

# Overcoming Low Teaching Self-efficacy of English as a Foreign Language Teachers in Secondary Vocational Schools

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## Abstract

The new English curriculum stand (MOE, 2020) has put forward high requirements for China secondary vocational school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' qualities. As part of teachers' qualities, teaching self-efficacy determines their teaching practices and students' general achievements. Research has found China secondary vocational school EFL teachers lack confidence in teaching processes (Liu, 2018). Therefore, this study reports on a qualitative study exploring factors contributing to the enhancement of EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational education context. It is based on the views of 12 experts from Higher Education Institutions, Teacher Training Colleges and the Academy of Educational Sciences, and Secondary Vocational Schools in China to learn more about what factors can enhance EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational schools. The interview data were examined using thematic analysis which allows for a detailed exploration of the data, and 12 themes emerged from that analysis in terms of experiences, knowledge, and school culture. These themes encompassed various aspects, including enactive mastery experiences, vicarious learning experiences, interactive experiences, physical and emotional states, learners and learning, the pedagogy and curriculum, the English language, the self, vocational background, school spiritual culture, school material culture, and school system culture. The article concludes by considering the implications of the results for those designing policies and professional learning activities for secondary vocational EFL teachers and suggesting potential avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, teaching self-efficacy, EFL teacher, factors enhancing teaching self-efficacy

## 1. Introduction

As China enters a new developmental stage, the speed of industrial progress and economic reconstruction has accelerated, creating a demanding requirement for skilled personnel in various fields. In particular, the importance of English has been increasingly highlighted as China reform and opening-up and economic development have deepened. Foreign trade cooperation drives the foreign trade economy of numerous technical industries. Meanwhile, domestic and foreign technology exchange and discussion activities have brought significant support to research and development and innovation within the realm of the cutting-edge technology industry. Technical talents with competent English language skills are needed in a wide range of professions, businesses, workplaces, and enterprises in China (Gao, 2021).

The responsibility for training tens of millions of English-speaking workers falls on China secondary vocational English language education. In secondary vocational schools in China, English is one of the Cultural Foundation Courses for students of all majors (MOE, 2020). Chinese secondary vocational English instruction undertakes the obligations of fostering students' linguistic proficiency, professional and cultural awareness, and effective learning strategies. However, in China, English language learners are rarely exposed to English except in English language classrooms (Shao, 2015). EFL teachers are not just knowledge transmitters, but agents of change. EFL teachers are responsible for implementing curriculum reforms and classroom instruction (Molina, 2016), and thereby, EFL teachers' qualities are the key to the success or failure of EFL teaching and curriculum reform.

As part of teacher qualities, teachers' teaching self-efficacy refers to teachers' perception of her or his abilities to

teach effectively and facilitate students' learning (Shao, 2015; Wyatt, 2008, 2016). The teaching self-efficacy of EFL teachers has been recognized as a crucial factor influencing the quality of instruction, encompassing teaching methodologies and the achievements of students (Alibakhshi, Nikdel, et al., 2020; Choi & Lee, 2018). However, researchers have found vocational school EFL teachers lack confidence in teaching processes (Liu, 2018). The low teaching self-efficacy level of EFL teachers has resulted in poor qualities of secondary vocational school EFL teaching, such as unsatisfactory students' grades and dominance of traditional teaching methods (Liu, 2019). Therefore, it is of paramount significance to explore factors enhancing China secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. However, very few studies have been conducted on the development of English language teachers' teaching self-efficacy, especially in secondary vocational contexts. Therefore, the study is meant to fill the gaps by exploring factors enhancing China vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. It is hoped that the results of this study can be used as references for some stakeholders such as school administrators and teacher educators to formulate policies and design professional training and programs.

## 2. Literature Review

Bandura, the first psychologist to summarize the theoretical framework of self-efficacy, stated that self-efficacy is "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (Bandura, 1986, p.391). 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). The four efficacy-building experiences established the groundwork for the development of an individual's self-efficacy. The role of knowledge has also been stressed by Bandura who acknowledged that "self-development of personal efficacy requires mastery of knowledge and skills" (Bandura, 1997, p. 16). In addition, he also emphasized the significance of contextual factors in developing personal efficacy, and he claimed that "expectations of personal efficacy do not operate as dispositional determinants independently of contextual factors" (Bandura, 1997, p. 203) From Bandura's perspective, the three categories of factors consisting of experiences, knowledge, and contextual factors are highlighted in developing and enhancing self-efficacy. In this study, we adopted self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) as the research basis, and acknowledged contextual factors pertaining to school culture within educational institutions.

Researchers have made attempts to enhance teaching self-efficacy (Palmer, 2006; Poulou, 2007; von Suchodoletz et al., 2018) mainly from sources of self-efficacy, knowledge, and contextual factors. Bautista (2011) reported that enactive mastery, cognitive pedagogical mastery, symbolic modeling, and cognitive self-modeling are major factors enhancing early education preservice teachers' teaching self-efficacy. Moradkhai and Haghi (2017) concluded teaching self-efficacy strengthening factors involving prior successful experience, positive feedback, professional preparation, ideal teaching models, and emotional well-being among Iranian EFL teachers. Kundu (2020) also found three sources of self-efficacy that enhance teachers' teaching self-efficacy in online education, including self-mastery, role modeling, and verbal persuasion. Alibakhshi, Abdollahi, and Nezakatgoo (2020) summarized that teaching experience, English proficiency, and transformational leadership styles have a positive relationship with English language teachers' teaching self-efficacy. However, these efforts are not as insufficient as the unbalanced attention. More attention has been given to sources of teaching self-efficacy, which are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states, and less to teacher knowledge, and contextual factors. Providing teachers with knowledge is also effective in developing teachers' teaching self-efficacy (Bjerke & Solomon, 2020; Lee et al., 2017). Palmer (2006) found that there are additional three sources of teachers' teaching self-efficacy, including cognitive pedagogical mastery, cognitive content mastery, and simulated modeling. Nevertheless, other studies have examined the impacts of teacher knowledge on teaching self-efficacy that have not been guided by Bandura's (1997) description of the original four sources (Fives & Alexander, 2004; Markova, 2021; Wyatt, 2016). Contextual factors also affect teaching self-efficacy (Phan, 2016; von Suchodoletz et al., 2018), such as classroom characteristics and interpersonal support, but none of the researchers have classified these contextual factors appropriately. Some of the enhancement factors in the above categories are not appropriate in the context of EFL teaching in secondary vocational schools in China, like theoretical knowledge without practical application. The unique characteristics and contextual challenges faced by China secondary vocational school EFL teaching may need different factors to enhance teachers' teaching self-efficacy. As technology advances, new factors that enhance teaching self-efficacy may emerge, such as technology integration.

Commentators have long criticized the study of teachers' teaching self-efficacy for relying heavily on quantitative research methodologies, resulting in confusion and limitations. Key points of contention include the formation and the development of teaching self-efficacy. To address these concerns and 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). Morris, Usher, and Chen (2017) also mentioned the importance of using exploratory studies to explore the possible efficacy-building events except for the four original sources. 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). In addition, very few empirical studies on English language teachers' teaching self-efficacy especially in secondary vocational school contexts. Lack of attention to secondary vocational school EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy specifically the enhancement of their teaching self-efficacy will be a damage to secondary vocational school EFL teaching qualities. Scholars overlooked the fact that English language teachers in secondary vocational schools are more deserving of enhanced teaching self-efficacy as they are faced with more difficult and unmotivated students (Liu, 2019). The study is meant to fill the gaps and explore factors enhancing EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational schools by using qualitative methods. Hence, the research questions of the study were formulated as follows:

RQ1: What experiences can enhance EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational schools according to experts?

RQ2: What knowledge can enhance EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational schools according to experts?

RQ3: What school culture can enhance EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy in China secondary vocational schools according to experts?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

**Table 1.** Information of Participants

No.	Gender	Years of teaching/ working experiences	Job title	Category	Code
1	Male	14	Associate prof	Lecturer	LT1
2	Male	9	Associate prof	Lecturer	LT2
3	Female	37	Associate prof	Lecturer	LT3
4	Female	10	Associate prof	Lecturer	LT4
5	Female	31	Senior	Teaching and researching personnel	TP1
6	Female	15	Associate senior	Teaching and researching personnel	TP2
7	Male	23	Associate senior	Teaching and researching personnel	TP3
8	Female	22	Associate senior	English teaching research group head	EH1
9	Female	26	Associate senior	English teaching research group head	EH2
10	Female	20	Associate senior	English teaching research group head	EH3
11	Female	40	Associate senior	English teaching research group head	EH4
12	Male	23	Associate senior	English teaching research group head	EH5

A purposive sampling technique (Cohen et al., 2018) was employed to select twelve participants for this study. They are considered experts because they can offer the needed data for achieving the research objectives based on their expertise and experience. The determination of the sample size is typically guided by the principle of achieving “saturation” in the information gathered, signifying the point where no novel themes or information emerge from the conducted interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Therefore, the participants in the study were 12 experts, who were teaching and researching personnel, heads of English teaching research groups, and lecturers. Teaching and research staff from the Teacher Training College and the Academy of Educational Sciences, who are responsible for supervising the teaching and training of EFL teachers in vocational schools. Lecturers are from universities or colleges whose research areas are Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Psychology, and English Education, while the head of the English Teaching Research Group is an expert teacher appointed at each secondary vocational school. Information on the participants’ backgrounds can be found in Table 1.

### *3.2 Data Collection*

In order to respond to the three questions, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore factors enhancing the teaching self-efficacy of secondary vocational EFL teachers. I audio-recorded all of the interviews and these were later transcribed. 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.

### *3.3 Interview Protocol*

The interview protocol was carefully developed to capture the pertinent information related to the factors enhancing the teaching self-efficacy of secondary vocational school EFL teachers. To ensure the interview questions' validity and effectiveness, the protocol underwent validation by two field experts. Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted to assess the interview protocol's clarity and ensure smooth execution of the actual interviews.

### *3.4 Analysis*

The study employed thematic analysis to analyze the data from the semi-structured interview. Based on the methods of thematic analysis, themes or patterns generated from research data can be derived using two main approaches: inductive and deductive (theoretical) methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The deductive approach is done by researchers which is exploration guided by existing theories or models. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis deductively through coding based on the theoretical framework of the study which is the Model of the Development of Teaching Self-Efficacy (Morris et al., 2017), Model of Growth in Language Teachers' Teaching Self-Efficacy (Wyatt, 2016), Model of Promotion in Teachers' Teaching Self-Efficacy (Lu & Wu, 2018). Based on the deductive thematic analysis method, the researcher followed six procedures: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, finding themes, revising themes, defining and naming themes, and producing reports (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Employing the NVivo 12 software, the transcriptions were analyzed. Furthermore, the transcription data underwent member checking, a process in which participants were given the opportunity to review and offer feedback regarding the accuracy of their transcriptions.

## **4. Results**

Three overarching themes were identified: experiences, knowledge, and school culture. These themes encompassed a total of 12 subthemes, which offers a comprehensive insight into the factors enhancing the teaching self-efficacy of secondary vocational school EFL teachers. Table 2 below presents the themes, subthemes, and corresponding codes.

**Table 2.** Summary of Themes, Subthemes, and Codes Based on the Interview

Themes	Subthemes
Experiences	Enactive mastery experiences (3 codes)
	Vicarious learning experiences (3 codes)
	Interactive experiences (5 codes)
	Physical and emotional states (4 codes)
Knowledge	Learners and learning (3 codes)
	The pedagogy and curriculum (4 codes)
	The English language (5 codes)
	The self (4 codes)
School culture	Vocational background (4 codes)
	School spiritual culture (3 codes)
	School material culture (3 codes)
	School system culture (4 codes)

#### 4.1 Experiences

Under the perspective of experiences, four themes emerged: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, interactive experiences, and physical and emotional states. Enactive mastery experiences incorporate teaching experiences and students' educational attainments and behaviors, one participant pointed out,

##### 4.1.1 Enactive Mastery Experiences

**“Self-practice** involves preparing a detailed lesson plan before class” [LT1].

The experience of successfully addressing this kind of challenge will be passed on to my teaching and give me great confidence in my teaching abilities [LT2].

Another adds:

*“Students’ responses in class...for example, **students actively participate in classroom activities**”* [EH1].

##### 4.1.2 Vicarious Learning Experiences

Vicarious learning experiences are concerned with experiences of watching, reading, and listening to others performing the teaching tasks. As TP1 mentioned,

*“Teachers can also **watch their classroom teaching videos** in their spare time, which has a certain effect on promoting teaching self-efficacy”.*

In addition, online learning and reading are stressed by most participants, one participant said,

*“For example, depending on his or her actual situation, the teacher can **find some necessary resources on the Internet** for what knowledge he needs to learn”* [TP2].

Another two added,

*“...However, these platforms have now expanded significantly, offering a plethora of high-quality courses. This optimization signifies a positive shift. Indeed, upon **watching these resources**, you will derive significant benefits”* [EH4].

*“...**Engaging in extensive reading**...”* [LT1]

##### 4.1.3 Interactive Experiences

Interactive experiences involve experiences with peers, expert teachers, leaders, students, and students' parents.

**“Recognition and acknowledgment of teachers' teaching performance from school leaders** will greatly boost their teaching self-efficacy” [EH1].

*“In fact, **parents** are still very concerned about the students and **speak highly of the teachers' work**”* [EH2].

Interactive experiences with students are mainly excluded from students' feedback.

**“Students’ feedback** should be the most enhanced teacher's teaching self-efficacy...serves as an authentic

assessment of your actual teaching outcomes” [EH4].

#### 4.1.4 Physical and Emotional States

Physical and emotional states emphasize emotion, energy, outlook, and physical health, as EH4 stressed,

*“When we approach our teaching work with **enthusiasm**, it can lead to increased teaching self-efficacy levels”.*

LT1 further added that,

*“If the **tone of your voice** makes one feel that is full of vitality, and attracts the attention of the students, it will enhance your teaching self-efficacy... if the teacher **has proper body language**, his or her teaching self-efficacy will be enhanced”.*

#### 4.2 Knowledge

The knowledge perspective yielded five subthemes highlighting knowledge mastery in the enhancement of teachers’ teaching self-efficacy. Learners and learning involve students’ family background, learning situations, and affective states. The pedagogy and curriculum are also important for secondary vocational school teachers to be efficacious, including assessment, classroom activities, curriculum standards and textbooks, and teaching approaches. As for the English language in terms of grammar and vocabulary, the English culture, and English skills are stressed by the participants. In addition, knowledge of the self such as reflective attitude and skills are also valued by participants to enhance teachers’ teaching self-efficacy. Finally, knowledge of vocational background consisting of industry requirements and standards, vocational education policies, students’ major, and industry trends and updates. Here are some of the experts highlighting the significance of factors enhancing secondary vocational school EFL teachers’ teaching self-efficacy.

##### 4.2.1 Learners and Learning

*“**Having a full understanding of students**... some students have a poor English foundation and they may not be particularly interested in our English learning. I think teachers must further study our **students’ learning**, for example, their study habits generally are not good, even a little naughty...There may still be some students in secondary vocational schools who are excellent but have poor **family backgrounds**, but these students only account for 10% to 20% of the main body... In addition, there is a considerable number of secondary vocational students who have **psychological problems**” [TP3].*

##### 4.2.2 The Pedagogy and Curriculum

*“Mastering **the tools, methods, and criteria** of student learning evaluation [TP1].*

*Knowing how to **evaluate students differently at different levels**” [EH4].*

*“We should learn how to **design different classroom activities to create an active classroom atmosphere**, such as games...” [EH5].*

*“Knowing how to **design classroom activities aligned with students’ majors** would enhance my teaching self-efficacy” [LT4].*

*“**Familiarity with the curriculum standards**, encompassing the understanding of students’ core qualities listed in curriculum standard” [TP2].*

*“... I believe it's also necessary to **make various adjustments, enhancements, reductions, and refinements to the curriculum and textbooks** based on students' specific circumstances” [LTI].*

*“I believe we are currently shifting towards an **outcome-oriented approach**. I believe mastery of this method may be more suitable, which can enhance teachers’ teaching efficacy” [TP2].*

*“Knowing how to **integrate diverse instructional technologies with classroom teaching** is vital” [LT4].*

##### 4.2.3 The English Language

*“Except for **grammar, proficiency in professional technical English vocabulary** holds immense significance for secondary vocational English teachers. such as Hotel English, check-in and check-out terms at the front desk...” [TP3].*

*“...it is more about the improvement of teachers' English **listening, speaking, reading, and writing ability**, especially the **speaking and translation ability in the workplace**, which make teachers more confident in English teaching” [LT3].*

*“For EFL teachers, they need to know some **cultural knowledge** at first, such as local customs, people's living habits,*

*etiquette, some history, and so on” [EH3].*

#### 4.2.4 The Self

*“Possessing a **lifelong learning concept** is too crucial for the development of teachers' teaching self-efficacy” [EH4].*

*“Teachers' **self-reflective ability, attitude, and awareness**. For young teachers, I think this is quite an essential link. That is, they must be capable of self-reflection” [LT1].*

*“**Teaching reflection** is immensely crucial as it allows me to consolidate the insights acquired from the class and identify areas that require further development... This reflection contributes to the development of my teaching self-efficacy” [EH3].*

*“**Cultivating research awareness and ability** contribute significantly to teachers' teaching self-efficacy...for example, teachers can apply for research projects by themselves” [TP1].*

#### 4.2.5 Vocational Background

*“...there lies a necessity to comprehend the **English language proficiency requirements and professional standards for vocational students** in these specific job roles” [TP3].*

*“...Like the recent **policy on vocational education**, the newly promulgated “Action Plan to Improve Quality of Vocational Education ...” [LT2].*

*“Understanding **students' major** can help teachers more competent in combining English teaching with the professional skills required for students' future careers [TP2].*

*“Being aware of the **latest trends in the industry** especially the relation between teaching contents in real cases and the latest trends and situations in the enterprise, so that teachers can be more efficacious in vocational English teaching” [LT4].*

To summarize, knowledge encompassing understanding, awareness, and skills enhance secondary vocational school teachers' teaching self-efficacy.

### 4.3 School Culture

The school culture perspective revealed three subthemes related to the spirit, material, and system.

#### 4.3.1 School Spiritual Culture

School spiritual culture incorporates democratic and positive ethos, respecting teachers and valuing education, and a sense of community. One participant responded,

*“...If schools can create a **democratic and relaxed atmosphere**...another is a **positive school spirit** as long as it has a beneficial effect” [EH1].*

*“...if there is no atmosphere of **respecting teachers and students** on campus, how can teachers' teaching self-efficacy be enhanced? ” [EH3]*

Another two participants added,

*“What is culture, is that our **colleagues can communicate openly, equally and harmoniously**... help each other, and point out each other's shortcomings, which can effectively promote teachers' teaching self-efficacy” [LT2].*

*“The formation of a collective **sense of belonging** in schools can promote the enhancement of teachers' teaching self-efficacy” [EH1].*

#### 4.3.2 School Material Culture

*“If the **hardware** of schools could fully address concerns about competition for our teaching capacity, I think our teaching self-efficacy would be even stronger” [EH1].*

*“It would be beneficial to provide teachers with **subscriptions to magazines and books**” [EH3].*

With the further advancement of time, traditional teaching equipment no longer fully meets the needs of classroom instruction for teachers. Most participants believed that providing online resources could enhance teachers' teaching self-efficacy. One of them said,

*“Schools are now considering implementing instructional systems...by incorporating these technologies, teachers have access to a **wealth of instructional resources**, ultimately boosting their teaching self-efficacy” [LT4].*

### 4.3.3 School System Culture

Codes involved in school system culture are teacher professional development system, professional title promotion, teacher remuneration and welfare, and teaching management. One participant concluded,

*“Professional training opportunities and self-development plan are factors enhancing teachers’ teaching self-efficacy” [EH1].*

In addition to these, financial support and time allocation to teachers’ training are also significant in enhancing EFL teachers’ teaching self-efficacy. Two more participants described,

*“...however, schools do not give sufficient time for teachers to participate in training” [TP3].*

*“Training requires financial resources and, as yet, there is no clear system in place...” [EH2].*

Professional title promotion is also stressed by many participants, as EH2 stated that opportunities to get promoted in professional titles can enhance teachers’ teaching self-efficacy. Furthermore, teacher remuneration and welfare are also the main concerns of most participants, as one said,

*“Get a satisfactory salary...and of course, to solve the worries of teachers’ lives, such as faculty canteen and gym” [LT2].*

The last is teaching management, one participant put forward,

*“There should be a reasonable arrangement of the teacher’s workload” [TP3].*

By examining efficacy-enhancing factors through the lenses of experiences, knowledge, and school culture, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of factors to enhance secondary vocational school EFL teachers’ teaching self-efficacy. The identified subthemes offer valuable insights and guidance for policymakers and educators to develop supporting policies and professional development programs to enhance EFL teachers’ teaching self-efficacy.

## 5. Discussion

The study’s findings create a picture of what factors enhance secondary vocational school EFL teachers’ teaching self-efficacy based on Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory. This picture has three main features and these were referred to as themes. Experience, whether accrued in a vocational education setting or not, was a strong feature of the picture formed. This finding is consistent with work conducted by Hemmings (2015), Kundu (2020), and Moradkhani and Haghgi (2017) which stressed the importance of teaching experiences, teaching models, verbal persuasions, and emotional well-being in enhancing teachers’ teaching self-efficacy. It is a common practice in the China secondary vocational school context that EFL teachers can be more efficacious when they acquire experiences. However, experiences like students’ positive behaviors and educational attainments, and interactive experiences with students’ parents such as appreciation and gratitude from parents, were also considered as factors contributing to the enhancement of teaching self-efficacy. Most secondary vocational school students’ parents are not around their children, and they are working in big cities (Fu, 2021). It is very hard for teachers to contact the parents, which may lower their teaching self-efficacy. If teachers can get frequent interaction with parents, and talk with parents about students’ current situations, teachers’ teaching self-efficacy can be enhanced because of benign interaction. Physical and psychological relaxation and appropriate behavior involved in physical states were mentioned by many participants.

Knowledge was a second theme. Mastering knowledge of learners and learning, the pedagogy and curriculum, the English language, the self, and vocational background were highlighted as factors to enhance teaching self-efficacy. This finding about the effects of the pedagogy and subject matter resonates with the ideas expressed by researchers (Alibakhshi, Abdollahi, et al., 2020; Lauermaun & König, 2016). Wyatt (2009) and Shao (2015) found English language teachers need to master general English knowledge like vocabulary, grammar, and English skills. For China secondary vocational school EFL teachers, knowing specialized vocabulary and workplace communication skills are also indispensable factors in enhancing teaching self-efficacy, which is different from previous research focusing on the general English language. Some participants regarded knowledge of vocational background as one efficacy-enhancing factor because vocational teaching cannot be separated from the understanding of vocational education knowledge. It is imperative to establish a strong foundation within secondary vocational schools, addressing this matter through a practical lens. Knowledge of the self also stressed by participants, although some participants thought that secondary vocational school EFL teachers were lack of lifelong learning awareness and research abilities, they still hold vocational EFL teachers need self-development awareness and skills and that is not



limited to narrowly published papers, or participating research projects. The classroom cannot be too outdated, and it must incorporate new ideas and have fresh elements, which falls on teachers.

A third theme was school culture, including school spiritual culture, school material culture, and school system culture. Efficacy-enhancing factors involving material culture and system culture, such as teaching management, better remuneration and welfare, and professional development system are consistent with the findings of JO Odanga et al (2018). Material and system support were also applied to EFL teachers of China secondary vocational schools to enhance their teaching self-efficacy. It is worth noting that with the coming of Web 2.0 times, the adequacy of online resources was raised by most participants, like access to paid databases and software. School spiritual culture was also key in contributing to high teaching self-efficacy. Although vocational education has been taken more and more seriously in recent years, and it reveals its importance attached by China, however, it also shows the weak position of vocational education. Chinese traditional culture believes that academic talents enjoy higher status than technical talents. Since the Pre-Qin periods, a culture of disdain for technicians had formed especially among Confucianism (Lu, 2012). Hence, a supportive school culture fostering respecting teachers and valuing education is of paramount importance to enhance teachers' teaching self-efficacy.

The depth of this discussion showcases the factors enhancing the teaching self-efficacy of secondary vocational school EFL teachers. It is important to note that while not all subthemes from the conceptual framework were directly reflected in the interview findings, new elements emerged from the interview, such as vocational background and specialized English knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

This study provides some initial ideas on what factors can enhance teachers' teaching self-efficacy in the context of secondary vocational education. Unlike prior research, which heavily relied on quantitative methodologies, the study takes a qualitative approach to provide a more in-depth exploration of the efficacy-enhancing factors. Interviewing the experts consisting of teaching and researching personnel, heads of English teaching research groups, and lecturers, revealed the importance of experiences, knowledge, and school culture in enhancing EFL teachers' teaching self-efficacy. From the perspective of experts, it provides a beneficial foundation for understanding the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the development of teaching self-efficacy, including enactive mastery experiences, vicarious learning experiences, interactive experiences, physical and emotional states, learners and learning, the pedagogy and curriculum, the English language, the self, vocational background, school spiritual culture, school material culture, and school system culture. Theoretically, by identifying the efficacy-enhancing factors of secondary vocational school EFL teachers, this study facilitates further exploration of teaching self-efficacy development research. In terms of practical implications, the research findings offer valuable sources for teachers seeking to enhance their teaching self-efficacy and guide their professional development, ultimately benefiting students' learning. Furthermore, school administrators and teacher educators can formulate policies and design professional training and programs to enhance teachers' teaching self-efficacy, ultimately contributing to the improvement of EFL instruction quality. However, the small sample size of the present study may limit the generalizability of the findings. Hence, it is recommended that future studies include a larger sample size to enhance the validity and reliability of the results. Experimental studies are encouraged in further studies to examine the feasibility of the findings by drawing causal inferences.

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