
Exploring Language Teacher Efficacy in Japan.
Gene Thompson. Channel View Publications, 2020. 183 pp.

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Teacher efficacy (TE) is a critical concept for general educators, including in- and pre-service teachers, stakeholders, and policymakers in Japan. Education in Japan has recently suffered from severe teacher shortages (Oka, 2023; Shioiri et al., 2023), a long-acknowledged problem in teaching professions. In this book, Thompson conducts a step-by-step mixed-method investigation into teaching self-efficacy beliefs of high school English teachers by developing a scale pertaining to the Japanese educational context. Delving deeply into language teacher efficacy (LTE) in a contextualized manner is timely as it may contribute to a breakthrough in the current situation.

Thompson aims to present each of the 11 chapters as stand-alone, allowing readers to start from any they wish. However, reading the preface and introduction will help with understanding what he means by ‘language teacher efficacy’ (LTE) and the research context. He defines LTE “as the beliefs that teachers have about their perceived capability to organize and carry out courses of action in order to effectively support the development of student L2 language ability” (p. xvi). The introduction (chapter 1) reviews previous studies in the LTE field and provides contextual features of the Japanese language teaching environment, where communicative language teaching (CLT) and the English-only-instruction policy were implemented through the Course of Study (COS) in 2009 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). Thompson points out that while previous studies uncovered teachers’ lack of confidence and under-preparedness for CLT, they fail to discuss what “confidence” refers to and its influence on teachers’ activities. For example, he believes LTE research can identify in which areas teachers have strong or weak self-efficacy and can thus cater to needs of individual teachers through training.

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical development of TE beliefs concerning Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986) and shows how TE beliefs have been theorized to better investigate what, why, and how teachers do what they do within contextual and personal constraints. Thompson emphasizes the cyclical interaction between TE beliefs, teachers’ actions, and the contexts in which teachers operate (p. 17). His review indicates the influences of institutional and collegial dynamics on TE beliefs and the impact of technological advancements on teacher preparation. Thus, he calls for refining and expanding the concept of TE sources to understand TE development with a more delicate lens.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the development of LTE research, which finds that language teachers' strong L2 proficiency, language pedagogy knowledge, and instructional strategies—dimensions unique to the language teaching profession—tend to be associated with strong LTE. Previous studies employed TE measurement scales from North America or Europe, which failed to adequately address LTE dimensions regarding group-oriented and collective cultural nuances typical of Confucian East Asian countries, including Japan. This shortcoming prompted Thompson to concentrate on the collective efficacy beliefs related to Japanese teachers' "collaborative practice" (p. 33) and the cultural impact on LTE.

Chapter 4 presents two research questions; (1) What are the underlying dimensions of JTE efficacy beliefs? and (2) What factors appear to influence JTE efficacy beliefs? In answer, Thompson cross-referenced research approaches used in previous studies, identified problems, proposed a research design appropriate to the context of Japanese high school English education, and reported on the design of his research instrument. TE sources and beliefs tend to be domain-specific and strongly influenced by the culture in which teachers are situated. Efficacy items in his scale were created from teacher interview results in the first step of a three-step development process. Following this, the items were piloted with a small sample of teachers to identify problems, and online responses from English teachers in 27 prefectures were quantitatively analyzed.

Chapter 5 details Thompson's development of the 25-item Japanese Teacher of English Teacher Efficacy Scale (JTE-TES). He ensured the JTE-TES maintained content, cultural, and linguistic validity for JTEs. This required addressing challenges related to context specificity and conceptual equivalence, particularly in a multilingual research setting. The development process comprised two interview cycles with seven local JTEs, who provided expert insight into the Japanese high school environment during the instrument's design phase.

In chapter 6, eight "underlying dimensions of Japanese high school English teachers' efficacy beliefs" were identified, ranging from "Classroom Management" to "Working with Colleagues" (p. 79). Further, five dimensions of TE: Using English (UE), Communicative Teaching (CT), Teamwork (TW), Student Achievement (SA), and Managing Workload (MW) were extracted for more comprehensive analysis. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of 141 teachers' responses highlighted JTEs' weakest efficacy beliefs in areas such as workload management and motivating students. However, JTEs have positive efficacy in using English to communicate with colleagues and students. They faced specific challenges in CT, SA, and TW, particularly in balancing teaching for communication with university exam preparation and collaborating in Japan's team-focused educational environment.

The relationship between a language teacher's self-efficacy, L2 proficiency, and classroom use is examined in chapter 7. Although L2 knowledge was assumed to influence efficacy, the study found neither proficiency nor efficacy directly predicts L2 classroom usage. Thompson underscores the significance of perceived proficiency in LTE. Generally, L2 proficiency does not directly translate to classroom use. In the Japanese high school context, teachers' L2 use, despite their high self-efficacy, is impacted by factors such as student motivation and school academic strength.

The interview and survey results in chapter 8 reveal school levels and educational goals strongly affect JTEs' L2 teaching efficacy. High-achieving schools prioritize entrance exams over CLT methods, whereas underperforming schools present unique teaching challenges. Meanwhile, JTEs exposed to CLT when learning L2 as students exhibited higher efficacy beliefs. These beliefs can be predicted by both personal and contextual factors, including CLT training and school academic performance, among others.

Chapter 9 delves into LTE in collaborative practices, specifically within the Working with Others and Teamwork dimensions of the JTE-TES. It assesses existing research on collective L2 teacher efficacy and presents findings on the significance of collaborative efficacy for high school JTEs, also discussing potential contextual and personal influences. Chapter 10 explores factors influencing development of LTE beliefs, focusing on four primary sources highlighting the significance of previous experiences with actual teaching practice, and emphasizes the role of social persuasion in the JTEs' efficacy belief development.

Chapter 11 revisits the major findings of the study, and also provides a comprehensive list of areas for LTE research, among which the relationship between LTE beliefs and student outcomes and students' self-efficacy warrants future investigation. Thompson emphasizes that LTE is a multifaceted concept deeply rooted in teachers' perceptions of their abilities, prior experiences, and context. He highlights the collective dimension of L2 teacher efficacy and, while valuing language proficiency enhancement, stresses the importance of context-specific practice and innovation opportunities for teachers.

Each chapter being a stand-alone read results in some repetitiveness across sections which sometimes blurs their distinct focus; I struggled with the organization of the book. Nevertheless, this structure could be advantageous for readers, including researchers, graduate students, or teachers, seeking information based on their immediate interests. Thompson's valuable contribution lies in the comprehensive examination of JTE-TES development and the pivotal findings on JTE self-efficacy beliefs. These insights, rooted in the context of Japanese high school

English education, can guide graduate students and researchers studying LTE in various international or domestic settings.

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