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# Optimism and Performance of Novice ESOL Teachers

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# Optimism and Performance in Novice ESOL Teachers

Elizabeth Conkey, Natalie Nibler, DeAnna Sturm, and Debi Brannan



## Introduction

Teachers face a number of trials in and out of the classroom and these challenges can be particularly difficult for new teachers. Researchers have focused on understanding the perceptions of novice teachers and what might assist with their teaching success (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Farrell, 2003; 2006). More specifically, researchers have examined the association between personality traits, specifically optimism, teaching efficacy, and success (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Poraj, 2010; Tait, 2008). While research has found significant positive correlations between optimism and self-efficacy in undergraduate teachers (Karademas, Kafetsios, & Sideridis, 2007), there has been little research on optimism and how novice teachers perceive their teaching performance. Even less research has been done with novice teachers who teach English as a second language in countries that are not immersed in English (ESOL teachers). Thus, this study focused on the relationship between optimism and perceived teaching success within a novice ESOL teaching population; moreover, gender was also examined.

## Participants

Age Range	
27-58	
Marital Status	
Single	24
Married	22
Living with partner	1
Country of origin	
USA	43
Australia	1
China	1
Germany	1
Russia	1
Country of residence	
USA	22
China and Taiwan	18
Korea	2
Australia	1
Kazakhstan	1
Laos	1
Mongolia	1
Turkey	1

## Procedure

- Potential participants were recruited via email solicitation. Willing participants were directed to click a link to a secure survey page. In the survey the first page included the informed consent and details about the study.
  - All participants were recent graduates from hybrid Masters TESOL programs (< 3 years).
  - Finally, most individuals in this study reported teaching adults
    - 60% at universities
    - 18% at an adult ESL program
  - Optimism.** Optimism was measured using the Life Orientation Scale (LOT; Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994).
    - A = I agree a lot
    - B = I agree a little
    - C = I neither agree nor disagree
    - D = I Disagree a little
    - E = I Disagree a lot
- In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
  - It's easy for me to relax.
  - If something can go wrong for me, it will.
  - I'm always optimistic about my future.

**Satisfaction with Teaching Performance.** Satisfaction with teaching performance was measure with a single question asking, "How satisfied are you with your teaching performance?" and rated on a 7-point Lickert-type scale

## Descriptive

- The overall average for teaching performance was 5.53 ( $SD = 1.06$ ), yet when examining gender, results revealed that men had an average mean rating of 5.90 ( $SD = .54$ ) on perceived teaching performance and women had an average rating of 5.23 ( $SD = 1.27$ ).
  - Of note, there was not much variability for men compared to women; more specifically the range of average ratings was 5-7 for men (see Figure 1) and 2-7 for women (see Figure 2). This suggests that all the men in this study felt satisfied to some degree with their teaching performance while a number of women (20%) reported being neutral or dissatisfied with their teaching performance.
- The mean for the overall optimism measure was 3.87 ( $SD = .76$ ). Further analyses suggest that men had an average optimism level of 4.04 ( $SD = .77$ ) and women had a 3.74 ( $SD = .74$ ). Interestingly, the range was the same for both groups, 2-5.

## Differences by Gender

Figure 1

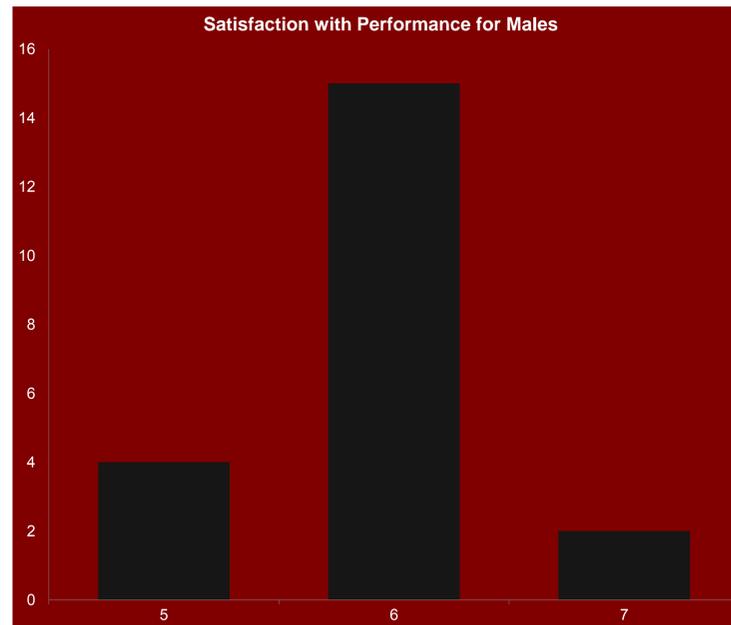
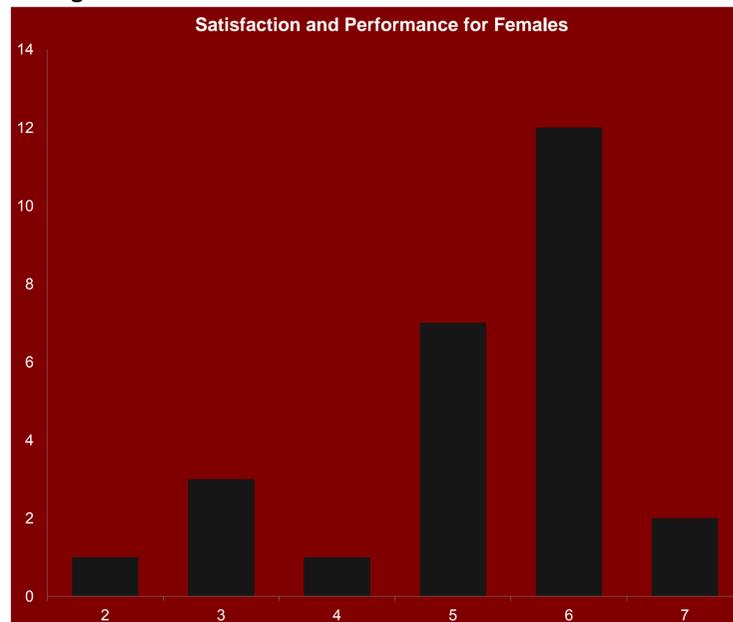


Figure 2

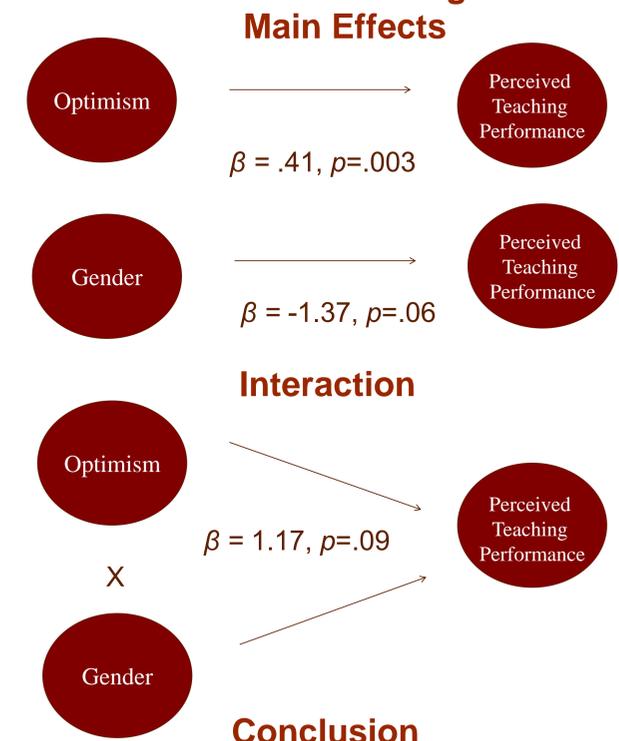


## Correlations of Gender, Performance and Optimism

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Teaching performance satisfaction	5.53	1.06	1		
2. Optimism	3.87	.76	.47**	1	
3. Gender	.11	1.01	-.32*	-.19	1

Gender: females = 1, Males = -1; \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Hierarchical Linear Regressions



The current study provided evidence that optimism and gender significantly predict how satisfied novice ESOL teachers are with their teaching performance. Results suggest that gender and optimism levels, specifically lower levels of optimism, have a significant impact on how an individual perceives their teaching performance. These findings further support the work by Nonis and Wright (2003) who found that those who are more optimistic perform better and are more satisfied with their performance than those who are less optimistic (Karademas et al., 2007).

This study also brings attention to the possible gender discrepancies in perceived performance. While this study found marginal associations, it is likely that novice female ESOL teachers who have lower levels of optimism may view their own performance as lower when compared to their male counterparts

Using empirical methods, this research study is a contribution to the understanding of a very special group of teachers. While interest in this unique group of teachers has been growing, there are still many areas to explore.

This exploratory study also serves as a platform for future research studies in that it has called to attention areas that need more examination, and brings to light the importance of examining the influence of personality traits of novice ESOL teachers when examining important outcomes.