How Teaching Competitions Support the Development of Teaching Self-Efficacy: A Study of Award-Winning English as a Foreign Language Teachers

Zhongyue Zhang[1,*] & Ahmad Johari Bin Sihes[1]

[1]School of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

*Correspondence: School of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia. Tel: 60-112-756-7535. E-mail: zhangzhongyue@graduate.utm.my

Abstract

The research focuses on award-winning EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers' teaching competition experiences. Each of the 11 EFL teachers interviewed in the study had won at least two prizes in teaching competitions. The main objective of this research is to explore their recollections of participating in teaching competitions and the impact that their experiences had on them. The findings indicate the important role of teaching competitions in the development of EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy and factors that are responsible for increase in teaching self-efficacy. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, resulting in the identification of four key themes: knowledge, practice and reflection, feedback, and interpersonal support. These themes are discussed in the context of Bandura's self-efficacy theory, highlighting how teaching self-efficacy is developed through the interplay of various factors, including experiences, knowledge, and contextual factors. The study provides valuable insights into the literature on the development of teaching self-efficacy, and specific recommendations for developing effective teaching competition activities.

Keywords: teaching competition, award-winning EFL teachers, teaching self-efficacy, China secondary vocational schools

1. Introduction

The present study aims to investigate the teaching competition experiences of award-winning EFL teachers in China secondary vocational schools. Teaching competitions are widely recognized in China as an effective means to improve EFL teachers' professional development (Liu, 2015; Song, 2021; Yang, 2017). They serve as a catalyst, propelling teachers from a normal, static state to an active and dynamic state, offering opportunities for professional growth. In recent years, teaching competitions in secondary vocational education have received attention and support from China government. MOE (Chinese Ministry of Education) issued a document which is called "Action Plan to Improve Quality of Vocational Education (2020-2023)" (MOE, 2020). The action plan pointed out that it is necessary to vigorously safeguard and perfect the teaching competition mechanisms at the school level, municipal level, and national level. Nowadays, teaching competition activities in English subject in China secondary vocational education concentrates on promoting teachers' qualities (Zhao, 2020). As one part of teacher qualities, teaching self-efficacy is a kind of inner psychological experience and feeling. It is the the teacher's perception of her or his abilities to teach effectively and facilitate students' learning (Shao, 2015; Wyatt, 2008, 2016). Previous studies focused on how teaching competitions enhance EFL teachers' teaching abilities such as teaching design, classroom organization, and informatization abilities (Wang, 2022; Zhang, 2017), but few have explored the impact of teaching competitions on EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Xia, 2016), specifically how teaching competitions support the development of EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. This study lies in its focus on award-winning EFL teachers in China secondary vocational schools, who have demonstrated exceptional competence and achieved recognition for their teaching practices. By examining the experiences and perspectives of these successful teachers through semi-structured interviews, we aim to shed light on the specific factors in which teaching competitions contribute to their development of teaching self-efficacy. The findings of this study will increase our understanding of the role of

teaching competitions on teachers' teaching self-efficacy and help us better understand the factors that lead to efficacious teachers, but also provide practical implications for teacher educators and administrators to refine their support of teaching competitions, thereby bolstering teachers' teaching self-efficacy.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997). Bandura (1986, p. 391) stated that self-efficacy is "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments". According to Bandura (1997), there are four types of sources used by individuals when forming self-efficacy judgments: enactive mastery experiences (past performance attainments and are considered to be the most powerful source of self-efficacy), vicarious experiences (are derived from observing a social model, or oneself, perform a task), social persuasion (negative or positive verbal judgments of other people), and physiological and affective states (individual feelings when they are completing a task, such as stress, fatigue, anxiety and excitement). Except for the efficacy-building experiences, the role of knowledge is also highlighted by Bandura, and he acknowledged that "self-development of personal efficacy requires mastery of knowledge and skills" (Bandura, 1997, p. 16). Contextual factors exert their influences on self-efficacy, involving "situational impediment, the assistance provided by others, the adequacy of teaching resources or equipment available, and the circumstances under which an activity is performed" (Bandura, 1997, p. 83). From Bandura's perspective, experiences, knowledge, and contextual factors play crucial roles in developing and enhancing individuals' self-efficacy.

As a professional development opportunity, teaching competitions have been found to have a significant influence on developing teachers' teaching self-efficacy. Several factors can be employed to explain the positive changes. Xia (2016) proposed that participating in teaching competitions can be considered as a strategy to enhance EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy through successful teaching experiences in Chinese and Thai universities. Teaching competitions bring opportunities for EFL teachers to practice (Song, 2021). To optimize teaching, teachers should aim to improve teaching design by integrating competition as a tool and incorporating practical elements of the competition into their teaching content. By actively participating in these competitions, teachers can identify and overcome existing challenges, such as dealing with difficult students, and effectively resolving them. Successful teaching practices support the growth of more positive teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Morris et al., 2017). In addition, teaching competition is the best way for EFL teachers to reflect on their teaching (Yang, 2017), which is often overlooked by many researchers. One such practical strategy gaining prominence in ELT (English Language Teaching) teacher education research and practice is reflection (Wright, 2010). Through reflection, teachers engage in a continuous process of critically examining their teaching beliefs and practices. The ultimate objective is to enhance the overall quality of their teaching (Borg, 2011). Research has found teaching reflection is conducive to improving EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Moradkhani et al., 2017; Wyatt, 2016). After teaching competitions, teachers reflect and evaluate their teaching, through which they identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This teaching reflection facilitates a deeper understanding of their knowledge and teaching abilities, leading to the enhancement of their teaching efficacy. Teaching competition is also advantageous for EFL teachers to acquire constructive feedback (Liu, 2015). Li et al. (2021) indicated that "promoting teaching through competitions" contributes to the development and enhancement of teachers' teaching confidence to a certain extent by utilizing participant interactions, judge evaluations, and media coverage. Feedback from students, peers, and experts has been proven to have significant influences on teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Hemmings, 2015; Morris et al., 2017). The same finding applied to EFL teachers. Moradkhani and Haghi (2017) regarded positive feedback as a factor in strengthening EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. Participating in various competitions is a more efficient way to acquire interactive experience. The affirmation and encouragement from expert judges during competitions, which was mentioned earlier as verbal persuasion, will boost teachers' confidence in teaching. However, it is noteworthy that the feedback teachers receive from others is most effective when they are specific, genuine, and provided by a credible observer (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2006). In addition to these efficacy-building experiences, knowledge is another critical factor to enhance teaching self-efficacy in teaching competitions. The development of knowledge will be beneficial to construct teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Morris et al., 2017). A great deal of scholars have paid attention to content and pedagogical knowledge, for example, Wyatt (2016) and Zhang (2016) have found English language teachers are more confident in their teaching abilities when they are equipped with knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary, and teaching approaches. Engaging in teaching competitions can be a means for EFL teachers to learn new knowledge such as teaching approaches and educational resources (Liu, 2015). Driven by teaching competitions, teachers are more skilled in analyzing learning process, adopting innovative teaching approaches, and implementing the newest instructional technologies (Wang, 2022; Zhang, 2017). As an integral

component of contextual factors, interpersonal support is an efficacy-enhancing factor. Support from colleagues and administrators is beneficial to increase English language teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Alibakhshi, Abdollahi, et al., 2020; Wyatt, 2010, 2013). In preparing for teaching competitions, technological, emotional, and pedagogical support teachers received from their peers and school leaders are significant for them to be efficacious in teaching. Nevertheless, a lack of specialized guidance tailored to the specific requirements of teachers before teaching competitions will be a hindrance to developing teaching self-efficacy.

The present study aims to investigate how award-winning EFL teachers construct their teaching competition experiences and the significance they attribute to these experiences. In this study, we focus on China secondary vocational schools, a context overlooked in most teaching self-efficacy research compared to general education. China secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy is generally low as they are encountered with complex teaching tasks (Liu, 2018). EFL teachers accompanying low teaching self-efficacy are more likely to employ traditional and teacher-centered teaching approaches, resulting in unsatisfactory students' academic performances (Alibakhshi, Nikdel, et al., 2020; Choi & Lee, 2018). It is of great necessity to focus on developing secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. In the study, attention has been given to how teaching competitions support the development of secondary vocational EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. To enhance the value of teaching self-efficacy research for teacher educators, there is a growing recognition of the potential benefits of employing mixed methods and qualitative research designs (Wyatt, 2014). However, only a limited number of qualitative studies have been conducted on the development of teaching self-efficacy (Phan & Locke, 2015; Wyatt, 2010, 2013, 2016), and thus, the study employed qualitative method to explore how teaching competition experiences contributed to the development of secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy.

3. Research Questions and Method

Research has demonstrated that teaching competition experiences play a crucial role in developing and enhancing teachers' teaching self-efficacy, there is limited understanding of the underlying developmental mechanisms (Li et al., 2021; Xia, 2016). Therefore, the article aims to understand how EFL teachers who have received at least two prizes in teaching competitions recall their own teaching competition experiences. Teaching awards do offer one benchmark by which excellence in teaching has been externally recognized, at least at the secondary vocational schools we identified for the study. Guided by self-efficacy theory and the conception of self-efficacy, the study addressed the following question: how do teaching competitions support the development of EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy?

The focus of this qualitative study lies in the teachers' personal recollections and the impact of their teaching competition experiences. Our emphasis is not on factual events, but rather on subjective interpretations given to these experiences. Retrospective methods are extensively employed in biographical research to analyze certain events and processes in relation to their meaning for individual or collective life histories (Flick, 2022). A retrospective approach recognizes humans as capable agents who possess the ability to reflect deeply on the meaning of their lives (Polkinghorne, 1995; Stroobants*, 2005). Our objective is to enhance the comprehension of key issues pertaining to teaching competition experiences among EFL teachers, by examining these issues from their perspectives and through their personal interpretations.

3.1 Participants

I created a list of potential participants by asking, via email, Heads of Vocational English Groups at five secondary vocational schools to supply the names of award-winning EFL teachers who had received at least two teaching awards or above. We used teaching awards as a selection criterion because they serve as one index of exceptional teaching. This request generated 14 names. I then invited these award-winning teachers to participate in the study via email and provided them with an information statement to aid in their decision-making process. Despite receiving three declines due to impending maternity leave and sabbatical leave, the study proceeded as planned. Our sample thus consisted of 11 such teachers. Information on the participants' backgrounds, including their years of teaching experience, qualifications, and teaching awards can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of Participants

Pseudonym	Years of teaching experiences	Qualifications	Awards in teaching competitions
Lei	6	Master	One school-level award; two municipal-level awards
Xiang	7	Bachelor	Two school-level awards
Yang	10	Bachelor	Two school-level awards, one municipal-level award
Deng	5	Master	One school-level award, one municipal-level award
Xu	5	Master	Three school-level awards
Tao	7	Bachelor	Two school-level awards, one municipal-level award
Zhang	8	Master	Two school-level awards, four municipal-level awards
Lang	9	Bachelor	One school-level award, one municipal-level award
Fu	10	Master	Two municipal-level awards, one national-level award
Zeng	12	Bachelor	Two school-level awards, one municipal-level award
Fan	15	Bachelor	One school-level award, one national-level award

3.2 Data Collection

To capture the individual experiences of EFL teachers and ensure a comprehensive exploration of essential topics, a deliberate choice was made to employ a semi-structured approach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). A well-structured yet flexible informal guide was meticulously prepared for the interviewer. The core interview questions were the following: What are the most vivid memories of your teaching competition? How do teaching competitions make you feel more confident as a secondary vocational school EFL teacher? What types of knowledge have you gained through teaching competitions? Describe your teaching and reflection experiences. What kind of feedback did you receive? What kind of support did you get? The structure, however, maintained enough flexibility to enable the interviewer to adapt the questions according to the specific circumstances at hand. This ensured that the interview process remained adaptable and responsive to the individual needs and experiences of the award-winning EFL teachers being interviewed. With the participants' consent, all interviews were recorded to ensure accurate documentation of the discussions. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 40 minutes. Participation was voluntary and held in strict confidentiality, and the anonymity of the respondents was taken care of by the researcher throughout the process.

3.3 Data Analysis

I audio-recorded all of the interviews and these were later transcribed. I employed a six-step process, as outlined by, to conduct a thematic analysis of the transcribed data as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved data familiarization, coding, and the labeling of themes. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82) have put forward that a theme "represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". The interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the phrases used for the analysis were also in Chinese so that the meaning would not be lost in translation. The examples were translated into English exclusively for the purpose of presenting the findings to international audiences.

4. Results

Four themes emerged from the analysis and these were labeled in the following way: knowledge, practice and reflection, feedback, and interpersonal support.

4.1 Knowledge

Nearly all of the participants recounted the knowledge gained through competitions gave them the confidence to teach EFL in China secondary vocational schools. Most of them commented that their pedagogical and technological knowledge mastery generated this confidence. This particular point is exemplified by the following excerpts:

Part of my confidence in teaching is that I have a clear understanding of action-oriented teaching approaches such as project-based teaching and task-based teaching. (Xiang)

There's this bridge between mastering classroom management techniques and being able to manage the classroom. (Yang)

Mastery of pedagogical knowledge like organizing classroom activities aligned with students' study programs enhanced my beliefs in teaching competencies. Taken an example, for students in preschool education, activities like singing songs could be a better choice (Zeng)

Acquiring and mastering knowledge in pedagogy builds teachers' teaching self-efficacy. When teachers possess a deep understanding of innovative instructional strategies and classroom activities, they feel more capable in their role as teachers.

Others like Lei and Deng hold that technological knowledge also strengthens teachers' teaching self-efficacy during teaching competitions.

Through teaching competitions, I learned to use English teaching apps and classroom interaction apps. The software provides instant communication and makes teaching and learning easier, more flexible, and enjoyable. Knowing how to use the instructional resources bolstered my beliefs in teaching competencies. (Lei)

Technological knowledge helps me organize and manage the teaching process more effectively. Using tools such as an online learning management system, I prepare teaching materials in advance, assign assignments and quizzes, track students' progress, improve teaching efficiency, and increase my confidence in my teaching abilities. (Fu)

These accounts from the participants exemplify how the acquisition of both pedagogical and technological knowledge during teaching competitions positively impacted their teaching self-efficacy.

4.2 Practice and Reflection

More than half of the participants had described their teaching practices during teaching competitions. Teaching competition encourages teachers to explore and innovate within their teaching practice. In order to stand out in the competition, teachers may practice different teaching strategies, activities, and methods. The process of exploration and innovation can prompt teachers to think about how to better meet students' learning needs, and eventually enhance their teaching self-efficacy.

After analyzing of teaching materials, I elaborately designed and practiced innovative classroom activities in a virtual classroom. This kind of teaching experience equips me with confidence in classroom teaching. (Tao)

After I overcame difficulties and challenges in attracting students' attention in class. Especially for students who were chatting with their classmates or playing their mobile phones, I found my teaching confidence has been strengthened. (Lang)

Participating in teaching competitions requires teachers to engage in self-reflection of their teaching practices. Through reflective analysis of their competition experience, teachers can identify their teaching strengths and areas for improvement. Teachers have a further objective judgment on their teaching behavior, which plays a role in improving and adjusting the teaching practice in the future, thus improving the teaching self-efficacy of teachers.

Some participants mentioned maintaining a journal where they recorded concise reflections on their teaching experiences after participating in teaching competitions. Yang, for instance, documented her thoughts in a journal and expressed how her reflections served as a reminder to "stay focused on her goals and maintain a positive mindset". She believed that by capturing her thoughts on paper, she could better understand her emotions and gain clarity in her journey. Each entry in her journal became a personal account of her progress and a source of inspiration during challenging times. This reflective action was viewed by her as a confidence-building approach as illustrated in the quote below:

I am very confident or highly confident in teaching through teaching reflection after teaching competitions, which increase my teaching approaches and techniques, and my teaching skills. The improved teaching abilities are an important link to strengthen my teaching self-efficacy.

Fan was another participant who used self-reflection to improve her teaching. She described how after teaching competitions she would contemplate how the interaction between students and teachers in the EFL teaching classroom could be improved. It is necessary to contemplate how to further utilize these effective teaching methods in future teaching processes. Through these highlights, the entire teaching process can be activated in subsequent practices. Regarding the areas of mistakes, a thorough analysis of the reasons behind the errors should be undertaken, followed by the implementation of appropriate strategies for instructional improvement.

4.3 Feedback

The term "feedback" was frequently mentioned in the responses provided by the participants. These responses are mainly derived from students, peers, and experts. Feedback from the students definitely appeared to affect

confidence levels of a number of the award-winning EFL teachers interviewed. The ensuing quotes further support this point:

Feedback from my students indicates that I am a successful teacher. (Xu)

I have gained confidence in my teaching abilities due to the positive feedback received from my students. (Xiang)

Classroom recording increases interaction with my students, and I get feedback from them. (Zhang)

Some participants acknowledged that peer evaluation had a positive influence on their confidence to teach. One of the participants Lang highlighted that she had received positive and constructive feedback about her preparatory competition teaching from their English teaching groups at the school. Colleagues in the group gave her valuable feedback. Other participants like Xu and Yang chose not to seek assistance from their colleagues because there is a lack of individuals with similar disciplinary knowledge and skills at their school. However, during their interviews, they expressed a sense of isolation from their peers while acknowledging the significant role that peer feedback could play.

Expert feedback has been recognized by some participants. One teacher commented:

Before teaching competitions, I did a lot of trials for teaching competitions, and the feedback from my supervisor and outside experts was very useful. Some of the suggestions are about increasing students' engagement in the whole class. (Fu)

A similar picture was painted by another participant Lei, who had participated in the competition training. Following experts' suggestions, he adjusted his instructional strategies to better meet the standard of the competition.

Other participants received positive evaluations about their teaching performances from expert judges after teaching competitions, which is an affirmation of teachers' expertise and contributions to the field. This recognition not only generates teachers' feelings of honor and fulfillment, but also boosts their sense of professional identity and value as teachers, eventually enhancing their confidence in classroom-based teaching.

4.4 Interpersonal Support

Another significant factor that drives the development of teachers' teaching self-efficacy is interpersonal support during their teaching competitions. The participants remembered in detail which professional skills they had developed with the support of their administration and colleagues, including pedagogical and technical support and emotional support.

During the period of teaching competition preparation, most participants felt that they were assisted by their colleagues.

For certain subjects or technical matters, I am among those individuals who require mentoring. I thrive when I am taught by someone who possesses excellent teaching skills and expertise in the field. Our school has a well-established support system. When I participated in a competition, my team members suggested how to deal with pedagogical issues such as students' disruptive behaviors in class. (Fu)

My colleagues reassure me when I feel stressed and anxious. The emotional support is conducive for me to become a competent teacher. (Tao)

I was assigned one mentor and he helped me with the technical side of teaching. They showed me how to make excellent teaching courseware by using some software like PowerPoint and Excel. (Zhang)

Others such as Deng and Xu complained about the inadequacy and inappropriateness of support, Deng explained:

I believe that support is critical, especially for EFL teachers who are new to participating in teaching competitions and lack related experience. However, my school doesn't prioritize teaching competitions and I have to rely on myself for everything. The support I received was minimal. I hope that my school can establish a team to support competition teachers as soon as possible.

Xu said that my school confided a similar story but also laid the blame for her poor mentoring and the fact that "the pervasive pressure to meet performance expectations is often impeded by bureaucratism". some teachers complained about the shortage of specific guidance tailored to the unique demands of teaching competitions. They felt that the existing support was too formalized and lacked practical effectiveness. She suggested that the selection of mentors needs to be done with great care and in some cases, two mentors need to be assigned – one for pedagogical guidance and one for technological support– because teaching competitions in the digital age require a focus on information technology and Web 2.0 tools.

5. Discussion

These findings are consistent with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. The development of self-efficacy cannot be without the interaction of experiences, knowledge, and contextual factors. The study's findings create a picture of how teaching competition strengthens teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational schools. This picture has four main features and these were referred to as themes.

The first theme is knowledge. The study finds that in teaching competitions, the acquisition of pedagogical and technological knowledge plays a pivotal role in the development of secondary vocational EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy, as discussed in previous studies, knowledge development is intimately linked with language teachers' teaching self-efficacy growth (Wyatt, 2010, 2013, 2016; Zhang, 2016). Participating in the teaching competition requires EFL teachers to learn the knowledge of the relevant topics. In order to achieve excellent results in the competition, teachers need to continuously expand their knowledge related to pedagogy. Many participants have mentioned the importance of understanding action-oriented teaching approaches, which is highly recommended in secondary vocational schools in recent years. In the Web 2.0 times, as mandated by the standards set for teaching competitions, the exploration of the newest instructional resources is also inevitable, like student management systems and language learning apps. Through this learning and exploration process, the depth and breadth of secondary vocational school EFL teachers' knowledge has been improved, and thereby, their cognition and confidence in their knowledge level have been further enhanced. However, the influences of content knowledge on teaching self-efficacy were not mentioned by participants in the study because of its less connection with the teaching competitions evaluation standard.

The second theme is practice and reflection. The study indicates that teaching and reflective experiences within teaching competitions contribute to their positive teaching self-efficacy. Teaching competition provides a platform for practice and reflection (Kou, 2020; Yang, 2017). Participating teachers are required to design and implement their teaching practices through videotaped teaching or real classroom teaching, which increases the possibility of acquiring successful teaching experiences. Zhang (2019) and Naidoo and Naidoo (2021) stressed the significance of teaching and reflection experiences in developing teaching self-efficacy. At the end of the competition, teachers will reflect and evaluate their teaching practices to find their strengths and room for improvement, which helps teachers develop their teaching effectiveness, eventually enhancing their teaching self-efficacy (Zhang, 2019). The study emphasizes reflection, effectively addressing a previously identified research gap.

The third theme is feedback. The study reveals teaching competitions support the development of secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy by utilizing feedback that is derived from students, peers, and experts. The findings align with previous literature. Teaching competitions brought opportunities for EFL teachers to acquire feedback about their teaching practices (Liu, 2015). Positive feedback is a factor in strengthening EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Moradkhani & Haghi, 2017). Students' participation in the competition evaluation, not only can reflect the teachers' teaching level realistically from the perspective of students but also can strengthen the communication and interaction between teachers and students. Moreover, it enables teachers to comprehensively understand the needs of students, to facilitate better teaching methods. Students' feedback plays an essential role in the development of teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Morris & Usher, 2011). Feedback from experts is also conducive to developing teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Morris et al., 2017) because of their authority and professionalism. Although peer evaluation is mentioned by some participants, the lack of individuals with similar disciplinary knowledge and skills weakens its effects.

The fourth theme is interpersonal support. In the study, teaching competitions can enhance secondary vocational EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy by receiving support including pedagogical, emotional, and technological support from colleagues and administrators. Interpersonal support has been found to have a significant influence on teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Alibakhshi, Abdollahi, et al., 2020; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The majority of the participants believed that support is crucial during the preparation process for teaching competitions. However, it is worth noting that participants also highlighted the need for support to be aligned with the unique requirements and expectations of teaching competitions. Targeted and customized support is essential to maximize its effectiveness in boosting teachers' teaching self-efficacy.

6. Conclusion

Secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy is vulnerable as they are encountered with complex teaching tasks. It is vital for them to be efficacious in their teaching. EFL teachers with high teaching self-efficacy are more likely to devote time and energy to difficult and unmotivated students, and adopt

student-centered and communication-oriented teaching approaches (Alibakhshi, Nikdel, et al., 2020; Choi & Lee, 2018), ultimately improving the overall teaching qualities. This study adds to the literature about the development of EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy, especially in secondary vocational school contexts. It does this by using a qualitative approach to explore the views of award-winning EFL teachers at five secondary vocational schools in Chongqing, China. Such an exploration revealed that teaching competitions can support the development of teachers' teaching self-efficacy through the interplay of factors including knowledge, practice and reflection, feedback, and interpersonal support. It is recommended that teaching competition activities need to be developed as follows: (1) provide opportunities for teachers to develop technological and pedagogical knowledge, (2) offer opportunities for teachers to practice innovative teaching methods and to reflect and learn from their teaching experiences, (3) allow for social persuasion in the form of feedback from experts, peers, and students, such as timely comments and teaching suggestions, (4) organize individualized guidance and training so that secondary vocational school EFL teachers can better prepare for competition, thoroughly demonstrate their strength and ability in the competition, conduct teaching reform and innovations actively, eventually improve their teaching self-efficacy.

References

Alibakhshi, G., Abdollahi, H., & Nezakatgoo, B. (2020). Exploring the antecedents of English language teachers' teaching self-efficacy: a qualitative study. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *21*(3), 286-303. https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-05-2020-0040

Alibakhshi, G., Nikdel, F., & Labbafi, A. (2020). Exploring the consequences of teachers' self-efficacy: a case of teachers of English as a foreign language. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, *5*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-020-00102-1

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Englewoods Cliffs. In: NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

Borg, S. (2011). Language teacher education. In *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 215-228). Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Choi, E., & Lee, J. (2018). EFL teachers' self-efficacy and teaching practices. *Elt Journal*, *72*(2), 175-186. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccy026

Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research*. sage.

Hemmings, B. C. (2015). Strengthening the teaching self-efficacy of early career academics. *Issues in Educational Research*, *25*(1), 1-17. Retrieved from https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/ielapa.373203911746219

Kou, P. (2020). Teaching competition and Professional development of college English teachers-A case study on the development of English teachers in application-oriented universities. *Journal of Heilongjiang Administrative Cadre College of Politics And Law, 2020*(2), 157-160. https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1008-7966.2020.02.033

Li, G., Liu, Y., Wang, L., & Chen, X. (2021). The theoretical basis and practical value of educational psychology of "promoting teaching by competition and learning by competition". *Higher Education of Sciences*, 59-63.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2017). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Sage publications.

Liu, T. (2015). *A Case Study of the Development of English Core Teachers in Secondary Vocational Schools* [Sichuan Normal University].

Liu, Y. L. (2018). The relationship between curriculum leadership and self-efficacy among EFL teachers in Chinese secondary vocational school *Teachers Education Management*. https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.2096-0603.2018.29.098

MOE. (2020). *Action Plan to Improve Quality of Vocational Education.*

Moradkhani, S., & Haghi, S. (2017). Context-based sources of EFL teachers' self-efficacy: Iranian public schools versus private institutes. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *67*, 259-269. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.019

Moradkhani, S., Raygan, A., & Moein, M. S. (2017). Iranian EFL teachers' reflective practices and self-efficacy: Exploring possible relationships. *System*, *65*, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.12.011

Morris, D. B., & Usher, E. L. (2011). Developing teaching self-efficacy in research institutions: A study of award-winning professors. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *36*(3), 232-245. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2010.10.005

Morris, D. B., Usher, E. L., & Chen, J. A. (2017). Reconceptualizing the sources of teaching self-efficacy: A critical review of emerging literature. *Educational psychology review*, *29*(4), 795-833. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9378-y

Naidoo, K., & Naidoo, L. J. (2021). Designing teaching and reflection experiences to develop candidates' science teaching self-efficacy. *Research in Science & Technological Education*, *41*(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/02635143.2021.1895098

Pajares, F. (2006). Self-efficacy during childhood and adolescence. *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents*, *5*, 339-367.

Phan, N. T. T., & Locke, T. (2015). Sources of self-efficacy of Vietnamese EFL teachers: A qualitative study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *52*, 73-82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.09.006

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *8*(1), 5-23.

Shao, S. (2015). *A study on EFL teachers' self-efficacy in Chinese secondary school context* Shanghai International Studies University].

Song, Z. (2021). The growth of English teachers in secondary vocational schools brought by "teaching ability Competition". *Growth*, *57*.

Stroobants*, V. (2005). Stories about learning in narrative biographical research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *18*(1), 47-61.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *23*(6), 944-956. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.05.003

Wang, Y. (2022). An important engine for improving the teaching ability of vocational college teachers in the new era: A review of the Teaching Ability Competition of the National Vocational College Skills Competition in 2019. *Chinese Vocational and Technical Education, 4*(5).

Wright, T. (2010). Second language teacher education: Review of recent research on practice. *Language teaching*, *43*(3), 259-296. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444810000030

Wyatt, M. (2008). *Growth in practical knowledge and teachers' self-efficacy during an in-service BA (TESOL) Programme* University of Leeds]. Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/docview/1779950047/51861776E1234B09PQ/1?accountid=41678

Wyatt, M. (2010). An English teacher's developing self-efficacy beliefs in using groupwork. *System*, *38*(4), 603-613. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2010.09.012

Wyatt, M. (2013). Overcoming low self-efficacy beliefs in teaching English to young learners. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *26*(2), 238-255. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2011.605082

Wyatt, M. (2014). Towards a re-conceptualization of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: Tackling enduring problems with the quantitative research and moving on. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *37*(2), 166-189. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2012.742050

Wyatt, M. (2016). "Are they becoming more reflective and/or efficacious?" A conceptual model mapping how teachers' self-efficacy beliefs might grow. *Educational Review*, *68*(1), 114-137. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1058754

Xia, L. (2016). Strategies to improve English language teachers' teaching self-efficacy in Chinese and Thai universities *University Education*, *3*.

Yang, L. (2017). *Analysis of the Effect of University-level Teaching Competition Mechanism on Novice English Teacher Development*. 2017 2nd International Conference on Humanities Science, Management and Education Technology.

Zhang, J. (2016). Professional development strategies for university teacher under the background of follow-up extension courses based on promoting teachers' self-efficacy. *Higher Education Management*, *2016*(3), 81-83. https://doi.org/10.13236/j.cnki.jshe.2016.03.019

Zhang, Y. (2017). The effects of "teaching competition"on the promotion of secondary vocational school teachers' teaching abilities. *China Training, 2*(12).

Zhang, Y. S. (2019). Research on strategies for enhancing university teachers' teaching self-efficacy based on "teaching reflection". *Journal of Kaifeng Institute of Education, 39*(6), 100-101. https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1008-9640.2019.06.046

Zhao, X. (2020). From "patching" to "upgrading ": Reunderstanding of the teaching ability competition in vocational education -- taking English subject in secondary vocational schools as an example. *Chinese Journal of Multimedia and Network Teaching: electronic edition, 2*(14).

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.