a different reason: a mismatch between her training and her classroom experience. She described being adequately prepared to teach ESOL literacy in her teacher training program but as her first assignment being placed in a class teaching students who were preparing to take the TOEFL. Her classroom assignment highlighted her need for a more in-depth knowledge of grammar and she elaborated, “That’s a challenge—going into a program where the students know more than I do,” referring to the grammatical knowledge and orientation of many students studying for the TOEFL. Hence, in the case of Elizabeth, the lack of preparation for the specific teaching task she was assigned to do contributed to a decrease in her perceived sense of preparedness.

Jack indicated very low preparedness both after graduation and at the time of the study. He described having a negative experience in

his TESOL program and cited an inability to adjust to the expectations of the program and the field. He described his educational experience and approach to teaching as “traditional/classic” and not aligned to the “creative” approach or learner-centered approaches recommended for TESOL. He felt he might be better suited to teach more advanced levels and focus on teaching conversation. His practicum placement had been in a class of lower levels, and he felt unsuited to teaching at a basic level. He described his perceived low sense of preparedness after graduation and frustrations as follows:

I did not have a clear sense of where I would have to go, what I would have to do. . . . We had some basic teaching about lesson preparation, course preparation. But really, I think, if you said I would have been hired in a week, after the course, I would be scrambling day and night for a long time to put things together.

In contrast, Zack indicated strong levels of preparedness, 10 and 10, both at the time of graduation and at the time of the study, a year after graduation. He talked about feeling very comfortable teaching grammar and pronunciation because of his previous graduate degree and experience as a journalist and translator/interpreter. He described feeling “like a fighter who has been trained and given all the keys to triumph in his battle” and even though he indicated the same high level of preparedness, he went on to describe feeling frustrated with his job search. He referred to recent cutbacks and specific employer requirements as having an effect on his enthusiasm and described job searching as “a hoax that kills you from inside.” His lack of success in finding a teaching position had not impacted his perceived sense of preparedness to teach but had resulted in a high level of frustration with the nature of the ESOL teaching profession in Ontario.

Sense of Efficacy

Sense of efficacy was explored as context-specific expectations of TESOL teachers in practice. Of the expectations listed in Table 3, novice teachers overall reported that they felt most prepared to (a) manage classrooms effectively ($M = 8.2$, $SD = 1.7$), (b) select appropriate material to use in the classroom ($M = 8.1$, $SD = 1.6$), and (c) design effective lesson plans ($M = 8.0$, $SD = 1.7$). They felt least prepared to (a) teach ESL literacy ($M = 6.1$, $SD = 3.0$), (b) teach English for academic purposes ($M = 6.5$, $SD = 2.7$), and (c) teach English in a foreign language context ($M = 6.6$, $SD = 2.7$). Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for all the areas in order of means from lowest to highest.

TABLE 3
Sense of Effectiveness for Specific Teaching Tasks and Contexts

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Teach ESL literacy	6.1	3.0
2. Teach English for academic purposes	6.5	2.7
3. Teach English in a foreign language context	6.6	2.7
4. Use professional resources and engage with organizations in the field	6.7	2.0
5. Use technology to teach language	6.9	2.4
6. Use the LINC curriculum guidelines	6.9	2.5
7. Use the Canadian Language Benchmarks in teaching	7.0	2.6
8. Develop tests for the classroom	7.0	2.2
9. Teach pronunciation	7.4	2.0
10. Teach international students in Canada	7.4	2.4
11. Teach grammar	7.5	1.9
12. Teach listening skills	7.6	1.9
13. Use a variety of teaching methods	7.7	1.8
14. Teach writing skills	7.7	1.8
15. Develop appropriate material to use in the classroom	7.9	1.8
16. Teach speaking skills	7.9	1.8
17. Teach reading skills	7.9	1.8
18. Design effective lesson plans	8.0	1.7
19. Select appropriate material to use in the classroom	8.1	1.6
20. Manage classrooms effectively	8.2	1.7

In addition to the means for each of the areas, the standard deviation shows that a number of areas elicited a wider variation in responses: teach ESL literacy ($SD = 3.0$), teach English for academic purposes ($SD = 2.7$), teach English in a foreign language context ($SD = 2.7$), use the Canadian Language Benchmarks ($SD = 2.6$), use the LINC curriculum guidelines ($SD = 2.5$), and teach international students in Canada ($SD = 2.4$). These results suggest that the context and teaching situation play a role in terms of how teachers perceive their efficacy.

Teachers' Perceptions of Their TESOL Program

Specific questions investigated how the teachers perceived aspects and content of their TESOL programs in terms of usefulness. Although this was addressed in two questions on the survey, in the analysis the responses to these questions are combined because it became apparent that although the distinction was made in the survey, with regard to aspect (referring to characteristics such as duration, intensity, and instructors) versus content (referring to topics such as grammar, teaching the skills, theory), the participants had chosen to respond more holistically to these questions. In reporting the findings, both aspects and content are referred to as features.

When asked to identify the most useful features of their TESOL programs, participants most often cited the practicum experience, with 82 of the 115 participants mentioning this aspect. The value of the practicum experience was described by some as providing the opportunity to “really get a feel for the classroom” and develop a “hands-on approach to how to structure an ESL classroom and gave us insight on our personal teaching methodologies.” Another participant described how the practicum facilitated “a smooth transition to be an ESL teacher.” In fact, in their recommendations on how to modify TESOL programs, many teachers commented that the duration of the practicum should be increased. This quote from one survey respondent reflects this concern: “The practicum was the most useful. It would have been more helpful if we had more practicum and less in-class learning.”

The quality of instructors was cited by 38 participants. They wrote positively about the dedication and in some cases passion of their instructors, their extensive knowledge base, their teaching methods, and the quality of feedback they provided. Some comments include “instructors were very knowledgeable and experienced” and “made the program interesting and relevant.” Another feature of their programs that emerged as important to participants was the duration and scheduling. A number of participants commented on how helpful it was to be able to complete the program on a full-time basis over a short period of time, for some as little as 4 months, or in some cases part time, accommodating a work schedule.

In describing the least useful features of their TESOL programs, participants wrote extensively about theory instruction, ranging from theories of second language acquisition to theoretical linguistics. The respondents seemed to be most concerned when the application of theoretical discussions was not the focus of their lessons. Some commented that “the [TESOL] course needs to be edited for content to include more of the practical aspects of working in teaching,” “I found that the courses were heavy on theory but too light on concrete teaching of skills. Some theory is useful but we need to have more tools to use when teaching,” and “the different theories were interesting, but not very helpful in the real classroom.”

Grammar appeared to be a controversial feature of TESOL programs. Grammar was cited by 76 of the 115 respondents, which suggests that it was one of the most significant (after practicum) features of the program, yet comments regarding the nature of grammar offerings were inconsistent. Most respondents commented that grammar was a very useful component of their program and that they even needed more grammar instruction: “our course did not spend enough time in important areas, like grammar”; “I found the grammar very

useful, but I could have used much more”; “the grammar was useful in that I am a native English speaker and needed to learn, explicitly, the structures of the language that I learned mostly implicitly.” Yet other comments indicated a lack of appreciation of grammar in their program: “the course on grammar wasn’t very useful.” What emerged in discussions around grammar seemed to be (a) the background of the respondent (i.e., whether he or she learned English as a first or second language) and (b) the nature of grammar instruction in the TESOL program.

DISCUSSION

In response to the question of novice teachers’ sense of preparedness after completing a TESOL program, overall, the participants in this study felt moderately prepared to teach ESOL to adults and better prepared after gaining some teaching experience. A closer examination, however, showed variation: Despite the overall increase in teachers’ feelings of preparedness, some teachers reported a decrease and others no change at all. This variation appears to reflect the impact of classroom experience, the nature of employment, and the specific tasks and teaching contexts.

Novice teachers’ assessment of their abilities to succeed in the classroom appears closely linked to their experience of the classroom during the practicum and their abilities to adjust to the new reality once teaching in the field. On the question of what novice teachers find useful in their TESOL programs, findings indicate an emphasis on the value of the practicum and a concern with “surviving” the realities of the classroom. Interviews with some of these teachers underscored the need to adjust to classroom realities after completing TESOL teacher training. These findings echo much of the work of Farrell (2003, 2009) and others who describe the novice teachers’ first experiences with the classroom as a type of “reality check.” Those who were not able to make the adjustment questioned their ability to continue in the field, a phenomenon of attrition that is well documented in school-based contexts (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Moon, 2007) but has not been documented in adult ESOL education contexts.

Of note is the employment experience of the novice teachers entering the profession after they graduate. Some of the teachers with the lowest self-efficacy ratings had not been able to find stable employment immediately after completing their teacher education. This reduced their opportunity for mastery experiences that can contribute to perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Unlike graduates of school-based teacher

education programs, TESOL graduates receive very little support in their employment search. They are usually left to their own devices to find work in a field that is characterized by a diverse range of employment options, including part-time and highly specific contexts. These frustrations were evident in this study when teachers questioned whether they would remain in the field much longer if they did not find the employment they were expecting.

In addition to questions of overall preparedness, novice teachers' sense of their own effectiveness to carry out specific teaching duties underscored the situated nature of teacher efficacy, a cornerstone of efficacy theory posited by Bandura (1997) and others (e.g., Bong, 2006; Dellinger et al., 2008). This finding is also consistent with previous research that found differences in self-efficacy across teaching expectations and tasks (e.g., Atay, 2007; Hoy & Spero, 2005). The areas in which, overall, teachers rated themselves most effective were those that can be addressed by more concrete skills development, that is, classroom management, selecting material, and planning. The finding related to classroom management contrasts with the literature, which shows this to be an area of high stress for K-12 teachers (e.g., Fantilli & McDougall, 2009) and as such may reflect the nature of adult education, in which learners are self-motivated and usually able to make choices regarding their participation in the programs and discipline problems are not ordinarily an area of challenge for teachers. The areas in which the novice teachers expressed lower levels of efficacy were also highly contextual, a factor shown to be significant in teachers' assessment of their efficacy (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008). The specific contexts cited require teachers to adapt teaching to the specific nature of the learners and the program: ESL literacy, English for academic purposes, and EFL.

The value of the practicum reflects the same context- and task-specific considerations. Novice teachers in the present study valued the practicum because they drew on it to manage classrooms and plan appropriate lessons, two of the areas that received the highest efficacy ratings. The challenges they faced in teaching in specific contexts, given lower efficacy ratings, may also reflect the lack of practicum in these contexts. Teachers may have been unprepared to use theoretical knowledge to adapt to these different contexts because they relied on skills attained, or lacking, in firsthand exposure during the practicum. The same concern with the realities of the classroom was reinforced by the teachers' evaluations of what was least useful. Theory and grammar were not overwhelmingly rejected or accepted by the teachers. The usefulness of these features of their TESOL program experience appeared linked to the quality of instruction and how well they were situated in the TESOL classroom so that teachers could apply them in practice.

IMPLICATIONS

These findings have implications for TESOL program developers and teacher educators, for professional associations and accreditation bodies, and also for teachers themselves. For TESOL program providers and teacher educators, the findings suggest that a broader view of the profession is warranted, one that includes the understanding that TESOL programs are preparing teachers to join a professional community, not just a classroom. They should prepare teachers by raising awareness of the wider issues in the field so that novice teacher expectations may be more closely aligned with the realities of not only the classroom but the employment context as well. Graves (2009) describes the essential role of collaborative relationships between schools and teacher education institutions. Although such partnerships are usually created for the purpose of practicum placement, they may also provide links for novice teachers to become apprenticed to the professional employment contexts and make links in the field before leaving the relatively secure haven of the teacher education program.

The overwhelming concern with the practicum component and the application of knowledge suggests that TESOL providers need to reexamine the role, nature, and duration of the practicum and situate it within the program as an integrated component. Currently, most TESOL programs include the practicum as a separate course to be completed after the 250 hours of in-class instruction rather than as experiences dispersed throughout the induction period (Stoyhoff, 1999). By integrating the practicum component in the program, teachers have the opportunity to connect in-class instruction with actual language classroom experiences. This can provide a more cohesive experience for teacher candidates, one in which every feature and component has value, and utility, in their first years of practice. An integrated practicum may help novice teachers make sense of their teacher education more holistically and be better able to adapt to classroom contexts outside of their immediate experience. The findings regarding efficacy also suggest that TESOL teacher educators look closely at what elements and experiences contribute to the development of efficacy. This could include creating scenarios and simulations that allow teachers to adapt instruction to different contexts while still in the supportive environment of their teacher education program.

This research also suggests an important role for regulatory bodies and professional associations. Such organizations are well positioned to take a leadership role for their members by building bridges and

collaborative relationships with TESOL programs. This would help TESOL programs respond to the demands of the change and development in the field. Novice teachers and teacher candidates too may learn from these findings. They bear some responsibility to become cognizant of the profession in their particular context and develop expectations that are aligned with reality. In this way, they are able to engage in opportunities to develop beyond their novice years to expert teachers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A number of limitations warrant consideration. The nature of data collection with an online survey may have affected the quality of the data collected. By providing selections, the survey may have directed the respondents and limited the range of responses provided. Follow-up interviews were designed to mitigate this limitation. Another limitation stems from the attempt to tap into each individual's assessment of preparedness in the past, at the point of graduation, by asking them to recall the impressions some time later, filtered through subsequent experience. A longitudinal study that follows novice teachers from the point of graduation through the experiences of the early years spent teaching might capture a more genuine picture of their self-assessments. Finally, the application of efficacy theory as a methodological foundation must be noted. Efficacy theory has been criticized for its construct validity (Gist & Mitchell, 1992) and doubts as to whether individuals can accurately predict behavior (Eastman & Marziller, 1984; Hawkins, 1995).

The research agenda in teacher education will continue to examine how teacher education can be improved to address the needs of teachers—and consequently the learners. In the present study, the focus was on the voice of the teachers and how they perceive their teacher education and their own abilities to effectively perform in their roles as teachers. A number of questions arise: How do individuals make sense of their novice experiences as they attempt to apply their teacher training? In this study, individual differences appeared to play a role in how teachers assessed their own ability to be effective ESOL teachers. Yet it is unclear to what degree these differences are rooted in individual background, motivation, or quality of early experience. Answers to questions such as these may be uncovered in research that engages teachers at all stages of their careers as they move from teacher candidates to novice and expert teachers.

CONCLUSION

Effective teacher education is widely accepted as essential to achieving learning outcomes in the classroom. Research in teacher education often aims to understand teacher learning and to apply this understanding to developing best practices in teacher education programs. This article drew attention to particular areas of teacher education that appeared to play a role for novice teachers: the significant role teacher educators play in preparing teachers, the need to connect theory and practice, the important role of the practicum in preparing teachers for classroom realities, and the importance of teachers' ability to adapt their skills and knowledge to different contexts, classrooms, and professional demands. The need to be adaptable, in particular, is crucial for novice teachers who, upon graduating, step into a variety of contexts and then must learn to engage in, and direct, their own teacher development throughout their careers. Of interest, however, is also the degree to which the impact and effectiveness of teacher education varied among the teacher participants. A number of factors appeared to have had an impact on how individual teachers made sense of the professional skills and knowledge addressed in their teacher education. Individuals interpret their teacher preparation through the lens of past experience, expectations, and personal differences and then reinterpret it in a myriad of classroom contexts. This complexity highlights the need to develop a greater understanding of how teachers engage with the processes and content of their teacher education programs and how teacher candidates shape their experiences during this time of development and in the early years of practice.

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