

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND BIOGRAPHIC FACTORS IN PREDICTING TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY: EVIDENCE FROM JAPANESE EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract— This study investigated how perceived English language proficiency and biographic factors predict teacher self-efficacy among Japanese EFL teachers. Quantitative data were collected from 132 in-service teachers through a survey incorporating the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale and a self-assessment of language proficiency. Regression analyses revealed that perceived language proficiency was the strongest predictor of teacher self-efficacy ($r = .492$, $p < .001$), followed by teaching experience ($r = .328$, $p < .001$). Education level showed only a small correlation ($r = .141$, $p = .012$) and was not significant in the regression model, while overseas experience exhibited no effect ($p = .850$). These results highlight the pivotal role of communicative competence and sustained teaching experience in enhancing teachers' confidence and instructional effectiveness. The findings suggest that teacher education and professional development programs should move beyond credential-based evaluation to emphasize competence-oriented training and continuous language development. Such efforts may foster a more empowering environment for teacher growth, resilience, and long-term retention within Japan's EFL context.

Keywords—Japanese EFL teachers, language proficiency, quantitative research, teacher self-efficacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher self-efficacy has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing educational effectiveness, shaping instructional decisions, classroom management, and ultimately student outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Tschanen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Defined as teachers' belief in their ability to plan, organize, and execute instructional tasks to achieve desired educational goals, self-efficacy is not only central to teacher motivation but also strongly associated with persistence, resilience, and job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). A growing body of research demonstrates that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to implement innovative teaching strategies, manage classroom challenges more effectively, and create learning environments conducive to student achievement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

While numerous studies have explored the antecedents of teacher self-efficacy, two critical factors remain underexplored in the context of Japanese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) education: teachers' language proficiency and their biographic context. English proficiency is widely considered a cornerstone of effective EFL instruction, shaping teachers' confidence in delivering lessons and engaging students in authentic language use (Medgyes, 1994; Tsui, 2007). Teachers who perceive themselves as linguistically competent are more likely to demonstrate confidence in instructional delivery, provide richer input, and respond effectively to students' linguistic needs (Faez & Karas, 2017). Conversely, insufficient language proficiency may hinder instructional effectiveness and negatively impact self-efficacy beliefs (Lee, 2009).

Equally important, biographic factors such as teaching experience, education level, and experience abroad have been hypothesized to affect teacher self-efficacy. Teachers with extensive experience may have accumulated practical skills and coping strategies that enhance their confidence (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). However, maintaining a stable teaching workforce is a growing challenge. In Japan, 45.6% of new employees in the education industry (including schools, cram schools, and educational support organizations) leave their profession within the first three years (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan, 2021). This high attrition rate not only reflects structural issues such as burnout and workload but also limits opportunities for teachers to build experience—an important source of self-efficacy. Similarly, advanced academic qualifications or exposure to English-speaking environments could theoretically boost self-efficacy by broadening professional competence. However, empirical evidence remains mixed, and few studies have examined these relationships systematically in the Japanese EFL context.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the extent to which teachers' perceived English language proficiency and biographic factors predict their self-efficacy. Drawing on quantitative data from 132 in-service Japanese EFL teachers, the study employs regression analysis to examine the relative contributions of these predictors. By clarifying how perceived proficiency and experiential variables shape teacher self-efficacy, this research contributes empirical evidence to ongoing discussions about professional competence and teacher development in Japan's EFL context. The findings are expected to inform teacher education programs and policy initiatives that emphasize communicative competence, sustainable career growth, and resilience in the teaching profession.

Research Questions:

1. Does perceived English language proficiency significantly predict teacher self-efficacy among Japanese EFL teachers?
2. Do biographic factors (teaching experience, education level, and experience abroad) significantly predict teacher self-efficacy?

Hypotheses:

1. Perceived English language proficiency will serve as a significant positive predictor of teacher self-efficacy among Japanese EFL teachers.
2. Biographic factors (teaching experience, education level, and experience abroad) will collectively contribute to the prediction of teacher self-efficacy, although the strength of their effects may vary.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Teacher Self-Efficacy: Definition and Theoretical Framework

Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) is grounded in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory and refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to plan, organize, and execute instructional tasks to achieve specific educational goals. Bandura identified four primary sources of self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Among these, mastery experiences—successful teaching episodes—are the most influential, shaping teachers' sense of capability and persistence in challenging situations (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Research consistently shows that teachers with higher self-efficacy demonstrate greater resilience, employ more innovative teaching practices, and positively influence student achievement (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Self-efficacious teachers are also more likely to implement student-centered instruction and maintain high expectations for learners. Conversely, low self-efficacy correlates with teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction, and attrition (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

In the Japanese EFL context, where English instruction is often exam-oriented and influenced by rigid curricula, teacher self-efficacy plays an even more critical role. Teachers must navigate constraints while fostering communicative competence, which requires confidence in language use and pedagogy.

B. Language Proficiency and Teacher Self-Efficacy

Language proficiency is widely recognized as a cornerstone of effective language teaching (Medgyes, 1994; Tsui, 2007). Proficient teachers can model accurate language use, provide corrective feedback, and create authentic learning experiences, all of which contribute to learners' linguistic development. Perceived proficiency influences not only instructional quality but also teacher identity and confidence (Faez & Karas, 2017).

Empirical research supports the positive association between language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy. Lee (2009) found that Korean EFL teachers with higher self-rated English proficiency reported stronger efficacy beliefs, particularly in instructional strategies and student engagement. Similarly, Yilmaz (2011) demonstrated that Turkish EFL teachers' self-efficacy was significantly predicted by their perceived proficiency levels. These findings align with Bandura's notion of mastery experiences: teachers who feel competent in the target language perceive greater control over instructional outcomes, thereby strengthening self-efficacy.

However, not all studies present uniform results. Some research suggests that external factors, such as institutional support and classroom resources, may mediate the relationship between proficiency and self-efficacy (Richards, 2017). Nevertheless, the overall trend highlights language proficiency as a key determinant of teacher confidence, especially in contexts where communicative competence is a central instructional goal.

C. Biographic Factors: Teaching Experience, Education Level, and Overseas Experience

Biographic factors such as teaching experience, academic qualifications, and overseas experience have been examined as potential predictors of teacher self-efficacy, but findings remain mixed. Teaching experience often correlates positively with self-efficacy, reflecting the cumulative effect of classroom exposure and professional growth (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Experienced teachers tend to develop adaptive strategies, manage classrooms effectively, and exhibit resilience in the face of challenges (Day & Gu, 2007).

Education level, by contrast, has produced inconsistent results. While advanced degrees may enhance theoretical knowledge, they do not necessarily translate into classroom confidence (Akiba & Liang, 2016). Similarly, overseas experience—often assumed to improve linguistic and cultural competence—has shown limited impact on self-efficacy (Saito & Sato, 2020). Factors such as the purpose, duration, and context of international exposure may moderate its influence.

In Japan, where EFL teachers frequently pursue graduate education or participate in overseas programs, understanding the true impact of these biographic factors is crucial for teacher education policies. This study addresses this need by empirically testing their predictive power alongside language proficiency.

D. Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined the individual effects of language proficiency and biographic variables on teacher self-efficacy, few have explored these predictors simultaneously within the Japanese EFL context. Moreover, much of the prior research has relied on small samples or qualitative designs, limiting the generalizability of findings. To address these limitations, the present study employs a quantitative approach to investigate the combined and relative effects of perceived language proficiency and biographic factors on teacher self-efficacy. By identifying the most influential predictors, this study aims to provide empirical insights that inform teacher education, professional development, and policy initiatives in Japan's EFL context.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design using survey-based data to explore the predictive relationships among language proficiency, biographic factors, and teacher self-efficacy. The analysis focused on regression modeling to determine the relative influence of each predictor variable.

Participants

Participants were 132 in-service Japanese EFL teachers across secondary and tertiary education levels. The sample included teachers with varying years of experience ($M = 10.42$, $SD = 6.15$). Approximately 65% were female, and all had completed formal teacher training programs.

Instruments

- Teacher Self-Efficacy: Measured using the short version of Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES; Tschanen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), which consists of 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale.
- Language Proficiency: Assessed using Choi and Lee's (2016) English Language Proficiency Survey, based on self-ratings of speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar on a 7-point scale.
- Biographic Factors: Data on teaching experience (years), education level, and overseas experience were collected through demographic questions.

Procedure

Data were collected via an online survey distributed through professional networks and educational mailing lists. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained electronically.

Data Analysis

In order to explore how teacher self-efficacy correlates with other factors (i.e., language proficiency and biographic factors), descriptive statistics were computed, followed by Pearson correlation analyses and multiple regression modeling using the statistical software R. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents descriptive statistics, correlations among variables, and multiple regression results, followed by a visual representation of the relationship between language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the primary variables are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR KEY VARIABLES

Variable	M	SD
Self-Efficacy	5.23	0.87
Language Proficiency	4.78	0.91
Teaching Experience (yrs)	10.42	6.15

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients indicated a strong positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy and language proficiency ($r = .492$, $p < .001$), and a moderate correlation with teaching experience ($r = .328$, $p < .001$). Education level showed a small correlation ($r = .141$, $p = .012$), while experience abroad demonstrated virtually no correlation ($r = -.003$, $p = .977$).

TABLE 2 CORRELATIONS AMONG KEY VARIABLES

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-Efficacy	-				
2. Language Proficiency	***.492	-			
3. Teaching Experience	***.328	**.214	-		

4. Education Level	*.141	.091	.036	-	
5. Experience Abroad	-.003	.027	.018	.045	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of language proficiency, teaching experience, education level, and experience abroad on teacher self-efficacy. The model was statistically significant, $F(4,127) = 19.8$, $p < .001$, and explained 38% of the variance in self-efficacy ($R^2 = .38$). Language proficiency emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), followed by teaching experience ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). Education level and overseas experience were not significant predictors.

TABLE 3 REGRESSION ANALYSIS PREDICTING TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY

Predictor	β	t	p
Language Proficiency	.42	5.98	*.001
Teaching Experience	.29	3.76	*.001
Education Level	.08	1.27	.206
Experience Abroad	.01	0.19	.850

$R^2 = .38$, $F(4,127) = 19.8$, * $p < .001$

Visual Representation

Figure 1 illustrates the positive relationship between language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy. The regression line highlights the strength of the association.

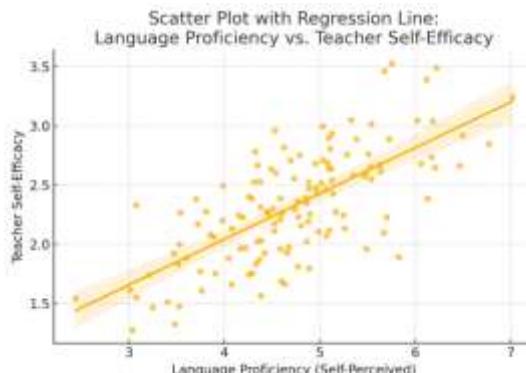


Fig. 1 Scatter Plot with Regression Line: Language Proficiency vs. Teacher Self-Efficacy

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how language proficiency and biographic factors predict teacher self-efficacy in the Japanese EFL context. Quantitative analyses revealed that language proficiency was the strongest predictor, followed by teaching experience, whereas education level and overseas experience exerted no significant influence. These findings are discussed below in relation to previous research and their implications for teacher education and policy.

A. Language Proficiency as a Primary Source of Self-Efficacy

The strong effect of perceived language proficiency underscores its role as a fundamental component of teacher confidence and professional effectiveness. This finding aligns with Bandura's (1997) framework, which identifies mastery experiences—successfully performing a task—as the most influential source of self-efficacy beliefs. Teachers who perceive themselves as competent in English are more likely to anticipate positive instructional outcomes, thereby reinforcing their motivation to engage students in communicative classroom practices. These results also corroborate previous findings (Faez & Karas, 2017; Lee, 2009; Yilmaz, 2011), emphasizing that proficiency-based interventions should be integral to teacher education and professional development. Institutional and policy efforts should prioritize ongoing language enhancement opportunities rather than relying solely on pre-service training or short-term overseas experiences.

B. Teaching Experience: A Moderate but Consistent Factor

Teaching experience exerted a significant, though smaller, effect compared to language proficiency. This finding aligns with prior research (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), which suggests that accumulated classroom experience enhances teachers' adaptive expertise, classroom management, and resilience. However, given the magnitude difference observed in this study, experience alone may not compensate for limited language ability—a critical implication for teacher recruitment and professional training policies.

C. Education Level and Overseas Experience: Why No Effect?

The negligible effects of education level and overseas experience challenge the traditional emphasis on academic credentials and international exposure in teacher recruitment and advancement. While graduate education may

deepen theoretical understanding, it does not necessarily translate into classroom confidence or practical competence (Akiba & Liang, 2016). Likewise, overseas experience appears insufficient to influence efficacy beliefs, possibly due to variations in program quality, duration, and individual engagement (Saito & Sato, 2020). One plausible explanation for the limited impact of overseas experience lies in the nature of language learning itself. Although study-abroad programs often foster conversational fluency, such gains may not directly enhance teaching-related self-efficacy—particularly in Japan's grammar-oriented English education system. For instance, in the standardized university entrance examination known as the Center Test, the English section (250 points in total) allocates 200 points to reading and writing but only 50 points to listening. This disproportionate weighting underscores a national emphasis on written accuracy over oral communication, suggesting that overseas experience, while valuable, may not align with the skills most emphasized and rewarded in domestic educational contexts.

These findings highlight the need for a shift toward competence-based evaluation frameworks that prioritize demonstrable language ability and pedagogical effectiveness over formal credentials or overseas exposure.

D. Practical Implications

The findings highlight the need for systemic reform in teacher preparation and professional development:

- Proficiency-Centered Curriculum: Implement continuous language enhancement programs for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Such programs should emphasize not only written accuracy but also advanced communicative competence, enabling teachers to confidently model authentic language use in the classroom.
- Sustainable Career Development: Promote long-term teacher retention to allow educators to accumulate meaningful teaching experience, which contributes to greater self-efficacy over time. Addressing burnout, workload, and working conditions is essential to sustaining teacher motivation and professional growth.
- Policy Shift: Transition from credential-based advancement to performance-oriented evaluation frameworks that emphasize linguistic and pedagogical competence. Policymakers should ensure that overseas experience and communicative skills are effectively integrated into classroom practice rather than remaining peripheral. This includes aligning curriculum objectives, assessment systems, and professional development opportunities with communicative and practical language use.

E. Theoretical Contributions

This study extends Bandura's (1997) theory by demonstrating that linguistic mastery functions as a critical determinant of self-efficacy in language education. The results suggest that effective teaching emerges from the synergistic interplay between linguistic competence and professional experience, reinforcing the importance of both cognitive and experiential dimensions of teacher development.

F. Limitations and Future Research

The reliance on self-reported measures introduces potential bias. Future research should incorporate objective assessments of language proficiency and classroom observations to validate these findings. Moreover, qualitative data such as individual or focus group interviews could provide deeper insights into teachers' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing self-efficacy. Longitudinal designs could also explore how proficiency development and motivational interventions interact over time to sustain teacher self-efficacy and professional commitment.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role of language proficiency and teaching experience in shaping teacher self-efficacy among Japanese EFL educators. Perceived communicative competence emerged as the strongest predictor of instructional confidence and effectiveness, whereas education level and overseas experience exhibited limited direct effects—highlighting the need to more effectively integrate such experiences into classroom practice. Strengthening teachers' language proficiency and promoting sustainable career development can foster more confident and resilient educators. A transition toward competence-based teacher training and evaluation, rather than reliance on formal credentials or overseas exposure alone, appears essential. Ultimately, an empowering educational environment that supports teacher growth, mitigates burnout, and enriches students' learning experiences—and by extension, the future of language education—can be cultivated through the alignment of teacher preparation and policy with communicative language use.

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