

## Self-efficacy in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Australian Schools

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*Abstract: Participating in a research-oriented teacher education program, 20 university graduates from China were invited to teach Chinese as a foreign language in western Sydney schools and conducted teacher research for one and half years. By analysing their research on their own teaching through a qualitative approach, this study attempted to identify the factors that influenced their self-efficacy in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in an English-speaking school system. Influential factors identified in this research include teacher factors (proficiency in the medium of instruction, professional learning, teaching experience, and understanding of student), student factors (student responses, classroom discipline, students' motivation, student-teacher relations, and students' age) and contextual factors (culture, influence from other teachers, class size, and resources). Findings of this research have implications for foreign language teacher education.*

### Introduction

With the growth of China's economic power and increasing need to communicate with Chinese people, learning of Chinese language as a foreign language has gained popularity in more countries (Scrimgeour, 2014). Recognising the increasing engagement with Asia in terms of economy, Australian government emphasizes Asia literacy as a national priority in *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008). In the recently developed Australian National Curriculum, Chinese is listed as one of the prioritized Asian languages for students to study during primary and secondary schools (ACARA, 2012). Chinese is one of the most widely taught foreign languages in Australian schools with 92,931 students studying Chinese in 2008 (Sturak & Naughten, 2010). Also highlighted in the Australian National Curriculum are diversified cohorts of Chinese language learners and the importance of catering to various learning needs (ACARA, 2012). Three cohorts of learners are listed in Australian National Curriculum, including second language learners, background language learners, and first language learners (ACARA, 2012). The focus of this article is on teaching Chinese to second language learners who speak English as the main language and have no previous exposure to Chinese language and culture. Compared with other languages, Chinese is often considered as difficult for English speakers due to its distinctive oral and written forms (Scrimgeour, 2010). As a result, over 90% of students studying Chinese finally quit Chinese before Year 11. The 10% students who

remained in the Chinese subject were mostly first language learners of Chinese (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; Sturak & Naughten, 2010). Why non-Chinese speakers dropped out was unclear. However, Chinese language teachers' lack of capability to meet local students' needs has been considered as a contributory factor to the high drop-out rate in Chinese learning (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; Sturak & Naughten, 2010). Research suggested that native-speakers of Chinese from China, who make up the major workforce of Chinese language teachers in Australian schools, however, do not perform effectively in Australian classrooms (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; Sturak & Naughten, 2010; Scrimgeour, 2010). Scrimgeour (2010) attributed the apparently poor performance of Chinese language teachers to a variety of factors including their unfamiliarity with the Australian culture of learning, perceived low levels of learner motivation, inadequate planning to engage learners, inability to see language learning from the learner's perspective, and their low proficiency in English. Despite of these findings, the apparently unsatisfactory performance of Chinese language teachers in Australian classroom has never been examined from the perspective of the teachers themselves. The current study attempts to examine teacher self-efficacy based on existing literature. By revealing the influential factors for Chinese teachers' self-efficacy, the current study may enrich understanding of issues in teaching Chinese to non-Chinese speakers in Australian context as well as how teachers can be better prepared to satisfy learning needs of second language learners of Chinese.

### **Teacher Self-efficacy**

Grounded in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1997, p. 3) as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments". Bandura (1997) summarized sources of self-efficacy into four categories, namely, mastery experience, physiological reactions, vicarious experience and social persuasion. In terms of mastery experience, performances interpreted as successful increase self-efficacy whereas outcomes perceived as failure decrease self-efficacy. Physiological reactions such as heartbeats, fatigue and anxiety can decrease one's self-efficacy. Vicarious experiences change one's self-efficacy through observation of how similar tasks are performed by other people. Social persuasion is concerned with feedback and information from other people which influence individuals' belief in their own capabilities. Positive responses from students and colleagues support teacher self-efficacy whereas negative feedback, criticism and neglect decrease teacher self-efficacy. Moreover, the power of social persuasion is dependent on the expertise and experience of the person involved. Researchers (Bandura, 2006a; Pajares, 1997) maintained that self-efficacy influences people's perceptions of environmental conditions and impediments, their choice of activities, the amount of effort they devoted to an activity, and their persistence when faced with difficulties. Bandura (1997) found that self-efficacy had significant impact on human achievement in education, health, sports, and work. In educational settings, self-efficacy has been validated as an important influence on not only students' achievement, but also teachers' performance (Klassen et al., 2009). During recent decades, there has been growing interest in teacher self-efficacy referred to as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Wool-folk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). Using quantitative measurement tools such as Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfold Hoy, 2001), and Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

(NTSES; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), previous researchers have showed that as a task and situation-specific construct, teacher self-efficacy predicts teachers' commitment to teaching, job satisfaction, and teacher burnout (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Friedman, 2003; Klassen et al., 2009; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2010). Caparara et al. (2006) and Cheung and Cheng (1997) also claimed that teacher self-efficacy exerts an impact on student self-efficacy, motivation and achievement.

A growing body of research has tried to identify factors that influence teacher self-efficacy. One of the factors is *collective teacher efficacy* referred to as teachers' perception of the collective (not individual) capability of a faculty to influence student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000). The notion of collective teacher efficacy was developed based on the recognition that teachers from a particular school or faculty work as a team to plan teaching activities. Individual teachers have beliefs about the capability of their teacher teams in producing given outcomes of students learning. Goddard et al. (2004) argued for a positive relation between perceived collective efficacy and individual teacher self-efficacy based on the belief that perceived high collective teacher efficacy sets high expectations on individual teachers and encourages them to persist in their efforts. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) further stated that the positive effect of collective teacher efficacy on individual teachers' self-efficacy may be mediated through student achievement. They explained that the school culture of working towards challenging goals and teachers' persistence in effort derived from perceived high collective teacher efficacy is likely to improve students' achievement and engagement which will in turn boost up individual teachers' self-efficacy. In addition, previous researchers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) ascertained that in schools with a high level of collective teacher efficacy, individual teachers' self-efficacy benefits from observing successful practices of their colleagues and learning from each other.

Teacher self-efficacy in classroom management may to some extent be explained by *gender*. Previous research (Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999; Klassen & Chiu, 2010) indicated that female teachers demonstrate lower self-efficacy in managing behaviour problems. Teacher self-efficacy may also be domain specific. For example, according to previous research (Ginns, Watters, Tulip, & Lucas, 1995; Ramey-Gassert, Shroyer, & Staver, 1996), teacher's self-efficacy is correlated with teacher's *preference in the subject* and teacher's previous *subject-related learning or professional development*. Ramey-Gassert et al. (1996), for example, revealed that science teachers who had successful experiences in learning science or overcoming challenges in science subjects demonstrate more favourable attitudes toward science, which contributes to their self-efficacy in teaching science. On the other hand, unsuccessful science learning experiences negatively affects teacher self-efficacy and discourages teachers from teaching science (Ramey-Gassert et al., 1996). *Previous teaching experience* and students' previous academic achievement are also influential factors for teacher self-efficacy. A few researchers (Caprara et al., 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998;) proved that high teacher self-efficacy derives from success in teaching, whereas failures to improve students' academic achievement with increased amount of efforts reinforces teachers' belief that the subject is difficult to teach and results in low teacher self-efficacy.

Teacher self-efficacy may also be influenced by teachers' relations with other people within the school setting. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007; 2010), positive *relations to parents* increase teacher self-efficacy whereas negative experiences with parents such as not being trusted by parents, criticized by parents, having conflict with parents or having difficulty in getting parents' cooperation are detrimental to teacher self-efficacy.

Other researchers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ramey-Gassert, et al., 1996) emphasized that *relations with school administrators* are also crucial because school administrators' support in the form of providing access to resources, promoting attendance and ongoing encouragement enhance teacher self-efficacy. The most crucial is probably the relations with students. Previous research showed that teachers' level of self-efficacy is related to *students' characteristics*. Wolters and Daugherty (2007) found that in terms of engaging students and managing the classroom, elementary school teachers have higher self-efficacy than middle or high school teachers. Klassen and Chiu (2010) revealed that in all schools especially elementary schools, teachers of younger students report higher self-efficacy than teachers of older students in student engagement and classroom management. Perhaps, teachers of young students may have a better sense of control and hence a higher self-efficacy. According to Klassen and Chiu (2010), another factor related to teacher self-efficacy is teachers' *years of experience*, with teacher self-efficacy increasing through early-career years to mid-career years but declining afterwards.

There is a large body of research reporting influential factors for teacher self-efficacy, yet, only limited focus on teacher self-efficacy in particular subjects. Even less research has been undertaken to understand self-efficacy of foreign or second language teachers. However, we believe that understanding subject-specific teacher self-efficacy bears more relevance than studying general teacher self-efficacy. This is because teacher self-efficacy focuses on performing specific teaching tasks in specified contexts, and tasks and situations of teaching are to a large extent shaped by the nature of the subject the teacher teaches.

## **Methodology and Methods**

### **The Present Study**

The objective of this research is to explore factors that influence beginning teachers' self-efficacy in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in an Australian context. As mentioned above, specificity of teaching tasks and contexts is of particular importance for understanding teacher self-efficacy. The present study employed qualitative approach to capture specificity of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools and to generate in-depth and rich descriptions of the interaction between teacher self-efficacy and situational factors.

### **Data**

The present study used 20 of Master of Education (Honours) theses on Chinese language teaching in western Sydney schools as data sources. These theses were produced by teacher-researchers participating in a research-oriented teacher education program at different times. The research-oriented teacher education program started in 2008 and recruited up to ten candidates every year. The sample in the present study includes six teacher-researchers recruited in 2008, nine teacher-researchers recruited in 2009, two teacher-researchers recruited in 2010 and three teacher-researchers recruited in 2011. These teacher-researchers reported in the present study, even though participating in the research-oriented teacher education program at different times, share a similar teaching situation. First, they were all Chinese university graduates and native speakers of Chinese. Second, they worked as

voluntary Chinese teachers in western Sydney schools while studying for a Master of Education by research in Australia. Despite of the difference in research question, their research studies focused on their own teaching in western Sydney schools and incorporated significant amounts of self-reflections. In this sense, the theses provided rich accounts of the teacher-researchers themselves being Chinese foreign language teachers in real Australian classrooms. Therefore, we consider the these as valuable data for the present investigation of teacher self-efficacy in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools.

### **Procedure**

The Master's theses used in the present study were searched online through university repository by using the terms "Chinese language teacher" and "beginning Mandarin teacher". A total number of 20 theses were publicly available. The theses were imported to the computer software QSR NVivo for qualitative analysis.

### **Analysis**

The Master's theses were analysed through coding in which qualitative data were "segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation" (Grbich, 2007, p.21). Two cycles of coding were employed to handle the large amount of information available in the theses. The first cycle of coding selected relevant information for the purpose of this study by using holistic coding. Holistic coding which attempts "to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole rather than by analysing them line by line" (Dey, 1993, p. 104) is a preparatory approach to a data set before more focused coding. To facilitate analysis of teacher self-efficacy, holistic coding in the present study extracted from each thesis texts in which teachers' perception of their own ability in teaching Chinese as a foreign language was evident.

After gathering all these texts, provisional coding was used to identify influential factors for teacher self-efficacy. In provisional coding, researchers start with a predetermined set of codes developed from literature review, conceptual framework and research questions, previous research findings, pilot study field-work, or hypotheses, but also prepare to modify the codes if they do not apply to the data (Saldana, 2009). In the present study, the provisional codes were derived from our literature review of previous studies on influential factors for teacher self-efficacy, including collective teacher efficacy, gender, preference of the subject, professional development, prior learning experience, previous teaching experience, relations with parents, administrator support, students' characteristics and years of experience (see italics in the literature review above). While reading the texts selected in the first cycle of coding line-by-line, these codes were modified or reinterpreted to accommodate new findings that emerged from the data.

### **Results and Discussion**

The two cycles of coding identified three categories of influential factors for teacher self-efficacy: (1) teacher factors, (2) student factors, and (3) contextual factors. ]

## Teacher Factors

Teacher factors refer to influential factors associated with teachers' own knowledge, skills and experience. Our analysis showed that teacher factors which influence teacher self-efficacy in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in an English-speaking school system include teachers' proficiency in the medium of instruction, professional learning, teaching experience, and understanding of student.

### *Proficiency in the Medium of Instruction*

In the classroom of the beginning teachers, most of the students were beginners with almost no communicative competence in Chinese. English was employed as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese language. Hence, it was an interesting situation whereby the beginning teachers were teaching Chinese, which was their first language while using English, which was their second language as the medium of instruction. We found that the beginning teachers' perceptions of their own English proficiency were associated with their teacher self-efficacy. For example, in her thesis, W. Zhang (2010) considered her limited English proficiency as a constraint for her to manage students' behaviour and conduct discussions with students. Similarly, Li (2010) maintained that she could not be a good teacher if she could not speak English well. Non-native proficiency in English also led to Liu's (2012) doubt about herself as a qualified teacher.

Previous research showed that language may act as a major barrier for second/foreign language teachers' failure (Pavlenko, 2003). Pavlenko (2003) observed that by perceiving themselves as non-native, student teachers from a second-language background may have issues positioning themselves as teachers and are often lack of confident in classroom communication. Hence, in support of previous research, teachers in the excerpts above questioned their own capability as a teacher in the Australian classroom. They perceived their English ability as insufficient for performing essential classroom tasks such as communicating with students, disciplining students' behaviour, and organizing discussions.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the perception of non-native speakers as inferior to native speakers in teaching, Pavlenko (2003) considered bilingual/multilingual teachers as having multi-competence but a unique mind a valuable advantage. Hence maintaining their identity as multilingual may benefit teachers' perceptions of their own linguistic competence, self-esteem, and their own learning (Pavlenko, 2003). Consistent with this conjecture, some beginning teachers in the present study found that identifying themselves as bilingual teachers and recognising the advantages associated with such an identity could be conducive to their self-efficacy:

Initially, I aimed to achieve native-like competence in spoken English and treated English learning as an everlasting process. However, as I reconstructed my identity as an L2 user, I started to build confidence in English use as well as teaching. Rather than putting myself in a weak position, I was aware of my unique advantages.....My focus was not native standard anymore. Instead, I tried to explore my own ability and advantages in using an L2. (Li, 2010, p. 217)

Liu (2012) also stated that perceiving herself as a bilingual enabled her to view teaching positively as a learnable skill and to reposition her linguistic competence beliefs, which in turn enhanced her self-efficacy and self-esteem:

As an ESL speaker, I have successfully given lessons that were easy to understand and supported students' learning outcomes. These all contributed to my awareness of belonging to an imagined bilingual and multi-competence users community rather than marginal non-native community.....Hence, being a teacher here was no longer just heavy burden, but a learnable business that I believed I could do well in. Consequently, I kept my eye on positive elements of learning to teach, repositioned my own linguistic competence, finally contributing to my own self-efficacy and self-esteem in my teaching practice.....(p. 91-92)

### *Professional learning*

As university graduates from China in lack of pre-service teacher training in Australia, some of the beginning teachers worried about their ability in performing some teaching tasks. For instance, Y. Chen (2011) perceived herself as not adequately equipped with the skills required in conducting assessment and providing feedback appropriately. Without attending formal pre-service teaching training in Australia, some of the beginning teachers encountered several challenges and were doubtful of their role as teachers, which were, to some extent, reflected in their low self-efficacy (Li, 2010; M. Zhang, 2010).

However, this does not mean that these beginning teachers did not have any training at all before teaching in the classroom. It was only that despite the short-term training course provided by the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (DEC), they had to adjust themselves to the classroom situation specifically for the teaching of Chinese language. To some of them, the DEC training was in lack of the specificity on Chinese language teaching, and therefore, the training was of little help in building up their self-efficacy as a Chinese language teacher. For example, Huo (2012) found that the general DEC training did not facilitate the beginning teachers' confidence in teaching Chinese characters:

However, the methodology training for Hanyu she received did not enable her to feel confident to teach Chinese characters in a Hanyu classroom. From Ayala's perspective, the training for pre-service Hanyu teachers should be different from general training, especially focusing on the pedagogy for effective teaching of Chinese characters. (p. 76)

We found that compared to the formal DEC training, learning through hands-on experiences in classroom teaching seemed to be the form of professional learning that bore more relevance for the beginning teachers and could be more beneficial for their self-efficacy in teaching in the particular context. Li (2010) maintained that her self-efficacy was not gained directly from pre-service training, but was instead gradually built up through her interaction with students and other teachers while participating in actual teaching. Importantly, Li (2010) mentioned that it was not until she met difficulties in teaching that she started to draw the links between pre-service training and her real situation. In this sense, we believe that the value of learning by teaching for building teacher self-efficacy lies in its contextualisation of theoretical knowledge learnt from pre-service training so that teachers are equipped with more readily applicable knowledge.

### *Teaching Experience*

Lack of previous teaching experience was a concern for most beginning teachers in this study. They often perceived themselves as inexperienced and associated their failure in teaching with their lack of previous teaching experience. Lack of previous teaching experience also led to the beginning teachers' negativity, such as questioning themselves as a qualified teacher (M. Zhang, 2010). Even when given opportunities to gain teaching experiences, not all experiences were positive and rewarding. As reflected in Liu (2012) thesis, negative teaching experiences can be detrimental to teacher self-efficacy:

.....All of these negative experiences hindered my sense of being a good teacher.....These challenges all contributed to my perception that my teaching practice was ineffective and unprofessional, thus decreasing my confidence about becoming an effective teacher. My low confidence in my teaching overshadowed my intuitiveness, my courage to try new things and particular ideas.....This failure led me to underestimate my professional capacities.....(p. 155-156)

On the other hand, when beginning teachers accumulated more positive teaching experiences, their self-efficacy can be enhanced. H. Chen (2011) maintained that the accumulation of teaching experiences resulted in decreased negativity toward her own teaching. Liu (2012) shared the same opinion with H. Chen (2011) that successful teaching experiences increased her self-efficacy:

But my successful experience helped lessen my feeling of weakness as I proved my ability in teaching good lessons. My developed pedagogy and practice helped me to overcome the feeling myself as inferior and contributed to my increase in sense of self-efficacy in teaching local students. (p. 92)

With successful teaching experiences, Liu (2012) held a strong belief in herself as a proficient teacher and had positive evaluations of her capability in using instructional strategies, willingness to overcome problems, openness to new ideas, meeting expectations of teaching, persistence with new activities, responsibility, creativity, and flexibility in teaching.

### *Understanding of Student*

Our analysis shows that the beginning teachers' perception of their understanding of their students is relevant to their self-efficacy. As Hill, Ball, and Schilling (2008) pointed out, some teachers may have good knowledge about the learning content but poor understanding about how students learn the content. The present study demonstrates that for beginning non-English-speaking teachers with limited understanding of how non-Chinese speakers perceive the Chinese language, there is a difficulty in tailoring their teaching approach to suit English speakers' needs. These teachers may employ teaching approaches that are less effective for English speakers, although they might well be adequate for Chinese-speaking students. Consequently, these teachers may fail to help Australian learners' learn some Chinese features that do not exist in the English language. H. Chen (2011) recognised her minimal knowledge of potential errors and common difficulties English speakers have while learning Chinese writing. Another teacher, Huang (2011) stated that limited understanding about students' daily life and prior learning prevented her from building up new knowledge based on existing knowledge and effectively integrating new concepts with previous knowledge.

Nevertheless, it was also observed in the present study that when the beginning teachers' understanding about students improved with their increasing involvement in Australian schools, their self-efficacy in providing high-quality teaching was enhanced:

My increasing understanding about the students made me feel enlightened by finding right track of my own teaching practice rather than immerse myself in fear of losing my way. I began to feel myself hopeful and confident when I got the idea about what was suitable for students and this understanding contributed to positive teacher-students' relationship and positive attitude about teaching profession. These positive elements all contributed to my positive professional development and enhanced self-efficacy as a real teacher. (Liu, 2012, p. 92-93)

### *Student Factors*

Our analysis identified that teacher self-efficacy in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools is related to student factors including students' responses, classroom discipline, students' motivation, students' relations with the teacher and students' age.

### *Students' Responses*

As teacher self-efficacy is concerned with a teacher's belief in her/his ability to positively influence student outcomes (Soodak & Podell, 1996; Wheatley, 2005), it is likely that teachers' self-efficacy is dependent upon students' performance. Our review of the theses suggests that the beginning teachers tend to assess their teaching ability with reference to their students' responses to their instruction. Improved teacher self-efficacy is likely to stem from positive responses from students such as interest in the lesson and good performance in classroom activities. H. Chen (2011) mentioned in her thesis that positive responses from students confirmed a beginning teacher's belief in her competence as a real teacher who can use appropriate techniques to teach. Viewing students' performance as a direct measure of teacher success, M. Zhang (2010) was confident in her teaching on the basis of positive evidence of students' accent and ability in conversation.

In contrast to the positive students' responses which may give rise to improved teacher self-efficacy, subsequent to students' negative responses is often the beginning teachers' negative perception of their own teaching. For H. Chen (2011) who was originally confident in using technology, unexpected questions from students negatively impacted her self-efficacy in using technology for teaching as well as instructing students to use technology as intended. Another beginning teacher, Li (2011), demonstrated extra care about students' recognition of her teaching and interpreted students' boredom and restlessness as evidence of her poor teaching.

### *Classroom Discipline*

Discipline refers to the preservation of order and the maintenance of control (Orlich et al., 2012, p. 172). The beginning teachers in this research reported the impact of classroom discipline on their teacher self-efficacy. Liu (2012) continued to question her eligibility for being a teacher due to failure in managing students' behaviour in her classroom and engage students in learning. Moreover, our analysis indicates that unsuccessful classroom management may lead to the beginning teachers' attention being distracted from teaching and becoming over sensitive to students' off-task behaviour. Consequently, their over-sensitivity prevents them from teaching professionally and following their teaching plan. For instance, Wu (2010) thought that her confidence as a teacher was negatively affected by classroom management issues. Y. Chen (2011) raised classroom management as a major obstacle for her to fully concentrate on student learning. These findings coincide with Ozder's results (2011) that classroom management and engaging students in class are the major aspects of teaching in which novice teachers demonstrate low teacher self-efficacy. Hopf and Hatizichristou (1999) found that female teachers had more sensitivity to behaviour problems and lower self-efficacy in classroom management than male teachers. Given such relations between gender and teacher self-efficacy in classroom management, we may speculate that the emergence of classroom discipline as a major theme in this study may also be partly due to the high percentage of female teachers in the cohort of beginning teachers studied here.

### *Students' Motivation*

It was noticed in our study that the beginning teachers' self-efficacy was also associated with their perceptions of students' motivation in learning Chinese. The teachers demonstrated increased self-efficacy when teaching students with high motivation. In fact, they considered motivated students as easier to teach than students with low motivation, especially in terms of organising classroom activities and engaging students in those activities. On the contrary, teaching unmotivated students was more difficult because the teacher may be confronted with additional challenges of engaging them in learning activities. When teaching unmotivated students, the beginning teachers tended to suffer from decreased self-efficacy. In front of unmotivated high school students, Wu (2010) held negative views about her teaching and admitted that the negativity was a barrier to good teaching. Reduced teacher self-efficacy and teacher engagement may result in further unsuccessful experiences in motivating students, which may in turn negatively affect teacher self-efficacy. Hence, there seems to be a reciprocal effect between teacher self-efficacy and students' motivation, as described by Wu (2010) in her thesis:

As students became less engaged in lessons it caused me to become upset and less confident to teach. Teacher negativity then impeded teacher performance which increased teacher negativity. Teacher negativity decreased teacher engagement with teaching. Consequently, the relationship between student engagement and teacher engagement was seen to be highly interactive and dependent. (p. 164)

### *Student-Teacher Relations*

Our analysis shows that a cooperative and friendly relation between students and the teacher is more beneficial for teacher self-efficacy. As illustrated in W. Zhang's (2010) thesis, the friendly student-teacher relations enabled active interaction between students and herself and increased students' confidence and willingness to practice Chinese. As a teacher, the cooperative and friendly student-teacher relations alleviated W. Zhang's (2010) anxiety and insecurity associated with using English as the medium of instruction. Both students' willingness to practice and her lowered anxiety in using English as the medium of instruction allowed W. Zhang (2010) to use more communicative activities in teaching. Increased communication in the target language created more opportunities for practicing the target language and thus enhanced her confidence in developing students' communicative competence, which may be regarded as the most important outcome of contemporary language teaching.

### *Students' Age*

Our analysis indicates that teacher self-efficacy may vary according to students' age. Li (2010) considered it easier to teach at primary school than high school because the classroom rules, classroom teachers and seating arrangements ensure a well-established classroom discipline at primary school. Therefore, Li (2010) evaluated herself as teaching better at primary school. In contrast, other teachers may perceive themselves as less competent in teaching younger students who may be less active in learning a foreign language and slow in demonstrating accomplishments. M. Zhang (2010) preferred to teach older children and raised teaching young children as a key problem for herself, because to her, young children did not seem to learn as quickly as older children.

Nevertheless, given that teacher self-efficacy is task-specific, these teachers' varying levels of teacher self-efficacy in teaching young students may be explained by the different aspects of teaching they were involved in. For example, when one teacher focused on classroom management whereas another concentrated on students' progress in learning, their self-efficacy in these different aspects may not be comparable. Considering this, we may speculate that in terms of behaviour management, the beginning teachers demonstrate higher self-efficacy in a classroom of younger students than in a classroom of older students. This is consistent with previous research findings regarding student age and teacher self-efficacy in engaging students and in classroom management (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). With regard to promoting students' learning progress, the beginning teachers may have higher self-efficacy in teaching older students than younger students instead.

### **Contextual Factors**

In this study, we found that teacher self-efficacy in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools is influenced by a series of contextual factors including culture, influence from other teachers, class size and resources available.

### *Culture*

Previous research identified that teachers' practice is profoundly influenced by their beliefs about teaching and learning which are based on their own educational experiences (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Watzke, 2007). The beginning teachers in this research were mostly educated in China. As a result, their beliefs about teaching and learning were to a large extent shaped by the educational culture in China. As the Australian educational system and culture are different from those in China, the beginning teachers were unlikely to draw upon their Chinese educational beliefs and practices to inform their teaching in Australian classrooms. Analysis of the theses highlights that the incompatibility between the teachers' own educational beliefs and the Australian classroom norms influences their self-efficacy of functioning in Australian classroom. For example, H. Chen (2011) was worried about teaching in Australian classroom because there was no textbook for teachers to follow in Australia as would in China. Additionally, the extent of students' misbehaviour in Australian classrooms was what she had never experienced in China, and it made H. Chen (2011) worried about her ability to teach in an Australian classroom. Li (2010) seemed to experience the same reality shock about Australian students' classroom behaviour which led to her concern about her ability in teaching in Australia. For Liu (2012), the Chinese traditional belief in teacher authority and teacher-centred classroom culture led to her low self-efficacy in managing students' behaviour while adopting a student-centred approach.

The beginning teachers' worries, negative emotions and loss of confidence about their teaching in Australian classroom may be regarded as signs of reduced teacher self-efficacy. At the surface, their inadequate teacher self-efficacy was mostly related to students' inappropriate classroom behaviour, but behaviour problems are also a common issue for local teachers. Hence it was not purely students' inappropriate behaviour that threatened their teacher self-efficacy, but rather, it seemed to be the inconsistency between their well-established beliefs from their culture and the norm of the local classroom situation. As one teacher pointed out:

Chinese beginning teacher had issues in common with other beginning teachers in respect of classroom management, but also had distinct issues associated with her Chinese cultural background. (H. Chen, 2011, p. 65)

In this sense, we may speculate that for foreign language teachers who had been educated overseas, culture has a particularly powerful influence on teacher self-efficacy. This is to some extent supported in previous research demonstrating the relations of teachers' nationality and associated cultural beliefs with their level of efficacy (Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010; Liu & Ramsey, 2008). For Chinese-grown foreign language teachers, Orton (2010) contended that they may have problems adapting to the Australian environment due to the differences in the educational beliefs and cultures between Australia and China, especially when classroom discipline is concerned.

### *Influence from other Teachers*

We also found that the beginning Chinese teachers' self-efficacy was to some extent influenced by other teachers including experienced local teachers and other beginning Chinese language teachers. The influence from other teachers took different forms including comments on teaching practice, demonstration of teaching, sharing of knowledge, opinions

and feelings, and mentoring. Schunk (1987) argued that others' comments as a source of self-efficacy are especially influential for beginners who have no prior experience and are uncertain about their own capabilities. In our analysis, positive comments from other teachers were found to enhance beginning teachers' self-efficacy. Li (2010) demonstrated her belief in her own teaching capability after receiving positive feedback from other teachers. Similarly, Liu (2012) experienced increased confidence in teaching and became more willing to take risk in teaching when she was acknowledged and encouraged by her research supervisor who was an experienced early childhood teacher. On the contrary, criticism from other teachers reduced the self-efficacy of the beginning teachers. W. Zhang (2010) felt discouraged by another teacher's criticism, especially when she was criticised in front of students. These findings about the relations between other teachers' comments and teachers' self-efficacy are consistent with Bandura's (1997) finding about social persuasion as a source of teacher self-efficacy. Our analysis reveals that teacher self-efficacy is also influenced by the behaviour and practice of others. For example, the beginning teachers learnt by observing other teachers. H. Chen (2011) learnt a variety of practical strategies in maintaining students' attention and classroom discipline by observing experienced teachers. Observing other beginning teachers' performance also changed their own practice and self-efficacy, especially when the teacher being observed shared the similar background and was teaching in a similar situation. Li (2010), for example, changed her attitudes toward students' motivation and started to believe in her ability to teach after observing some good practice of another beginning teacher. Considering the relations between collective teacher efficacy and individual teacher self-efficacy evident in previous research, a possible explanation for the excerpt above is that the other teacher's good performance persuaded the beginning teacher of the collective efficacy of teachers within the similar situation, which in turn boosted her self-efficacy. It was noticed in our analysis that sharing of knowledge, opinions and feelings between teachers had an impact on teacher self-efficacy. Particularly, it was often the similarity of situation that made the opinions and information from others relevant and persuasive. Unfortunately, for unsuccessful experiences, sharing of such experiences among the beginning teachers contributed to increased pessimism about their collective teacher efficacy and further confirmed their own negative self-efficacy.

Our analysis of the beginning teachers' theses highlights mentoring as an important facilitation to beginning teacher self-efficacy. Mentorship usually encompasses experienced teachers as mentors coaching beginning teachers, providing constructive feedback, demonstrating contextual-specific practice and sharing resources and knowledge. In this sense, mentoring provides both vicarious experiences and social persuasion for enhancing beginning teacher self-efficacy. From the perspectives of the beginning teachers in this research, availability of a mentor was of great value for their on-job learning which facilitated them to achieve desired students' outcome:

Having a mentor in school meant that I would be 'taken care of' by somebody, which reassured me in certain ways, enhanced my teaching confidence and improved my teaching practice.....Practical advice and help were exactly what I needed, such as with solving pedagogical problems; providing feedback on my teaching; organising my teaching context; introducing available resource materials; and giving me information in advance so that I could prepare. (M. Zhang, 2010, p. 166)

In contrast, working in a school where support from other teachers was absent, the beginning teachers had lower self-efficacy in teaching.

### *Class Size*

Teacher self-efficacy is known to be, to some extent, related to class size. In a large class, M. Zhang (2010) reported lower self-efficacy in organising classroom activities, interacting with individual students, and engaging all students in the class. On the contrary, we noticed that small class size seemed to enable teacher self-efficacy in closely monitoring students' learning and emotions and then providing immediate and targeted support for individual students. For W. Zhang (2010), teaching in a small class seemed to allow more interaction with individual students, which especially enhanced her self-efficacy in conducting communicative language teaching, as shown in her thesis:

Another important factor was the small size of this class. There were only five students in my class. So I was able to give my attention to every individual student and have more chances to communicate with, and give instructions to, each student. More importantly, I could plan a variety of effective communicative activities for such a small class, so this allowed me to use CLT more effectively. (p. 113)

### *Resources*

Resources provided by the school seem to enhance teachers' self-efficacy. Li (2010) felt being more confident to teach when she did not have to worry about the availability of resources for teaching. Similarly, M. Zhang (2010) mentioned in her thesis that when she came to a school to teach, she was offered a staff package which included some teaching materials, a school Chinese language policy and a Chinese class timetable. She emphasized the importance of the availability such resources for her sense of being a teacher:

These resources were actually not complicated, but were of considerable help in my fitting into the school. The package worked well in giving me a clear idea about my role and position in the school. In other schools, I had no idea about what I should do. Perhaps it was because we were the first, pioneering group, and schools need time to organise and to be familiar with my position. No-one could imagine how important this sense of being a teacher in the school was for me. (p. 68)

Another teacher W. Zhang (2010) considered the availability of good technical support as a facilitator for her to implement communicative language teaching more effectively. Technology increased her access to online resources and enabled her to provide more authentic learning experiences by using more visual and auditory activities.

### **Conclusion**

By reviewing the teacher research of a cohort of beginning Chinese language teachers, we have identified several influential factors for Chinese language teachers' self-efficacy, including culture, influence from other teachers, students' responses, proficiency in the medium of instruction, classroom discipline, professional learning, teaching experience, students' motivation, understanding about students, teacher-student relationship, class size,

student age, and resources. Due to the nature of qualitative investigation as well as the fact that teacher self-efficacy is a situation-specific construct, the findings in this research may not be generalized worldwide, but are dependent on the similarity of the audience's situation and the teachers being studied in this research. However, the identification of the influential factors reported here has enriched our current understanding of Chinese language teachers' self-efficacy. As teacher self-efficacy is not static, but subject to situational changes, it is possible to facilitate the self-efficacy of beginning teachers of a foreign language through strategic manipulation of these influential factors.

### **Teachers**

Previous research pointed to some of factors related to teachers themselves as influences on their teacher self-efficacy, such as gender (Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999; Klassen & Chiu, 2010), subject-related learning and professional development (Ginns et al., 1995; Ramey-Gassert et al., 1996), and years of experience (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). This research adds proficiency in the medium of instruction and understanding of student to the list. Given the findings, we suggest that for teachers using English as their second language, merely high marks in standardised test of English language proficiency for non-native speakers does not necessarily lead to their self-efficacy in using English for language teaching purposes. To increase their self-efficacy, training and coaching on using English as a classroom language should be an integral part of teacher education for non-native English speaking language teachers. Additionally, helping non-native teachers to recognise their bilingual/multilingual identity and associated advantage instead of evaluating themselves against native-like standards seems to be conducive to their self-efficacy. To boost non-native teachers' self-efficacy, developing their understanding of student through teacher education is important. These include understanding students' life experiences, prior knowledge, as well as how non-Chinese speakers perceive and learn Chinese language. Findings in this research also highlight the value of professional learning especially with specificity on Chinese language teaching and learning by doing for building up teacher self-efficacy.

### **Students**

Previous research has shown that teacher self-efficacy is correlated with students' academic achievement, student-teacher relation, and student characteristics in previous research (Capara et al., 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ramey-Gassert et al., 1996; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). This research reaffirms these findings. It is likely that students' negative responses, problematic behaviour, lack of motivation and negative relations with teachers result in lower teacher self-efficacy and poor performance which give rise to students' further negative responses, behaviours, lack of motivation and negative student-teacher relations. The fundamental solution is to improve teachers' skills in establishing rapport with students, fostering students' positive behaviour and motivation for learning. It is also necessary to help teachers maintain an optimistic attitude when students' negative responses, problematic behaviour, lack of motivation and negative student-teacher relations occur.

## Contexts

Contextual factors for teacher self-efficacy found in previous research include collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2004; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), and support from parents and school administrators (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ramey-Gassert, et al., 1996; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Similar to previous finding on the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy, this research shows influence from other teachers on self-efficacy of Chinese language teachers. To increase foreign language teachers' self-efficacy, positive influence from other teachers such as encouragement, exemplary teaching, sharing of experience and mentoring need to be integrated in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Additionally, school support for teaching materials is important. Furthermore, this research highlights the culture as an influential factor for non-native teachers' self-efficacy, which responds to Milner and Woolfok Hoy's (2003) call for qualitative investigation of teacher self-efficacy in different contexts and in relation to cultural factors. To increase foreign language teacher self-efficacy, raising teachers' awareness of the difference between their own country and the local context in educational culture and facilitating their adaption to the local educational culture should be treated one priority of foreign language teacher education.

Ultimately, enhanced Chinese language teachers' self-efficacy may lead to improved outcomes of teaching and learning in Chinese as a foreign language in Australia, and contribute to the government's long-term educational goal of promoting Asia literate for young generations.

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