The Interplay of Teacher Training, Access to Resources, Years of Experience and Professional Development in Tertiary ESL Reading Teachers' Perceived Self-Efficacy¹

La Relación entre Formación Docente, Acceso Recursos, Experiencia Docente y Desarrollo Profesional en la Autoeficacia Percibida por los Docentes en la Enseñanza de la Lectura en Inglés como Segunda Lengua

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Abstract

Through a mixed methods approach, this study collected data on the current state of IEP teachers' perceived self-efficacy in teaching ESL reading, and the factors that may affect this. Statistical analyses of surveys show a number of relationships among the factors explored: years of teaching, perceived self-efficacy, amount of pre-service training, amount of professional development and availability of resources. To detail the experiences of these instructors, responses from follow-up interviews are discussed. Taken together, the results of this study underscore the need for ESL teacher training programs and IEP institutes to devote greater effort in preparing faculty to teach ESL reading skills effectively.

Keywords: ESL reading, teacher training, self-efficacy

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Resumen

A través del enfoque de métodos mixtos, este estudio recolectó información actualizada de la percepción de los docentes de IEP sobre la autoeficacia en la enseñanza de la lectura en inglés como segunda lengua y los factores que podrían afectar el proceso. El análisis estadístico de las encuestas muestra una serie de relaciones entre los factores explorados: años de experiencia docente, autoeficacia percibida, grado de formación inicial docente, grado de desarrollo profesional, y disponibilidad de recursos. Para detallar las experiencias de los docentes se discutieron las entrevistas de seguimiento. Los resultados de este estudio destacan la necesidad de los programas de formación de profesores de inglés como segunda lengua de dedicar un mayor esfuerzo en la preparación de profesores para enseñar de manera efectiva habilidades de lectura.

Palabras clave: Lectura en inglés como segunda lengua, formación docente, autoeficacia

Resumo

Através do enfoque de métodos mistos, este estudo recolheu informação atualizada da percepção dos docentes de IEP sobre a auto-eficácia no ensino da leitura em inglês como segunda língua e os fatores que poderiam afetar o processo. A análise estatística das enquetes mostra uma série de relações entre os fatores explorados: anos de experiência docente, auto-eficácia percebida, grau de formação inicial docente, grau de desenvolvimento profissional, e disponibilidade de recursos. Para detalhar as experiências dos docentes se discutiram as entrevistas de seguimento. Os resultados deste estudo destacam a necessidade dos programas de formação de professores de inglês como segunda língua de dedicar um maior esforço na preparação de professores para ensinar de maneira efetiva habilidades de leitura.

Palavras clave: Leitura em inglês como segunda língua, formação docente, auto-eficácia

Introduction

ell-developed reading skills are an undeniably important part of a student's course of study throughout schooling. It has been shown that children who read proficiently are more likely to succeed in school (NICHD, 2000; TEAL, 1995) and less likely to dropout. Additionally, "children with weak literacy skills are also more likely to enter the criminal justice system and to be underemployed" (Guo & Morrison, 2012, p. 3).

Several factors affect a student's reading skills such as attentiveness in the classroom, home background, and attitude towards reading (Rowe, 1995), but research suggests that teachers themselves play one of the most influential roles in students' achievement (Guarino, Hamilton, Lockwood, & Rathbun, 2006). Beyond teacher qualifications, a growing line of investigation takes an interest in teacher self-efficacy and its influence on student success in the classroom. Self-efficacy is defined as "the individual's perceived expectancy of obtaining valued outcomes through personal effort" (Fuller, Wood, Rapoport, & Dornbusch, 1982, p. 7) in terms of their abilities to think, plan, organize and perform activities needed in successful classrooms (Bandura 1997, 2006).

Teacher self-efficacy is integral to teacher success and sustainability because it is directly related to knowledge and skills required for effective teaching (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1992; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teachers who report levels of higher self-efficacy tend to experience greater perseverance, increased flexibility to cope with obstacles and an increased feeling of self-accomplishment (Bandura, 1997). Such teachers also have an increased awareness of how they are teaching, what their goals are, and are able to relate student outcomes to their teaching practices (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). Additionally, teachers reporting low self-efficacy have been shown have higher levels of emotional exhaustion from class disturbances due to lack of classroom management (Dickle et al., 2014). Consequently, research into perceptions of teacher self-efficacy can shed light on best teaching practices and assessment in the classroom (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008).

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Many studies of teacher self-efficacy have been conducted in the K-12 content classroom in the areas of science education (e.g. Cakiroglu, Capa-Aydin, & Woofolk-Hoy, 2012; Corkett, Hatt, & Benevides, 2011), literacy education (e.g. Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011), and math education (e.g. Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). An educational context in which comparatively little research has been done on teacher self-efficacy is the university ESL classroom

or tertiary intensive English programs (IEPs). Although intensive English programs have experienced rapid growth across the U.S. in recent years (Institute of International Education, 2012), this lack of research on teacher self-efficacy in adult ESL reading may be because of the recent increase in the number of international students entering American tertiary education. The number of students requiring ESL programs has subsequently increased, and research in this area is only now becoming necessary.

Intensive English programs are unique among institutions of language education for a number of reasons. First, as the majority of their students arrive on F-1 visas, IEPs must build English language programs in accordance with the number of hours of instruction required by the U.S. F-1 immigration status regulation for language training (Szasz, 2010). For international students in an American IEP setting, a full-time course load is "at least 18 clock hours of attendance a week" (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2010). Second, while students may arrive with an English proficiency as low as A1 on the CEFR scale, the majority of students enter an IEP with a degree of English proficiency ranging from A2-B1. This is likely because most IEP students come to the U.S. with the goal matriculating into a university, and thus want to spend as little time possible on intensive English studies. Many also have scholarship restrictions set forth by government sponsors which allow only a short time frame for intensive English studies (e.g. 3-6 months). Finally, as the goal of the majority of international students studying in IEPs in the U.S. is to gain admission into an American university, Therefore, program curricula usually focus on the academic language skills to enable students to read, write, speak, and comprehend English at a level that is appropriate for universitylevel course work.

In order to be successful readers of academic English, international students need to have large amounts of vocabulary knowledge (Alderson, 2000; Hellekjaer, 2009), be able to efficiently integrate background knowledge with text (Grabe & Stroller, 2002), use metacognitive monitoring to repair comprehension (Alderson, 2000), and make use of a variety of learning strategies for reading and new vocabulary (Hellekjaer, 2009). While many IEP students may be able to successfully take on academic texts in their L1, it is not necessarily true that these skill sets and strategies will transfer over to the L2 (Koda, 2005, 2007). Thus, it is crucial that ESL teachers at the tertiary level be adequately trained and effective in teaching reading to help students meet their goals.

To explore the current state of teacher self-efficacy in the teaching of adult ESL reading, we employed a mixed methods approach to explore the following questions:

- 1. How do teachers in a university-based intensive English program rate their levels of self-efficacy as ESL reading teachers?
- 2. How are self-ratings of perceived self-efficacy influenced by a teacher's amount of pre-service training, ongoing professional development, access to useful resources, and years of experience?

The quantitative results of a questionnaire and the qualitative results from interviews with a handful of university-level ESL teachers across the United States suggest that teacher self-efficacy in teaching adult ESL reading is relatively low. Moreover, this lack of confidence may stem from a lack of pre-service training, limited relevant professional development, and a dearth of useful resources to aid in the planning and teaching of ESL reading.

Literature Review

Teacher Self-Efficacy

With such an important role to play in student success, it is of interest to know how teacher self-efficacy is influenced by other crucial variables, such as professional development and pre-service training. Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) examined two major independent variables: teacher efficacy and organizational support and found that all teachers at various years in the profession need a strong sense of self-efficacy and organizational support to make the best use of their professional development training. In a similar vein, a recent study by Dixon et al. (2014) found that ESL teachers who received increased hours of professional development training developed higher self-efficacy. In reviewing this data, one can conclude that teacher training and self-efficacy are interdependent.

A study conducted in Turkey by student teachers (Cabaroglu, 2014) also yielded findings relevant to the interaction of teacher self-efficacy and pre-service training. These student teacher / researchers utilized a combination of self-evaluation, reading relevant literature, informal observations and interviews, and preparing action plans to improve their teaching abilities. Afterwards, quantitative data from the TSES (Teacher Self-efficacy Scale) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001) revealed that the student teachers' self-reports of self-efficacy had increased, while qualitative data collected from reflective

diaries showed that this action research promoted a positive learning experience for the pre-service teachers as well.

Another study linking pre-service training to teacher self-efficacy was done by Clark (2016). For the study, Clark determined the number of pedagogical reading courses required by various university teacher education programs. Upon correlating this data with ratings of teacher self-efficacy, the findings show that the number of pre-service courses taken influenced teacher self-efficacy in the teaching of reading. More specifically, teachers who took two courses in reading methodology had a higher perception of self-efficacy when compared to reading teachers than teachers who only took one course.

A common thread can be seen throughout each of these studies: teachers who have more training through methodology courses and/ or professional development report greater feelings of self-efficacy than those with less training and professional development. However, it could be argued that pre-service training alone cannot be the only factor affecting a teacher's perceived self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran & Johnston (2011) explore factors beyond pre-service training in teachers' perceived self-efficacy. The researchers surveyed 648 elementary and middle school teachers using the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES). A series of statistical analyses including multiple regression and correlation revealed that among these literacy teachers, ratings of the quality of their teacher preparation program, highest degree obtained, access to resources, school level taught, participation in a book club, and self-efficacy in the areas of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement were all significant predictors of self-efficacy for literacy instruction.

To expand upon existing multi-factorial investigations of teacher self-efficacy, the present study explored the interplay between teacher self-efficacy, professional development, pre-service training, and access to useful resources.

Methodology

Research Design

This study took a mixed methods approach to shed light on our research questions, as both quantitative and qualitative data are central to this line of inquiry. We worked from Johnson & Onwuegbuzie's (2004) definition of a mixed methods approach as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into

a single study" (p. 17). A questionnaire and a handful of face-to-face interviews, which are described in the subsequent sections, were utilized for data collection. This mixed methods approach allowed us to gather both quantitative data from a wide variety of participants (for the purpose of generalization), as well as in-depth information from individuals which could elucidate some of the quantitative data.

Participants

A total of 70 in-service ESL teachers (17 male, 53 female) employed at a university-level intensive English program in the United States participated in the questionnaire portion of the study. In addition to experience teaching at the university level, 29% had taught at the elementary school level, 34% had taught middle school, and 39% taught high school. In terms of years of teaching experience, the mean years of experience among the questionnaire participants was 12.16 years (range: 1-40 years). The figure below shows the distribution of the participants' teaching experience in years.

Figure 1. Participants' years of teaching experience



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Of these 70 participants, eight were chosen for participation in the interview portion of the study (2 males, 6 females). Convenient sampling procedures were used to select these particular subjects. Table 1 shows the years of ESL teaching experience for each of the 8 interviewees. All subjects agreed to be interviewed without compensation and provided written consent for both the questionnaire and the interview.

Table 1. Interviewees' years of teaching experience

Interviewee #	Years of Experience	Notes
1	8	
2	10	
3	6	Non-native speaker
4	2.5	
5	6	
6	10	
7	25	Non-native speaker
8	35	
	6 10 25	Non-native

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the researchers' experience teaching ESL and knowledge of the field (a total of approximately 40 years of experience combined) as well as informal interviews with four in-service university-level ESL teachers. The theoretical framework for the instrument and many of the questions were modeled after Eslami & Fatahi (2008). The questionnaire consisted of the following 6 sections:

- 1. Demographic information & years of experience
- 2. Efficacy for student engagement
- 3. Efficacy for instructional strategies
- 4. Training and professional development
- Curriculum & access to resources

This questionnaire was found to be reliable by calculating Cronbach's alpha for each of the four major subsections of the instrument. The alpha coefficients are as follows: .74 for efficacy for student engagement, .81 for efficacy for instructional strategies, .92 for training and professional development, and .66 for curriculum & access to resources.

Interview Questions. The ten interview questions were designed by the three researchers with input from other ESL program administrators and ESL teachers at the University of Arizona. The goal of the interviews was to collect more detailed information from a handful of teachers which might be able to provide further insight into some of the trends found within the quantitative data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

After obtaining IRB approval to conduct the study, the questionnaire was hosted online via Google Docs and sent out to randomly-selected intensive English programs throughout the United States to solicit participation from teachers. All participants gave written consent by typing their name and the date after reading through the consent form. The online questionnaire was left open for four weeks, at which point it was closed and the results were downloaded for statistical analysis.

For analysis of the quantitative questionnaire data, both descriptive statistics by item and correlational analyses (between perceived self-efficacy and the other variables) will be reported. Participants selected an answer ranging from 1 (Disagree) to 5 (Agree) on a Likert scale to indicate responses for subsections 2 (efficacy for student engagement), 3 (efficacy for instructional strategies), and 5 (curriculum and access to resources). The results of subsection 4 (pre-service training and professional development), are discussed in terms of counts since no Likert scales were used.

The eight subjects who participated in the online questionnaire were selected via convenience sampling to participate in the interview portion of the study. All subjects gave written consent prior to being interviewed. Their answers were recorded with a smart phone audio recording app, transcribed and coded (to maintain anonymity of the data), and subsequently destroyed.

In order to identify themes in the participants' responses, each transcribed interview was coded by the three researchers (independently) as either self-identifying as an effective ESL reading teacher or not an effective ESL reading teacher. This was done by analyzing each interviewee's response to question #3: "Do you feel that you're an effective reading teacher? Why or why not?" Subjects 1, 2 and 3 self-reported as being ineffective ESL reading teachers while subjects 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 self-reported as being effective ESL reading teachers. After separating the transcribed interviews into these two groups, the researchers re-read each interview and coded the data question by question in order to identify themes in the discourse. The emerging response themes are discussed separately for each of the two aforementioned groups. Because a theme of access to resources in motivating students surfaced across both groups, it is explored subsequently at the whole-group level.

Results

Quantitative Questionnaire Data

Efficacy for student engagement. Four questions comprised this section inquiring about teachers' perceived self-efficacy in engaging students during an ESL reading class. On the whole, participants reported rather marginal or average feelings of self-efficacy in this category with a mean 3.6 out of 5 for all questions in the section. Positive correlations were found between teacher's perceived selfefficacy for student engagement and amount of teacher training (r =.339), access to useful resources (r =.302), and years of experience teaching ESL (r = .391). However, no significant correlation was found between perceived self-efficacy for student engagement and amount of professional development. A closer look at the data suggests that no such relationship was present likely because the vast majority of teachers (78.5%) indicate that they received virtually no professional development in teaching ESL reading at their current places of employment. Support for this hypothesis is reflected in the mean response to "I could benefit from more professional development and/ or training in teaching reading skills to ESL students." as 4.35 out of 5.

Efficacy for instructional strategies. This section consisted of four questions about teachers' perceived self-efficacy in their ability to use a variety of instructional strategies during an ESL reading class. In general, participants' self-reports were higher for instructional strategies than student engagement with a mean 4.11 out of 5 rating across all questions. Positive correlations were found between teacher's perceived self-efficacy for instructional strategies and amount of teacher training (r = .377), access to useful resources (r = .283), and years of experience teaching ESL (r = .342). However, as with student engagement, no significant correlation was found between perceived self-efficacy for instructional strategies and amount of professional development. We posit that, similar to efficacy for student engagement, this is likely because the majority of teachers reported receiving little to no professional development in teaching ESL reading at their current places of employment.

Curriculum and access to resources. The data from just two questions in this section, pertaining to resource access, are reported. Each question is followed by the mean rating (out of 5) as self-reported by the participants: (1) At my current place of employment, I have access to useful resources to help teach reading skills. (Mean: 3.97, SD: 3.94). (2) At my current place of employment, I have access to useful resources to help teach vocabulary. (Mean: .96, SD: .97).

Pre-Service training and professional development. The data set for section four of the questionnaire, which asked teachers about their amount of pre-service training and current professional development, paints a rather dismal picture of the state of training and organizational support for ESL reading teachers. As many as 78.5% of teachers reported having little to no professional development in teaching reading skills at their current place of employment, as indicated by selecting the "0-2 times pear year" response. 77% of respondents reported taking 0-1 graduate level classes about teaching reading, and even fewer reported taking undergraduate classes on the subject (87% indicate 0 or 1 class). Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that they could benefit from more professional development or training in teaching ESL reading as evidenced by a mean response of 4.35 out of 5 on the Likert scale question (1 Disagree – 5 Agree).

Qualitative Interview Data

Self-reported ineffective ESL reading teachers. Analysis of the interview data from interviewees 1, 2, and 3 revealed a handful of patterns in their responses. Firstly, these interviewees reported only having taught ESL for between 6-10 years (mean: 8 years). Considering that the mean number of years teaching ESL among questionnaire participants was 12.16 years, these three interviewees have less experience than the average participant. Secondly, all three interviewees reported having no formal training in teaching ESL reading prior to becoming an in-service teacher. Instead, they indicated that they learned to teach ESL reading "mostly intuitively" or "from peer coaching with current colleagues." When asked the best way for teachers to improve their skills, all three stated that teachers should receive training which is "regular" and "ongoing" and is conducted by "expert teachers who specialize in ESL reading."

Two of the three interviewees in this group noted that they feel teaching vocabulary is easier than teaching reading strategies, referring to the latter as "stressful" due to lack of knowledge in how to do so and access to "limited and inadequate resources" to help them teach. Interestingly, the interviewee who reported that teaching reading strategies was easiest came from a K-12 teaching background in which she was paired with a "reading coach" who provided "a huge guide... about what she was supposed to be teaching or what the next step was." This interviewee stated that in turn, she felt that she taught reading strategies well because "it's more structured" than teaching vocabulary. Years of support from an expert coach in a former job likely influenced

this interviewee's response and level of confidence in teaching ESL reading strategies. Lastly, analysis of the responses to "What do you do well in your reading class?" revealed a pattern of "teaching vocabulary" and "modeling excitement about reading."

Self-reported effective ESL reading teachers. Interviewees 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 self-reported as being effective ESL reading teachers. Not surprisingly, the range of teaching experience across this group was much broader than the self-reported ineffective teachers (6-35 years) with a mean number of years of experience double that of the other group (16.4 years). This supports the findings from the quantitative data which show that years of experience strongly correlates with efficacy for student engagement and instructional strategies. Unlike the self-reported ineffective group, this group of interviewees all reported some degree of formal training at the graduate level in teaching ESL reading prior to becoming an in-service teacher. Additionally, all noted that they continue to seek out training through conferences, attending workshops, and "staying in the literature." Four out of the five interviewees discussed the importance of reflecting on their own experiences as readers as well when considering how to teach reading.

When asked about their opinion of the ease of teaching reading strategies as opposed to teaching vocabulary, three of the five interviewees stated that both are "equally easy to teach." This is likely due to the training they've each received and continue to seek out. Finally, in detailing what they do well in their ESL reading classes, a theme of setting goals and designing strong assessments emerged from the responses. This is reflected in statements including the following:

I also feel like my assignments in reading courses are strong...(they) work because it's easy to assess whether or not (students) understand how to do it" and "(it) works because it gives students milestones that are tangible. They feel like they're making progress.

Access to resources. According to our quantitative survey results, access to beneficial resources for teachers is a significant predictor of teachers' perceived efficacy in teaching reading skills. It also significantly predicts teachers' perceived abilities to motivate students who show a low interest in reading. This is further supported by several interviewees when they were asked the question, "What resources should be available?" One person stated, "They (students) should choose texts that they enjoy! That's the only way students will be interested too (in addition to the teachers)." Another person stated the following:

The most important resource is a good library so students can choose individually what they want to read.... Reading teachers need to take advantage of this (an independent reading program) so their students have choice. The tasks should be carefully chosen so as to not burden the student, but rather make them want to read the books.

Conclusions

The results support the notion that ESL reading teachers in a tertiary intensive English program need more training in and access to resources for teaching this skill in order to experience a higher sense of self-efficacy in the classroom. These findings both support and expand on previous literature by affirming the positive relationship between teacher training and self-efficacy as well as exploring the state of teacher self-efficacy and its relationship with other variables in an under-studied educational context: the intensive English program. Because our study was carried out with teachers from this unique genre of educational institution, it should be noted that our results may not be generalizable to other language learning contexts. Similarly, with a small sample size (N=70) representing programs across 17 states, further research should be conducted before firmly concluding that the trends in our data paint an accurate picture of teacher self-efficacy in the majority of IEPs within the U.S.

One of the goals of the present study was to shed light on the current lack of this training and its effect on teacher self-efficacy. However, in order to move forward and bolster teacher self-efficacy in the ESL reading classroom, we call for further research into specific reading methodology course offerings of ESL teacher training programs at universities across the United States as well as deeper exploration into the exact nature of any professional development offerings in ESL reading at the university level for in-service teachers. In this way, the field may gain a better sense of exactly what kind of teacher training courses and organizational support to develop.

A few suggestions for teacher professional development were gleaned from our qualitative interview data: observing expert teachers either online or in-person (Putnam & Borko, 2000), engaging in book groups where teachers read a book about teaching reading and discuss relevant ideas (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001), participating in peer coaching with a knowledgeable colleague (Schifter & Fosnot, 1993), attending ongoing trainings by an expert in the field of teaching reading (Little, 1994), having an expert as an accessible resource (Smith, 1969; Brockbank & McGill, 2006), and having access to helpful websites for suggestions (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005)

The above listed forms of teacher professional development boost a teacher's self-efficacy; some of which are well-documented by Bandura (1994, 1997). Observing expert teachers is a strong example of vicarious experience in which the observer relates to the expert teacher and gains the confidence to successfully accomplish a new skill. Both engaging in book clubs and having an expert as a resource are examples of social or verbal persuasion in which strong words of encouragement from a trusted person provide a positive perception of ability. Lastly, participating in peer coaching with a colleague is an example of master experience in which teachers are given the opportunity to build on past mastered skills by practicing similarly new ones. Whatever the form, the predominant theme is that this type of support needs to be ongoing and not just offered once or twice a year. This gives teachers the support they need as problems arise and keeps the methodologies used in the classroom current and relevant to the needs of the students (National Staff Development Council, 2001).

The results of this study also serve as a call for tertiary intensive English programs to take stock of the quantity and quality of resources available to their faculty for teaching ESL reading. Some possible resources for ESL teachers are as follows: Internet TESL Journal links page, ESL Gold (materials, lesson plans, and links for teachers and students), Using English (language references, teacher resources, analysis tools, discussion forum and links), and The Internet for ESL Teachers (Claire Braden's collection of pedagogical articles). Many researchers have found correlations between students having a choice in what they read with how they are intrinsically motivated to read. In fact, according to Reynolds & Symons (2001), background knowledge and topic interest are closely correlated and are a strong determining factor for a student's motivation to read. With students who come from a variety of countries and backgrounds in IEPs, this points to the need for teacher access to materials and resources that cover many content area topics.

Another factor which may affect student motivation is the incorporation a variety of engaging instructional strategies in teaching reading. According to Lems, Miller, and Soro, (2010), some strategies useful at the tertiary level are as follows: reader's response logs allowing students to engage with the reading and practice metacognitive skills while demonstrating comprehension, silent reading techniques such as SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) or DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) where students and the instructor silently read high-interest books, using visual and audio aids to supply a more dynamic interaction with the reading, and using semantic maps and other graphic organizers to bring meaning to non-fiction texts.

In conclusion, teaching reading skills to tertiary ESL students is an important academic endeavor in which some teachers in intensive English programs often feel underprepared to teach. With a lack of experience, pre-service training, and professional development, tertiary ESL teachers may not feel confident in teaching. Many desire adequate training and support in order to raise self-efficacy and effectiveness in the classroom. In addition, access to beneficial resources aids the teachers' perceived ability to motivate and instruct students to read. With the help of ongoing in-service training, teachers can obtain the instruction they need to feel more effective, and with access to resources, they can be equipped to implement the strategies and training they have received. Thus, both ESL teachers and students alike have a chance to be more successful in reaching their goals.

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