



EXPLORING EFFICACY SOURCES OF IN-SERVICE TEACHERS IN MYANMAR: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: Numerous studies have demonstrated the significance of teacher self-efficacy and highlighted its strong association with benefits not only for teachers (performance, well-being) but also for students (achievement, motivation). The study is an attempt to explore self-efficacy sources of in-service teachers. To achieve this aim, 8 in-service teachers with different positions in a school in Min Bu, Myanmar were recruited to conduct an interview. Interview guide was developed based on the literature related to sources of self-efficacy. The collected interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings denote that good teaching experience, ideal teachers, life experiences, motivation to become a teacher, positive feelings about being a teacher, principal's lead, professional development activities, received feedback on their teaching, and work experience act as sources of their self-efficacy.

Key words: in-service teachers, teacher self-efficacy, sources of efficacy

1. Introduction

Teachers are seen as the essential elements of an educational system because of the substantial impact they have on students' behavior through their knowledge, personalities, actions, and enthusiasm (Olakunle & Salman, 2020). Unlike the other professions, teaching is a complex activity, a professional pursuit and a process for facilitating learning. In addition to controlling the teaching-learning process by planning the lessons, conducting them, evaluating students, maintaining classroom disciplines, and ensuring students' participation in classroom activities, teachers should be patient, flexible, friendly, and humorous personalities which affect the whole classroom atmosphere positively (Hotaman, 2010).

In Myanmar, education reform in basic education sector has been initiated since 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2016). Myanmar is one of the Asian countries which lies between India and China. The new basic education structure was kindergarten, five-year-schooling (primary level), four-year-schooling (lower secondary level), and three-year-schooling (upper secondary level) and the new curriculum was adopted along with the new structure (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Due to the key role of teachers in educational reform and the demand of the teaching profession, it is vital that teachers have high efficacy so as to overcome the challenges they encounter in their day-to-day professional life. This is because Bandura (1977) argued that high efficacious teachers put in more effort to resolve problems they face and are able to keep up their efforts for longer. Oakes et al. (2013) also stated that teachers' sense of self-efficacy determined the goals the teachers set, the efforts they invest, the persistence to their teaching task and these goals, efforts, and persistence made a significant difference in their performance and student achievement.

2. Literature review

For more than four decades, the self-efficacy of teachers has been a subject of scrutiny (Hussain & Khan, 2022) as it is the important effective construct associated with benefits for teachers and students (Gale et al., 2021). Research conducted over several decades has shown evidence of the links between

Received May 2024.

Cite as: Phyo, S. Y.; & Theint, P. Z. Z. (2024). Exploring Efficacy Sources of In-Service Teachers in Myanmar: A Qualitative Study. *Acta Didactica Napocensia*, 17(1), 130-138, <https://doi.org/10.24193/adn.17.1.11>

teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and the quality of instruction, their wellbeing, student achievement, and student motivation (Klassen et al., 2009; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Ashton and Webb (1986) maintained that high efficacious teachers tend to see their role (teacher) as meaningful and important, set high expectations for students, take personal responsibility for student learning, take measures to improve their own performance instead of student failure and improve instructional strategies to meet all students' needs, show confidence in their ability to affect student learning, set goals for themselves and encourage their students to do so, consider learning as a collaborative process between themselves and their students, and exert greater effort and persistence in student learning.

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) reviewed almost all sources dated from 1974 to 1997 which included the term teacher efficacy and listed some important findings. Some major findings are that (1) efficacy does play a powerful role in schooling, (2) once efficacy beliefs are established, they appear to be resistant to change to some extent, (3) judgements about efficacy becomes automatic and routine as experience with the task increases, (4) during the process of change implementation, efficacy can dip temporarily and once they see the evidence of increased student learning, high efficacy beliefs will take root, and (5) encouragement and support are important at that time.

Bandura (1997) described self-efficacy as the person's perceived belief that he or she has the capability to perform a task. One cannot master all things. People cultivate efficacy in different and in the levels to which they develop it even within their given pursuits. One can have a high sense of organizational efficacy but low parenting one. As a result, an efficacious belief system is a unique collection of self-beliefs connected to distinct functional domains rather than a universal characteristic. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), teacher efficacy is the belief of a teacher that he or she is capable of organizing and executing courses of required action to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context.

The four main sources of self-efficacy are (1) mastery experience/performance experience, (2) modeling or vicarious experience, (3) verbal persuasion to be successful, and (4) affective states/emotional arousal/anxiety and vulnerability to stress (Bandura, 1977; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) contended that mastery experience and emotional arousal directly influences the most. Mastery experience involves the attainment of goals through one's direct, personal action within the behavioral domain (Morris et al., 2017). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) claimed that only in actual teaching can teachers assess their capabilities for their task and experience the consequences. If the teacher experienced that their performance has been successful, this experience raises efficacy beliefs, leading to the expectation that future performance will be proficient. Furthermore, if strong efficacy has been built, upcoming failures have less negative impact on it (Bandura, 1986). The influence of mastery experience on self-efficacy depends on perception of their own abilities, perceived task difficulty, the amount of invested effort and received external support, temporal success and failure patterns, and the cognitive organization of these factors (Bandura, 1997). This mastery experience is highly relevant not only at individual level but also at organizational level (Lazarides & Warner, 2020).

Arousal symptoms like racing heartbeat, elevated heart rate, increased sweating, and trembling hands can be interpreted either favorably as enthusiasm or negatively as worry and anxiety, depending on the situation, the individual, and the total amount of arousal (Bandura, 1997). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) also maintained that moderate level of arousal can improve performance by focusing concentration and effort on the task while high one can weaken functioning and disrupt making the best use of one's skills and abilities

Vicarious experiences mean the observation of a social model completing a task and social comparison processes (Bandura, 1997). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) maintained that watching others teach (from the view of a student or from images portrayed in the media) provides impressions about the nature of the teaching task. Models of successful teachers act as the basis for the decision that teaching is a manageable task and situational and personal resources adequate. They also asserted that verbal persuasion also provides information related to the nature of teaching. Bandura (1997)

stated that although verbal persuasion solely has limited effects on the rise and fall in teacher self-efficacy, this persuasion can mobilize greater effort in the face of difficulties, ameliorating the negative effects coming from self-doubt. According to Bandura (1986), with respect to verbal persuasion, the strength of the persuasion is dependent on the credibility, trustworthiness and expertise of the persuader. Specific performance feedback from supervisors, other teachers, and even students can be a powerful information source on whether their skills and strategies meet the demands of the particular teaching task. The feedback provides social comparison information: whether their teaching performance and outcomes are adequate, inferior to or superior to others in similar situation. If the feedback is overly harsh, the efficacy may be lowered.

The findings of empirical studies portray that professional development activities which involve mastery experience together with feedback and persuasion result in increases in the level of teacher self-efficacy (Morris & Usher, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). In addition to these four sources, cognitive content mastery and cognitive pedagogical mastery were also suggested by (Palmer, 2006, 2011) as the sources of efficacy. Such evidence can be seen in numerous studies such as Stevens et al. (2013), and Thomson et al. (2017). Furthermore, teachers with extensive subject knowledge rarely experience doubts in their ability to teach (Bruun & Evans, 2020).

3. Rationale of the study and research questions

Although there is a voluminous amount studies on teachers' sense of self-efficacy, only a few studies put an emphasis on sources of efficacy. Due to the prominence of teacher self-efficacy over several decades, a huge number of studies on teacher self-efficacy turn out to be quantitative (Morris et al., 2017). Though these quantitative studies are informative, they limit the investigation process as they need to make this complex belief easily identifiable and measurable (Marschall & Watson, 2022). Another research gap can be the participants as studies we have come across recruited preservice teachers as their participants such as Marschall (2023) and Wah and Perak (2007). The focus of the study is participants' sources of self-efficacy.

The research questions are the following:

RQ1 What are the sources of teacher self-efficacy expressed by teachers?

RQ1 (a) Which emotional arousals are expressed by teachers?

RQ1 (b) Which mastery experiences are expressed by teachers?

RQ1 (c) Which vicarious experiences are expressed by teachers?

RQ1 (d) Which verbal persuasions are expressed by teachers?

4. Method

4.1. Participant and setting

Participants were teachers from a High School in Min Bu, Myanmar. Interviewees were selected by purposive sampling to ensure maximum variation in position and gender. Characteristics of the interviewees are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. *Charatceristics of Interviewees*

Pseudonyms	Gender	Position	Service Year	Subject Taught
P1	Female	Primary Teacher	33	All Subjects
P2	Male	Primary Teacher	34	All Subjects
P3	Male	Primary Teacher	34	All Subjects
P4	Female	Junior Teacher	31	Mathematics
P5	Female	Junior Teacher	21	English, Science
P6	Male	Junior Teacher	3	History
P7	Female	Senior Teacher	9	Physics
P8	Male	Senior Teacher	35	Myanmar

4.2. Ethical issues

Before collecting data, ethical consent and permissions were asked from the township education officers, school principals, and participants at a Basic Education High School in Min Bu, Myanmar. Informed consent was shared with potential participants and this consent included research purpose, researchers' names and contact information, study procedures and management of data. After receiving the informed consent from voluntary participants, interviews were conducted. Anonymity of participants and confidentiality of their data were ensured.

4.3. Data collection and data analysis

First, developed interview questions based on literature review were prepared in native language (Burmese) and pilot-tested with three teachers (one primary teacher, one junior teacher, and one primary teachers). The interview consists of two sections: general information of interviewees, and their self-efficacy sources. Interview guide is described in appendix. It took the researcher an average of 35 minutes for each individual interview. The interviews were recorded as audio.

Thematic analysis was used to find common themes. The transcripts were analyzed manually by using the cyclical process. All the transcripts were written down, read to be familiar, analyzed by proofreading and synthesized according to the main themes. Credibility was ensured by member checking: participants were requested to read the transcripts and to make modifications if they want. As for the dependability of the study, the same questions were used for all interviews. With regard to neutrality, the codes of first and second authors were compared.

5. Results

With regard to the research question, the themes described in Table emerged.

Table 2. Themes Emerged from Interviews

Themes Emerged	
Motivation to become a teacher	Feedback on teaching
Positive feelings about being a teacher	Professional development activities
Good teaching experience	Work experience
Ideal teachers	Principal's lead and life experience

Regarding the first theme, P4 and P8 chose to become teachers due to their intrinsic motivation and the others became teachers due to extrinsic motivation. For example, P8 responded that he became a teacher as he was really into it and P4 described that she chose it as it was the profession that shaped students. Some became teachers due to the encouragement of their family or relatives (P5 and P7). P1 decided to be a teacher as this profession is suitable for women and the rest interviewees (P2, P3, P6) began teachers as they could get hired easily for this job.

The second theme emerged as all interviewees have positive feelings regarding teaching. For example, P6 described teaching as the way to rejuvenate as he spent time with children. P1, P4, and P5 gave a similar response that they enjoyed teaching because it could enable others to know and understand things that they did not before. A sense of pride was reflected in the responses of P2, P3, P7, and P8. P7 answered like that:

"I am very proud of being called a teacher. Though I scolded my students, they never hesitate to call me as teacher whenever we bump into on streets, or in the markets. Whenever I go to the village's celebration, even their parents call me as teacher regardless of my young age and treat me with respect."

The third theme appeared due to their description of their good teaching experience. P1 answered she felt being a good teacher when misbehaved students behaved well. P6 and P7 said that they felt so when students' eyes were sparking, and those eyes told that they really understood what they had taught. P2, P3, P4, P6, and P8 gave a similar response by relating the moment when they feel as a

good teacher to when their students won awards at township level competitions or passed the exam with high marks. As an instance, P4 gave the following answer:

“Long ago, students in my village did not receive any awards at township level competition. I feel really ecstatic when my students achieve awards due to my teaching.”

The fourth theme emerged when respondents shared about the teachers they wish to emulate. All participants idolized teachers with subject matter mastery. For example, P5 answered that she met a teacher who could give clear instructions and explanations while she was at university, and she was trying to be like her. Similarly, P7 described that she would like to become like the mentor whom she met through professional development training and the mentor shared all her knowledge and skills unreserved and worked together with the attendants. Another attribute of ideal teachers was found in the response of P3.

“I have met good teachers. One of whom is the female teacher who treated all students fair regardless of the background. Another one is the History teacher whose teaching enabled students to imagine the historical events vividly. I am trying to be like them, and I believe I can.”

The ideal teachers were found to have such characteristics: clear instruction, subject matter mastery, and treating students fairly regardless of the backgrounds. Another common response of the interviewees is that they can be like their ideal teachers, and they are trying.

The fifth theme appeared when six interviewees, except P5 and P6 described that they received positive comments on their teaching from their principal, colleagues, students, and parents. Regarding the comment that pleases them the most, they provide different answers. For instance, P1, P2, P3, and P8 stated that they appreciated comments from principal most as the principal knows more about what good teaching is than colleagues, students or students' parents do. P7 felt pleased most at positive comments from students and their parents because she believed that students knew better than anyone when it comes to her teaching skill. P4 responded like that:

“The one that pleases me the most is the positive comment from principal and colleagues. This is because they are educated people working in the same profession, meaning that they can decide right.”

P5 told that she did not receive any comment in person as she did not live in the village where the school existed. P6 said that he did not receive any comment and he thought that that was because he was a novice teacher.

All participants were confident in their ability to teach due to monthly continuous professional development activities, informal discussion with colleagues, and principal's support. As an example, P4 responded the following:

“In a year, we did continuous professional development sessions six times. We did it monthly starting from June. During that time, we worked together across subjects or grades on how to teach and discussed the contents in the textbook to clear misunderstanding. Sometimes, we got some useful ideas for improving instruction from our principal.”

Except for P6, the interviewees also added that they have taught the same subject for years. P5 also described that teaching English was a little difficult as the new textbook included more advanced vocabulary and grammar structures and discussion with colleagues was one of the ways to solve it.

All interviewees responded that they could enlist parental involvement because their principal took initiative in such matter and due to the principal's lead, parents became more active in involving in school activities. Two young teachers (P6 and P7) believed that they were young and inexperienced, and it would be better if the principal and older colleagues led them in doing so. The other teachers went on to say that they were in their middle ages, meaning that they had so many life experiences relating to this.

6. Discussion

The purpose of the study is to explore sources of efficacy expressed by teachers. The four sources discussed in the literature were found in the responses of the participants. Despite some variations in the data, there are some common things shared between the participants. In terms of career choice, there were intrinsically driven teachers and extrinsically driven ones. However, they all have good teaching experience, and positive feelings towards teaching. These mastery experience and emotional arousal are the sources that directly influence teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Furthermore, they all have ideal teachers (vigorous experience) and are trying to be like them. Regarding verbal persuasion, those who received positive comments pay attention to the one who gave it, and the level of their pleased feelings depends on what kind of person the comment giver is. This also reflects the point highlighted by Bandura (1986): the strength of the persuasion varies according to the credibility, trustworthiness and expertise of the persuader. Although most of the interviewees felt most pleased at comments from principal and colleagues, one chose students as she thought they know better than anyone else with regard to her teaching skills.

In spite of these variations, all interviewees believed in their ability to teach the assigned subjects and this belief is attributed to the professional development activities, informal discussion with colleagues, and principal support. Teachers with high service years also added so many years of teaching the assigned subjects. Bruun and Evans (2020) also described that teachers with extensive subject knowledge rarely struggle with doubts in their ability to teach. Regarding enlisting parental involvement, all interviewees emphasized the principal's lead and experienced teachers also attributed their belief to their life experiences. Younger teachers wanted to follow the lead of principal and experienced colleagues regarding enlisting parental involvement.

7. Conclusion

The interview responses described in the paper indicated that mastery experience, emotional arousal, vicarious experience and verbal persuasion can determine teachers' sense of self-efficacy. This implies that a sense of self-efficacy is a malleable trait and can be cultivated. An interesting finding is that the difference in their first motivation (extrinsic vs intrinsic) to choose teaching as their profession did not make any changes in their self-efficacy and when they became teachers, they had same positive feelings towards their profession. Furthermore, the interview responses reflect how important the role of principal and professional development activities in their self-efficacy. This has several important implications for teacher education programs and schools. These programs should ensure that practicum should reflect the context and situation student teachers will face when they become teachers, and they have good experience in their practicum as it will become the most influential source of their sense of efficacy. Professional development programs for in-service teachers should target at developing their expertise. Principals should create opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development activities, and lead in enlisting the involvement of parents and community.

Though participants involved in this study meet the criteria of maximum variation in terms of positions, they all were from the same school. Thus, further research should recruit participants from different schools. Moreover, it would be interesting to focus on how principal's leadership affects teacher self-efficacy and teachers' engagement in professional development opportunities and their self-efficacy.

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Acknowledgement

Our heartfelt acknowledgements go to all of those who help to complete this work.

Ethical statement

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects at the same time following national and international standards. Furthermore, this study is our own original work, and it is not under consideration anywhere. We agree on the order of the authors and the current manuscript format.

Disclosure

We declare no conflict of interest to disclose.

Annex-Interview questions

Background information

- What is your current position?
- How many have you been working as a teacher?
- Which subjects are you teaching at school?

Emotional arousal

- How did you become a teacher?
- How do you feel about teaching?

Mastery experience

- Could you describe the prominent moments in your professional career that increased your confidence as a teacher?

Vicarious experience

- Do you have any teachers you would like to emulate?
- Tell me more about it.

Verbal persuasion

- What kind of comments have you received regarding your teaching?
- Who gives you such comments?
- Whose comment makes you pleased the most?
- Why do you think so?

Others

- Are there some activities or other things that raised your confidence in your ability to teach?
- Are there some areas of functions that need someone's actions or other things to raise your confidence in performing them?