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Self-Efficacy Beliefs Among Japanese English-as-a-Foreign-Language Teachers: The Importance of Teacher Experience

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a mixed-methods study measuring the efficacy beliefs of Japanese English-as-a-foreign-language teachers regarding student engagement, instructional strategies, classroom management, and lesson planning. The study sought to identify relationships between levels of self-reported efficacy among these teachers and their gender, as well as their teaching experience. It also examined their views on how schools could support their teaching to enable them to become more effective and confident language teachers. Data were collected using a reflective report, a semi-structured interview, and a self-efficacy questionnaire. The findings indicated that Japanese secondary school teachers reported fairly high levels of perceived self-efficacy in their pedagogical practice. These beliefs were significantly correlated to only one factor: teaching experience. The study also revealed that experienced teachers had higher expectations regarding support from their schools and that these were more concrete and explanatory than those of novice teachers.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, English language teachers, secondary schools, teaching experience, Japan.

In Japan, Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) is under-researched. In the English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) sector, it is largely considered a theoretical concept. Few empirical projects have been undertaken, although studies in other contexts, such as those by Gibson and Dembo (1984), Miller et al. (2017), and Zee and Koomen (2016), have reported that self-

efficacious teachers can enhance student learning and achievement. There needs to be more exploration of the transition in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the Grammar-Translation Method to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its effect on TSE and classroom performance (Bartlett, 2020; Thompson, 2021). Consequently, there is an urgent need for empirical projects involving EFL teachers at different educational levels. The aims of this project were therefore threefold: (1) to measure and explore the efficacy beliefs held by Japanese secondary school EFL teachers, (2) to examine the differences in self-reported efficacy based on teachers' gender and teaching experience, and (3) to examine teachers' ideas as to how schools could support them to become more effective and confident practitioners.

Literature Review

Defining Teacher Self-Efficacy

Early approaches to self-efficacy were based on social learning theory. For instance, research by the U.S.-based Rand corporation in the mid-1970s assessed teachers' beliefs regarding: (1) their ability to affect student performance and (2) external factors and the impact of students' environments (Dellinger et al., 2008). A focus on external outcomes was later found to be less predictive of student performance than teachers' efficacy beliefs (Dellinger et al., 2008; Wyatt, 2018). Although Bandura's social cognitive approach (1997) was adopted soon after, this initial division was problematic in much of the research that followed (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Social cognitive theory considers self-efficacy beliefs important in mediating choices, effort, and persistence (Pajares, 1996). In Bandura's theory, self-efficacy denotes a belief in one's ability "to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). Bandura also highlighted a division between the central aspects of *efficacy expectation* and *outcome expectancy*. Efficacy expectation denotes an individual's belief in their ability, knowledge, and skills in order to perform actions that result in a desired outcome, whereas *outcome expectancy* describes an estimate of the perceived consequences of conducting a task at a particular performance level (Bandura, 1997).

One consequence of this division is that operationalised definitions of TSE either focus on agent ends such as teachers' abilities to influence outcomes or agent means such as teachers' task-specific abilities (Wyatt, 2018). The latter underlines the context-specific nature of TSE. Combining both agent means and agent ends, Wyatt (2010, p. 603) defined self-efficacy as "teachers' beliefs in their capabilities of supporting learning in various task and context-specific cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social ways." Although qualitative research reflects this, most quantitative research has adopted the agent ends definition (Wyatt, 2014).

Definitions of TSE thus concur that it refers either to teachers' confidence in their ability to guide students towards successful learning outcomes or teachers' beliefs in their ability to execute instructions and achieve their objectives. However, it is essential to understand the sources of such beliefs. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) pinpoints four sources: *past experiences* (e.g., mastery experiences – success or failure in performing a specific task), *vicarious experience* (observation of others' performance), *social persuasion* (positive/negative feedback from others), and *psychological and affective states* (stress, anxiety, and excitement). However, the significance of each varies because individuals view past experiences differently.

Findings on TSE from General Educational Settings

Multiple studies have examined the effects of TSE on self-regulated learning and academic performance in general educational settings. For instance, in a study of 208 elementary teachers, Gibson and Dembo (1984) administered their own Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES), which focused on two factors: Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE) and General Teaching Efficacy, later shortened to Teaching Efficacy (TE). The authors found that highly self-efficacious teachers were more persistent with low-achieving students, assumed greater responsibility for influencing student achievement, and demonstrated higher commitment. The TES scale has been widely applied, a notable example being Wertheim and Leyser's (2002) quantitative study of pre-service prospective teachers in Israel which utilised both the TES and a questionnaire on instructional strategies to explore PTE and TE. Similar to earlier research, it found that highly self-efficacious teachers exhibited greater intent to employ individualised instruction and adapt teaching practices.

Prior to this, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) developed a new Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), which combined three specific subscales: self-efficacy for classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. Designed for teachers of all subjects in any context (Wyatt, 2014), it has since been employed in several studies, and both long- and short-form versions have been found to exhibit good validity and reliability in different settings (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

In general, research on TSE indicates that teachers with higher self-efficacy exhibit a higher standard of teaching (Holzberger et al., 2013), are more effective in terms of classroom management (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007), create challenging lessons (Deemer, 2004), employ constructivism and instruction in a differentiated fashion (Suprayogi et al., 2017), ensure students remain focused, and increase learner autonomy through pedagogical strategies and classroom management techniques (Chao et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2017). Specifically, Woolfolk et al. (1990) found that religious studies teachers with high self-efficacy adopted a more humanistic approach to classroom management that encouraged greater student autonomy, whereas those with low self-efficacy were more controlling and rigid. Guskey's (1988) questionnaire-based study of elementary and secondary teachers revealed that self-efficacy was significantly related to attitudes towards the implementation of instructional strategies.

Numerous studies in general education settings have also investigated gender and TSE. For instance, utilising the TSES and interviews with 1,790 teachers, Odanga et al. (2015) found no significant effect of gender on self-efficacy. By contrast, a gender effect *was* identified by Kurt et al. (2014) among student teachers in a Turkish context. Employing adapted scales from Guskey (1988) in conjunction with the TSES, these researchers assessed teaching self-efficacy and responsibility for student achievement and reported a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy in female teachers compared with males. However, there was a large sample bias in favour of females.

Teacher Self-Efficacy in the Context of English Language Teaching

TSE in English language teaching is a special case when compared with more general educational settings. For instance, English in EFL classrooms uniquely serves as both content and a means of instruction (Faez & Karas, 2017). Consequently, the EFL domain is under-represented in research on TSE (Klassen et al., 2011). Hoang's (2018) systematic review of EFL TSE research between 2002 and 2017 appears to support this, as it concluded that most of the studies reviewed were quantitative in nature and conducted in Middle Eastern countries, indicating a clear gap in research in other EFL contexts. In what follows, research in contexts

other than Japan is reviewed with a focus on several key factors, including self-efficacy in relation to pedagogy and instructional beliefs and strategies, self-reported teacher language proficiency, gender, teaching experience, and training, with a brief reference to self-efficacy and technology. This is then followed by a focus on research conducted exclusively in the Japanese context.

Using the short version of the TSES, Chacon (2005) conducted a mixed-methods study of 100 middle-school EFL teachers in western Venezuela (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed higher TSE regarding instructional strategies than for management and engagement. Chacon found that the higher participants' sense of efficacy, the more likely they were to use either communicative or grammar-oriented strategies. Regarding the latter, Chacon also found that, in general, they were more likely to use grammar-oriented than communication-oriented strategies. The researcher explained this with reference to the predominance of the Grammar-Translation method in Venezuelan schools.

Using a modified questionnaire based on the TSES in conjunction with Chacon's (2005) instrument, Yilmaz (2011) provided support for these findings with respect to primary and high school teachers in a Turkish context. In Iran, Eslami and Fatahi (2008) used the TSES and (adapted) subscales from Chacon's study to explore self-efficacy in relation to language competence and pedagogical strategies in a sample of 40 secondary EFL teachers. They also identified a link between high self-efficacy and the use of instructional strategies, yet found that teachers were more inclined to use communicative strategies. In a later study of 190 South Korean secondary school teachers, Choi and Lee (2018) used a modified version of the TSES and found that classroom management efficacy positively enhanced communicative practices.

Chacon (2005) also identified a correlation between perceived English language competence and efficacy, indicating a need to ensure non-native speakers are competent in all skills if CLT approaches are to work. In this regard, several other studies have examined the relationship between English language proficiency and self-efficacy in relation to pedagogical skills. For example, in a study of 167 Korean secondary school teachers, Choi and Lee (2016) used a modified version of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and the TEBS-Self (Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs System-Self) instrument (Dellinger et al., 2008) and found that levels of language proficiency above the minimum threshold were associated with interdependence between linguistic and pedagogical competences and TSE.

Other studies have explored instructional beliefs and practices in relation to more specific abilities and skills. For instance, Karimi et al. (2016) explored TSE among 92 secondary level Iranian EFL teachers regarding instructional beliefs and practices surrounding reading. Utilising the TSES, they identified significant correlations between teachers with high efficacy and theoretical orientations and practice.

Regarding classroom experience and training, Faez and Valeo (2012) surveyed 115 novice teachers of TESOL in Canada to explore the impact of induction and subsequent classroom experience. Eight teachers also participated in post-experience interviews. The results revealed that practicum and classroom experience were the most impactful aspects of the induction. However, although perceptions of preparedness increased as a result of classroom experience, teachers' sense of efficacy regarding performance expectations was task-specific and highly situated. This highlights the need for an improved collaborative relationship between schools and teacher education institutions.

Tajeddin and Khodaverdi (2011), also in the Iranian context, employed a questionnaire to explore the effect of gender, experience, and educational background on TSE among 59 EFL teachers. They found that gender differences were marginal; however, even though the gap in

self-efficacy between experienced and inexperienced teachers was small, they identified non-significant differences related to educational background, albeit with stronger beliefs among experienced teachers. The latter finding was ascribed to experienced teachers becoming cognisant of gaps in their knowledge, depressing self-efficacy, whereas inexperienced teachers often overestimated their level of knowledge.

Cabaroglu (2014) conducted action research with 60 Turkish final-year English language teacher candidates on a teaching practice course. She employed the TSES along with quantitative data from reflective journals and course evaluations and revealed that undertaking action research can improve self-efficacy. Furthermore, these action research projects focused overwhelmingly on instructional and classroom management strategies rather than content knowledge.

Technological self-efficacy has become a stronger focus for research in very recent years due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and online teaching scenarios. Findings thus far have been mixed. For instance, Liu et al. (2021) surveyed over 486 senior high school Chinese EFL teachers and found relatively high levels of technological self-efficacy. However, there was clearly an issue pre-pandemic in terms of technological self-efficacy, which improved with the experience of livestream teaching. Teachers in the study reported lower self-efficacy in terms of classroom management in online classrooms, but higher efficacy in dealing with the technology. By contrast, in the Turkish context, Arslan et al. (2021) surveyed over 200 primary, secondary, and high school English teachers and reported rather low technological self-efficacy, with no significant differences in relation to gender, type of school, or years of experience. There has been little time available to study the impact of recent developments in AI tools on TSE, but amid many concerns about the negative impacts of AI, it is clear that technological self-efficacy can be a key predictor of technology acceptance (Alhwaiti, 2023). This indicates a need for urgent research and discussion in this field.

In Japan, few studies on TSE have emerged, despite a body of research on Japanese teachers' beliefs (e.g., Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Sakui, 2004; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). Some have focused on beliefs and practices around the implementation of CLT (Sakui, 2007), whilst others have focused on the impact of overseas training programmes on teacher confidence (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007). Most relevant to this study, Nishino (2009) investigated Japanese high school teachers' beliefs and practices concerning CLT and identified inconsistencies between reported beliefs and actual practices. Incorporating CLT self-efficacy into the teacher belief path model she designed, Nishino also highlighted the mediating role of self-efficacy beliefs. Similar to Chacon's (2005) conclusions regarding English language competence and efficacy, her findings indicated a relationship between L2 skill confidence and CLT self-efficacy or innovative practice more generally. Despite this, Thompson (2016) critiqued Nishino for collecting data from a limited set of CLT tasks and for questionnaire items that did not sufficiently focus on evaluations of future capability. Nevertheless, in a subsequent factor analysis design, Thompson used Nishino's findings and model as the basis for his conceptual framework. His findings demonstrated that TSE in Japanese high schools reflected the divide between CLT approaches and teaching based on entrance examinations.

More recently, Thompson and Woodman (2019) designed a Japanese teacher of English efficacy scale [JTE-TES] to explore TSE in a sample of 141 Japanese high school teachers. This instrument comprises 60 items based on expert decisions that draw items from Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's TSES (2001), Swanson's (2012) Foreign Language Teacher Efficacy Scale (FLTES), and Nishino's (2008) Perceived Teaching Efficacy. The findings revealed how teaching and non-teaching dimensions of TSE were reflected in the challenges of working in Japanese high schools. Echoing other studies, these challenges were educational,

social, and cultural and included large class sizes and exceptionally high pressure on students to perform in high-stakes examinations. Thompson and Woodman (2019) highlighted the conflict between the use of CLT approaches and teaching for examinations, as well as the issue of balancing workloads. They reflected upon the effect of *collective self-efficacy* on teacher collaboration, which refers to self-efficacy in terms of the capability of the teaching team, the social culture of schools, and the interactive dynamics of a group of teachers. For example, when a teaching team resists government reforms around CLT, the social culture of a particular school may then influence teachers' beliefs, which has important implications for school leadership.

The Current Study

Extensive quantitative research in both general and ELT settings has employed instruments such as the TES (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's TSES (2001). The over-reliance on survey items, however, has been highlighted (e.g., Hoang, 2018; Wyatt, 2014) and a clear need for more EFL-context-specific, qualitative, and mixed-methods research has been identified. Although findings on both TSE in general settings and in ELT indicate significant links between TSE and instructional strategies or TSE beliefs in relation to experience, there is less agreement on gender factors. Research in both English language and Japanese contexts has identified a connection between language competence and TSE and mastery experiences as a key factor influencing self-efficacy. However, few studies have been conducted in Japan and these have primarily been in secondary school settings.

To date, no strong relationship between gender and self-efficacy has been established, whereas teacher experience has often been identified as important. The Japanese findings suggest that TSE reflects underlying instructional beliefs, but they also emphasise a distinction between managing classrooms for communication and building knowledge for examinations (Thompson & Woodman, 2019). There is evidence for reduced self-efficacy in relation to CLT, as documented by Chacon (2005) and Thompson (2016). Furthermore, cultural contexts in research on TSE are central to understanding the Japanese context. The limited body of research in this area has foregrounded EFL teachers' awareness of the importance of school culture and effective collaboration in developing TSE. Based on these findings, three research questions were devised:

1. What efficacy beliefs do Japanese secondary school EFL teachers hold?
2. Do Japanese EFL teachers' self-efficacy scores differ according to gender and teaching experience?
3. In what ways do Japanese secondary school EFL teachers believe that their schools could support them in becoming more effective and confident practitioners?

Methods

Design and Participants

A sequential-exploratory design was employed and data were gathered in two consecutive stages: collection and analysis of qualitative data, followed by collection and analysis of quantitative data. For the qualitative phase, 16 participants, eight males and eight females equally representing both novice and experienced EFL teachers from Japanese secondary schools in Fukuoka Prefecture, participated in interviews and submitted reflective reports. For the quantitative survey, the male (n = 50) and female (n = 50) participants came from 20 public schools in the same prefecture. All taught English as a foreign language. Their ages ranged from 23 to 48. The participants were divided into two groups: novice (< 3 years of teaching experience, n = 50) and experienced (> 3 years of teaching experience, n = 50) teachers.

Stratified sampling was employed to recruit participants to ensure greater representativeness. This involved partitioning the population into subgroups (Asthana & Bhushan, 2016).

Instruments and Procedure

Three instruments were utilised to collect data: a reflective report, a semi-structured interview, and a self-efficacy questionnaire. To ensure complete understanding, all instruments were translated into Japanese by the native researcher and cross-checked for accuracy by three independent native colleagues.

Qualitative Stage. Two instruments were employed in the qualitative stage: a reflective report and a semi-structured interview. The report was divided into two sections, each containing prompt questions. In the first section, participants reflected on their efficacy in teaching, assessing, and managing students and identified strengths and weaknesses in their practice. Example questions included: *How do you motivate your students to learn English, and how confident are you about your ability to do so? What do you do in the classroom to meet your students' diverse needs, interests, and learning styles, and to what extent can you achieve these things?* In the second section, participants reflected on school support in teaching. The main question was: *In what ways can your school support you in becoming a more effective and confident practitioner?* Participants were given six weeks to produce a detailed document of no set length describing their efficacy beliefs, supported by examples from their own practice.

The second phase – the semi-structured interview – elaborated on the problems identified in the reflective report. The open-ended questions included the following: *How do you think schools should support teachers? Describe your weaknesses in teaching and explain how these could be improved and, more specifically, what your school has done and should do to support you. How confident are you about your teaching?* The participants were interviewed separately to avoid external influence. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, depending on how engaged the participants were and how much of their work they were willing to share.

Thematic coding was then employed to "identify, analyse and report [themes] within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The narrative element in the qualitative instruments facilitated an examination of participants' experiences and reflections, mirroring the intricacy of their teaching journeys. As such, it focused on the potential of the narrative to "explain and understand [the studied phenomena] better" (Swain et al., 2011, p. xiii). The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) six stages of thematic analysis. Because 16 participants completed both qualitative instruments, letter-number codes were used to clarify who said what and in which phase. Thus, RRT2 denoted a reflective report submitted by teacher number 2 and SIT9 denoted a semi-structured interview with teacher number 9.

Quantitative Stage. The second stage involved developing a questionnaire on self-efficacy to compare teachers' practices. This measure was based on Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) TSES survey, which consisted of 32 items responded to on a four-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). The original measure captured three domains of TSE: (1) *efficacy in student engagement*, (2) *efficacy in instructional strategies*, and (3) *efficacy in classroom management*, each comprising eight items. For the purposes of this study, a fourth category, *efficacy in lesson planning* (Appendix A), was developed and included. This section was added to broaden the scope of the instrument with an item that emerged in the reflective report and semi-structured interviews regarding teachers' beliefs about lesson planning. Specifically, several teachers commented that careful planning yields more confident and effective teaching, with one stating: "I always have my lesson plan with me; it's my guide…I easily move from one stage to another." (SIT8)

Analysis of the original TSES survey supported the three-factor structure and the internal reliabilities of the subscales were good: efficacy in student engagement (alpha = 0.82), efficacy in instructional strategies (alpha = 0.81), and efficacy in classroom management (alpha = 0.72) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Having added the *lesson planning* category, the modified version of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's TSES survey was piloted with ten teachers to identify potential problems with the presentation and item phrasing. The participants were asked to critique the questionnaire, including layout, length, and individual statements. Because the instrument was prepared in Japanese, the respondents readily followed the statements and no further changes were required. In the survey of 100 participants, the internal reliability of the total self-efficacy scale was high (alpha = .89). The coefficients for the individual categories were also acceptable: *student engagement* (alpha = .70), *instructional strategies* (alpha = .69), *classroom management* (alpha =. 73) and *lesson planning* (alpha = .63). To analyse the quantitative data, 2 x 2 between participants ANOVAs (analysis of variance) tests were conducted in order to identify any significant differences between the four self-efficacy categories based on a teacher's gender (male [n = 50] and female [n = 50]), experience (novice [n = 50] or expert [n = 50]) and the interaction between the two.

Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by ethical principles introduced by the British Educational Research Association (2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout. The participants were asked to sign consent forms prior to the study, which clarified their right to withdraw from the project. Upon completion of the qualitative stage, participants were given the opportunity to comment on the written record of their responses in order to ensure an accurate portrayal of information. Ethical approval for this study was also obtained from the Ethics Committee at Seinan Gakuin University, Japan.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings under two separate headings. The first describes Japanese secondary school EFL teachers' efficacy beliefs (first research question) and analyses these in relation to gender and teaching experience (second research question). The second focuses on their views regarding how schools could support them to become more effective and confident practitioners (third research question).

What Efficacy Beliefs do Japanese Secondary School EFL Teachers Hold?

The qualitative data were arranged into four themes reflecting Japanese EFL teachers' efficacy beliefs regarding *student engagement*, *instructional strategies*, *classroom management*, and *lesson planning*.

Student Engagement. Regarding student engagement, teachers emphasised the importance of being able to confidently "teach English in a communicative way…and fully…engage students" (RRT7). On closer inspection, however, they were more confident about this in theory than in practice. They exhibited a strong understanding of CLT principles but felt that "using those in practice…was somewhat substandard" (RRT3). In other words, they theorised that their classroom practice was not as communicative as it should have been. Aside from this, most experienced teachers felt confident about teaching English and believed they were adept at involving students in classwork and satisfying their needs; however, only two explicitly stated that they regularly created room for their students' "wishes and wants" (RRT15) to "keep [them] committed to classroom tasks" (RRT11). Eleven teachers reported being able to use their students' ideas to enhance class participation. Six teachers also thought their ability to increase students' engagement brought positivity to the classroom. Four others believed they were effective in involving students in decision-making processes and promoting student

agency; consequently, they were "perceived as better teachers" (SIT10; SIT13; RRT15; RRT16).

Unlike experienced teachers, novices did not see how the teaching-learning process could benefit from integrating students' wishes and wants. Most did not feel confident, including students' ideas for fear that they would lose authority and control. For instance, one teacher stated the following:

For me, teaching is about addressing my students' needs. I therefore strictly focus on the learning outcomes…class content and delivery…and my students always follow what I say. Otherwise, I wouldn't feel comfortable about my teaching…and [capable of] control[ling] my students. (SIT8)

Another teacher added that it was important "I was perceived as sure of myself; using students' ideas could mean I didn't know how to teach." (SIT6)

Both novice and experienced teachers reported feeling confident about integrating technology, images, and short stories/texts into lessons in order to ensure that students remained engaged and were more communicative. This notable finding links to Eslami and Fatahi's (2008) conclusion that secondary EFL teachers in Iran who exhibited higher TSE were more inclined to use communicative strategies. The qualitative data in the current study clearly indicate high TSE for aspects such as engaging students and instructional strategies (see the second theme below).

Additionally, six experienced teachers believed they could deliver English classes in a "friendly" (RRT13; RRT11; SIT16) and "well-organised" (RRT12; RRT14; SIT10) manner to prevent boredom and demotivation. Two teachers asserted that a positive classroom climate was crucial because "many of [their] students had low levels of motivation" (SIT14) and were "not interested in learning English" (RRT9; SIT14), which made "teaching in such classes…particularly difficult." (SIT9) Furthermore, six experienced teachers believed they did not possess a sufficient number of strategies to successfully motivate and engage students in learning or collaborative work with peers. This sometimes led to self-doubt and stress.

Novice teachers believed that friendly classes prevented students from feeling stressed or misbehaving. Although all reported being able to teach in a friendly way to keep students engaged, they were not always successful. For example, two teachers stated that "teaching [was] quite stressful" (RRT2) as they did not always believe in their capacity to teach effectively; they were afraid of being "asked difficult questions by ambitious students and consequently feel embarrassed if [they] didn't know the answer." (RRT8)

Instructional Strategies. With respect to the second theme, instructional strategies, most teachers described how they successfully employed numerous instructional strategies in their practice. However, several teachers admitted lacking confidence in their ability to meet students' expectations when designing lessons based on songs or movies. Likewise, four experienced and six novice teachers were unsure about the quality of the communicative activities they designed to accompany songs and movies. These findings align closely with Nishino's (2009) report of a mismatch between Japanese teachers' beliefs in the use of CLT strategies and their actual practice. The teachers in this study reported a similar lack of confidence in employing CLT strategies, despite strong beliefs in their value.

Whilst experienced teachers asserted that practising speaking skills should be connected to reading or listening, ideally "through [extension] tasks" (RRT15), they did not feel particularly confident using them due to their inability to demonstrate high proficiency in spoken English. By contrast, they all felt confident teaching grammar and maintained it had to be taught regularly. Among the novice teachers, only one stressed the importance of "teaching grammar

during every class." (SIT4) He felt confident teaching it but linked it to promoting speaking skills, explaining that students' spoken utterances "[had to] be correct to be understood by others." (SIT4) This is perhaps not surprising as studies by Chacon (2005) and Thompson (2016) point to factors such as the persistence of grammar translation practices and constraints of examination systems as militating against the use of CLT strategies, despite higher self-efficacy in instructional practices. However, in their reflective reports, all teachers were willing to undergo professional development training on current methods and approaches. For instance, experienced teachers felt they were not entirely up-to-date due to the exam-oriented nature of education and consequently "often lacked confidence in [their] own teaching." (RRT13)

Conversely, although all novice teachers thought teacher education programmes offered a general overview of language teaching pedagogy and pre-service teaching practice, these did not teach them to become confident practitioners. Five teachers felt that the programmes prepared them for teaching in an exam-oriented context which two considered "a disappointment." (RTT2, SIT8) This latter point resonates deeply with a recent study by Thompson and Woodman (2019), which highlighted the negative pressure felt by Japanese teachers to teach to examinations, reducing TSE regarding the use of CLT.

Classroom Management. Regarding the third theme, classroom management, seven experienced teachers believed that English classes should be communicative and collaborative and felt fairly confident about delivering classes "based on pair or group activities" (RRT10), including "role-plays." (RRT10; SIT11) This finding was similar to that of Choi and Lee's South Korean study (2018), which revealed that classroom management efficacy enhanced communicative practices. Although six novice teachers concurred with the experienced teachers, they often avoided group activities. Four novice teachers believed that such activities were the main reason for "student loud behaviour" (SIT2; SIT3; RRT1; RRT6), with three admitting they found it difficult to deal with this effectively.

Lesson Planning. As for the final theme, lesson planning, all participants believed that well-designed lesson plans guaranteed the effective delivery of engaging classes. For instance, half of the experienced teachers prepared lessons in the form of a short list of points – a skeleton of the lesson. This was described as "a thinking process" (RRT11) and contrasted with the writing exercise in which novice teachers engaged. Reflecting on how they planned lessons, most experienced teachers were not convinced their classes provided a sufficient variety of activities and a good balance of skills and language focus.

By contrast, all novice teachers reported preparing detailed lesson plans on the basis that these guided teaching and provided "a confidence-building exercise." (RRT1) However, half of these teachers believed that their plans functioned more as instruments for pre- and post-lesson reflection, boosting their confidence in critically reflecting on their practice. Teachers also felt they demonstrated the ability to be flexible and deviate from their plans when necessary; for example, the capacity "to deal with [critical] events that sometimes emerged from nowhere." (SIT8) Half the group concluded that their lesson plans were ineffective with respect to time management, formulating clear lesson aims, giving clear explanations/instructions, and including a variety of activities and teaching aids.

The qualitative analysis revealed that experienced teachers were more confident about the four areas (*student engagement*, *instructional strategies*, *classroom management*, *lesson planning*) of professional practice than novice teachers. Based on the teachers' comments, levels of self-efficacy were ranked (in descending order) as follows: *student engagement*, *classroom management*, *instructional strategies,* and *lesson planning*. The latter was particularly low among novice teachers. This lack of confidence occurred because teacher education

programmes did not prepare them well for their classroom work. They lacked the pedagogical knowledge and skills to deal with classroom problems. Furthermore, their pre-service teaching experiences, which strongly influence teacher confidence, were considered insufficient. All these factors decreased novice teachers' self-efficacy, affected their classroom performance, and elicited negative emotions such as stress, frustration, and doubt.

Is Japanese EFL Teachers' Self-Efficacy Dependent on their Gender and Teaching Experience?

Descriptive statistics for the self-efficacy scale are presented in Table 1. Significant relationships were found across all self-efficacy subscales. The mean score on the student engagement subscale was higher than the mean score on the other subscales.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for the Four Categories of Self-Efficacy Beliefs

	M(SD)	3	4	5
1. Total Self-Efficacy	93.48 (12.07)	-	-	-
2. Student Engagement	24.46 (3.46)	.64***	.77***	.58***
3. Instructional Strategies	24.20 (3.45)	-	.63***	.56***
4. Classroom Management	22.50 (3.96)		-	.57***
5. Lesson Planning	22.32 (3.36)			-

Differences in the descriptive statistics for the overall TSE score and all four subscales are presented in Table 2. These data are presented for the sample as a whole and presented by gender and number of years of teaching experience. Self-efficacy scores across all domains were similar for male and female teachers, but more experienced teachers scored higher across all domains than less experienced teachers.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for the Four Categories of Self-Efficacy Beliefs (Gender vs. Teaching Experience)

	Total (N=100)		<3 years' experience (N=50)			>3 years' experience (N=50)		
	Male (N=50)	Female (N=50)	Total (N=50)	Male (N=25)	Female (N=25)	Total (N=50)	Male (N=25)	Female (N=25)
Overall self-efficacy scale	93.52 (11.41)	93.44 (12.80)	87.46 (8.47)	87.92 (9.11)	87.00 (7.92)	99.50 (12.19)	99.12 (10.84)	99.88 (13.61)
Student engagement	24.92 (3.45)	24.00 (3.45)	22.98 (2.87)	23.52 (3.23)	22.44 (2.42)	25.94 (3.39)	26.32 (3.12)	25.56 (3.66)
Instructional strategies	23.70 (3.30)	24.70 (3.55)	22.68 (2.56)	22.48 (2.42)	22.88 (2.73)	25.72 (3.57)	24.92 (3.64)	26.52 (3.38)
Classroom management	22.74 (3.83)	22.26 (4.11)	20.94 (3.43)	20.92 (3.57)	20.96 (3.36)	24.06 (3.87)	24.56 (3.20)	23.56 (4.44)
Lesson planning	22.16 (3.22)	22.48 (3.53)	20.86 (2.45)	21.00 (2.66)	20.72 (2.26)	23.78 (3.54)	23.32 (3.35)	24.24 (3.72)

A two-way between-participants ANOVA was performed in order to examine differences in self-efficacy based on gender and number of years of teaching experience (Table 3).

No significant gender differences were found for the overall self-efficacy scale; however, significant differences were found between those with less than three years' teaching experience and those with more than three years' experience with those with more than three years' experience, scored higher. Finally, no significant interaction was evident between gender and years of teaching experience.

Table 3. Differences in Self-efficacy Based on Gender and Number of Years of Teaching Experience

	Gender		Years teaching			Interaction	
	F	*p*	F	*p*	*η2*	F	*p*
Overall self-efficacy scale	.001	.97	32.29	.001	.25	.16	.69
Student engagement	2.15	.15	22.23	.001	.19	.07	.80
Instructional strategies	2.64	.11	24.35	.001	.20	.95	.33
Classroom management	.43	.52	18.01	.001	.16	.50	.48
Lesson planning	.28	.60	22.86	.001	.19	.97	.33

Note. F was calculated based on $F_{[1, 96]}$ for gender differences and years teaching, and $F_{[2, 96]}$ for the interaction

As noted above, no gender differences in self-efficacy beliefs were identified, even though gender was expected to be significant as the Japanese workplace is still considered male-centric (Kobayashi, 2020; Shire, 2000). However, this may only apply to non-teaching settings. Regarding the teaching context (e.g., Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019), approximately 40% of secondary school teachers are female, rising to more than 50% for English language teaching. Therefore, gender differences among Japanese secondary school EFL teachers do not align with self-efficacy levels in other occupations. Gender differences in TSE have been investigated in previous studies with mixed results. For instance, Kurt et al. (2014) identified a clear relationship between gender and self-efficacy among Turkish student teachers, with female teachers exhibiting higher self-efficacy for the teaching process and responsibility for student achievement, whereas Klassen and Chiu's (2010) study identified a clear relationship between gender and TSE, with female teachers exhibiting reduced self-efficacy regarding workload and stress. However, other studies suggest gender is not significant (e.g., Odanga et al., 2015). It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that gender was not a significant variable in relation to stress and workloads, even though these were salient issues for teachers.

Additionally, the results highlighted significant differences in TSE between novice and experienced teachers. This provides further evidence for the importance of enactive self-mastery experience as a source of TSE (Bandura, 1997). This is because it delivers valuable insights into how self-efficacy beliefs are developed and sustained, with useful implications for teaching practicum and professional development in Japan and the wider TESOL context.

In What Ways do Japanese Secondary School EFL Teachers Think their Schools Could Support them in Becoming More Effective and Confident Practitioners?

The third research question examined novice and experienced teachers' expectations as to how schools could support them as professionals. The analysis of reflective reports and interviews indicated three specific expectations: schools should (1) create supportive communities of practice, (2) offer high-quality professional development, and (3) ensure a healthy work-life balance to aid teachers' classroom performance.

Regarding the first expectation, most teachers in both groups thought schools could support them by creating communities of practice where teachers share best practices, ask colleagues questions regarding their teaching and professional learning, and provide mutual assistance and encouragement. All experienced teachers wished to see more cooperation between teachers. Five believed successful cooperation would "stimulate [their] self-esteem" (RRT11; SIT12;

SIT16) and "confidence." (RRT13; SIT15) Only four teachers felt current cooperation was "very good" (RRT16; SIT13), emphasising that teachers in their schools, irrespective of career stage, "[were] encouraged to work together" (SIT14) and "voice [their] opinions on the teaching-learning process." (RRT10) Two also expressed interest in collaborating across schools to observe "how other colleagues work" (SIT11) and "learn from them" (RRT13; SIT9) to become effective and reflective practitioners. Elaborating on this, one teacher expressed the following view:

> I'd like to work more closely with teachers from other schools…observing other teachers in the classroom would be a useful experience. I could learn from more experienced teachers. We could talk about our classes and improving them. More experienced teachers from other schools could give me interesting tips about teaching. (SIT9)

Six novice teachers asserted that cross-school communities would facilitate collaboration with more experienced teachers who could "help [them] improve their teaching skills" (SIT4) and "boost [their] professional autonomy, self-efficacy and reflexivity." (RRT6) This partly echoes Faez and Valeo's (2012) conclusion that TESOL programmes should prepare novice teachers in Canada to join a professional community and not just a classroom. This underlines the importance of mastery experiences in determining TSE, as highlighted in various studies of general education (e.g., Malinen et al., 2013; Pajares, 1996).

Five novice teachers also believed that English should be the communication language in cross-school communities. The same teachers later admitted they lacked English language proficiency, which such communities might address. For example, one teacher opined that:

> I think the communities should promote [English] among teachers as we all need to improve it. To teach English effectively, we must use it confidently, and therefore practise it every day as we are all foreign users. (SIT4)

This observation is unsurprising; several studies on TESOL have identified a link between language proficiency or the perception of linguistic competence and TSE levels (Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Yilmaz, 2011).

The qualitative data revealed that collaboration and a "supportive atmosphere in the workplace" (RRT11) were deemed important in Japan. Three novice and two experienced teachers justified this whilst emphasising that both aspects were not always easy to achieve because "teachers [were] very busy" (RRT7; SIT3; SIT10), "lacked time and energy" (RRT5, SIT16), and "courage and can-do attitude." (RRT7) Again, this echoes the workload issues identified in other research on Japanese EFL teachers (Thompson & Woodman, 2019) and suggests collective TSE may be an important consideration in future research. For instance, Abedini et al. (2018) highlighted the different implications of collective TSE in various teaching contexts in Iran.

Regarding the second expectation (schools should offer high-quality professional development), all teachers hoped management teams would encourage them to attend professional development workshops to learn new things and address their current weaknesses. In their reflective reports, teachers were invited to consider their strengths and weaknesses. Common weaknesses included an over-reliance on teacher-centred instruction, unvaried classroom activities, and limited strategies to encourage demotivated students. Seven novice and five experienced teachers expressed their determination to work on these to "become excellent teachers" (RRT16; SIT6) who "demonstrate concerns about [their] students' lives inside and outside school." (SIT13) School support was perceived as essential in this regard

and has been strongly implicated in other studies (e.g., Faez & Valeo, 2012; Thompson & Woodman, 2019).

Five teachers in each group felt schools could offer "practical seminars with invited speakers" (e.g., RRT3; SIT2; SIT11) and three expected to be regularly involved in "lesson study projects." (RRT5; RRT10; RRT14) Expanding on this, the following views were expressed by two of the teachers:

> …schools should invite speakers…local and international…to run seminars that aim at improving our professional knowledge and skills. These seminars should be practical and focus on technical aspects of teaching so we're more effective teachers, and students regard us as confident and professional. (SIT2)

> I'd like my school to offer lesson study groups. Just like my friends in another school, I'd like to regularly meet with English language teachers to improve instruction in our subject, that is, English in our school. Through these meetings I'd learn to collaboratively plan, observe, and refine lessons, but would also become a more confident and productive teacher. (SIT11)

> Specifically, five experienced teachers argued that professional development events should promote current approaches to CLT to help them "teach effectively, confidently, and in an attractive manner." (RRT12) However, two novice teachers wanted "more emphasis on the use of technology." (RRT4; SIT6) Two others added that young people like technology and use it all the time, so incorporating it would make their "teaching more interesting, engaging and current" (RRT2) and "boost their tech/digital literacy." (SIT6)

> With regard to the third expectation (schools should ensure a healthy work-life balance so teachers can deliver high-quality performance in the classroom), two novice and six experienced teachers stated that schools should assist teachers in achieving a healthy work-life balance. Two experienced practitioners stressed that "Japanese teachers work[ed] too much" (RRT9; SIT15), which impacted wellbeing and "quality of teaching." (SIT15) One novice teacher stated that mental distress "lowers teachers' confidence and leads to poor performance in the classroom." (RRT8)

Regarding classroom performance, novice and experienced teachers alike stated that heavy workloads affected their teaching, admitting that classes were sometimes not "delivered up to standard due to tiredness" (RRT4) and a "lack of adequate preparation." (SIT11) Additionally, their busy schedules prevented them from helping students "become good Japanese citizens" (SIT7; SIT13) which made the teachers anxious and unhappy. For instance, three novice and five experienced teachers felt that due to "numerous classroom- and school-related duties" (RRT16), they did not have time to "instil Japanese values" (RRT5; RRT12; SIT2; SIT15), "attitudes" (RRT3; SIT10) and "traditions" (RRT16; SIT13) into their students. As one participant stated:

> Classroom time is…limited, but the syllabus is packed. I wish I had more time in the classroom to discuss American, or British, and Japanese cultures, and the traditions, values, and differences between these countries. These discussions would help my students better understand [Japanese] culture and become better citizens. (SIT13)

This aligns closely with Thompson and Woodman's (2019) report of the negative impact of workload on self-efficacy among Japanese secondary school EFL teachers.

Surprisingly, novice teachers did not express a higher level of need for support than experienced teachers, as logic would dictate, and the literature seems to suggest (Jensen et al.,

2012; Linhardt, 2022). Although their responses were generally brief, all the points they made were valid and should be taken seriously.

Conclusion and Implications

The current study aimed to measure and explore Japanese secondary school EFL teachers' efficacy beliefs about *student engagement*, *instructional strategies*, *classroom management,* and *lesson planning*; examine differences in self-efficacy levels and gender and teaching experience; and elicit teachers' ideas as to how schools could better support their teaching. Both the qualitative and quantitative findings indicated that Japanese secondary school EFL teachers reported high levels of self-efficacy for each of the four categories investigated, but only one factor, teaching experience, was positively associated with such beliefs. Moreover, experienced teachers had higher expectations of school support and were more specific and illustrative than novice teachers. However, the voices of novice teachers should not be underestimated or ignored as it is they who could benefit most from school and community support given their lack of enactive mastery experience. Such support should be varied (e.g., pedagogical, psychological, administrative) and include language development programmes to help them improve their proficiency in the target language and self-efficacy in language teaching.

This study is one of the first to employ a mixed-methods approach to examine TSE in Japan, and therefore contributes to current debates on the importance of TSE in TESOL in general and East Asia in particular. The addition of the qualitative component, in contrast to previous research, generated a deeper understanding of teacher experiences of TESOL in Japan and the important role of TSE from their personal perspectives. Another distinguishing feature of the current project is that it further develops a small body of research conducted in order to investigate TSE beliefs following the 2018 introduction in Japan of new national curriculum standards for the English language at the secondary school level, called the *Course of Study* (JMECSST, 2018). It is also one of the few studies to examine different domains of TSE in this population, specifically the role of lesson planning, from a mixed-methods perspective. In doing so, it provides useful evidence as to how best to support teachers in developing self-efficacy.

There are, however, several limitations of this research that need to be addressed. Firstly, the qualitative findings were based on a relatively small number of participants from Kyushu Island only; hence, they are not generalisable, limiting the study's impact despite its strong design. Secondly, because previous empirical projects on EFL teachers' self-efficacy are extremely scarce in Japan, it is difficult to understand, discuss and contextualise the findings. More extensive previous research would have provided an opportunity for the current findings to be compared and contrasted with past results, thus allowing for more generalisable conclusions and a clearer picture of the status quo in Japan. Finally, the project is based on self-reported data that may contain social desirability (i.e., providing responses that appear to be more socially acceptable) and recall (i.e., not remembering, withholding, or omitting details regarding past experiences) bias.

To facilitate generalisation, future studies could include participants from elsewhere in Japan and at different educational levels in order to measure EFL teachers' assessment of their ability to achieve student engagement and desired learning outcomes. To date, research in Japan has focused mainly on secondary school teachers. To better understand the degree and direction of change in relation to TSE beliefs and provide insight into the relationships between specific areas of teaching and TSE levels at different stages of their professional career longitudinal mixed-methods projects should be planned. In such studies, shifts in teacher beliefs, self-efficacy levels, and professional practices would be closely investigated over an extended

period of time. Regarding novice teachers' concerns about their English language competence, future research could investigate the extent to which Japanese teachers' proficiency in the target language affects overall pedagogical performance. Finally, future projects could use a new version of the TSES that facilitates a more specific exploration of self-efficacy; the current instrument, despite its popular usage, has been criticised for being domain-general (Hoang, 2018; Morris et al., 2017). This new scale would be useful if it focused on CLT and measured teachers' confidence about implementing it in the English language classroom.

The present study has implications for both teachers and management teams in Japanese secondary schools. Teachers must continue to work on increasing efficacy in *student engagement*, *instructional strategies*, *classroom management,* and *lesson planning*. They should actively participate in school-based professional development that satisfies their needs, stimulates their interests, and remains consistent with their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. Staff collaboration will help forge a culture of efficacy, enhancing teaching and general operations within schools. In conjunction with this, management teams must empower teachers, for example, by encouraging them to take on leadership roles. Levels of efficacy will increase substantially when they are actively engaged in decision-making and developing initiatives that improve teaching-learning and wellbeing and feel that their opinions are valued.

Finally, it is essential for school management teams to regularly praise and recognise the achievements of teachers. This will have a positive effect on levels of student success. If teachers are valued and feel that appropriate support is in place and that they belong in their schools, they will be more inclined to take the risks needed to enact changes within schools.

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Appendix A

TEACHERS' SENSE OF EFFICACY ABOUT THEIR OWN PRACTICE

EFL TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Think about your own teaching practice and rate the statements listed below on the Strongly Disagree → Strongly Agree scale. Put one ✓ on the scale from **1** to **4** in lines from 1 to 32. See item 0 for example.	1 S D	2 D	3 A	4 S A
0. Example		✓		
1. I ensure that all students are engaged in classroom activities.				
2. I plan lessons to include whole class, group, pair and individual activities.				
3. I provide constructive feedback and praise students at appropriate moments.				
4. I control disruptive behaviour in the classroom.				
5. I plan lessons which recycle previously taught language and skills.				
6. I motivate students to learn English.				
7. I make my expectations clear about student behaviour.				
8. I make students believe that they can succeed in learning English.				
9. I use a variety of teaching methods/strategies/activities to meet my students' needs.				
10. I establish routines in the classroom to keep activities running smoothly.				
11. I help my students to value English language learning.				
12. I monitor my students' understanding of what is taught.				
13. I plan activities that ensure a balance of skills and language focus.				
14. I pose stimulating questions to my students.				
15. I foster student creativity in and out of the classroom.				
16. I plan homework to consolidate classwork and promote independent learning.				
17. I get students to follow classroom rules.				
18. I consider specific aims for each lesson.				
19. I engage students in the teaching-learning process.				
20. I calm students who are disruptive or noisy.				
21. I draw on various sources (e.g., technology, games, magazines) when I plan lessons.				

22. I establish a classroom management system with my students.				
23. I adjust my lessons to the appropriate level of my students.				
24. I use a variety of instruments to assess my students' knowledge, skills and abilities.				
25. I keep noisy/disruptive students from ruining my lessons.				
26. I provide alternative explanations/examples when students are confused.				
27. I know how to deal with uncooperative students.				
28. I include a variety of activities in my lesson plans to ensure variety.				
29. I assist parents in helping their children to do well in school.				
30. I implement innovative methods in my teaching (e.g., computer technology).				
31. I provide appropriate challenges that take my students to the next level.				
32. I plan carefully to ensure English is used as much as possible in the classroom.				

Student engagement: 1, 3, 6, 8, 11, 15, 19, 29

Instructional strategies: 9, 12, 14, 23, 24, 26, 30, 31

Classroom management: 4, 7, 10, 17, 20, 22, 25, 27

Lesson planning: 2, 5, 13, 16, 18, 21, 28, 3