

A Qualitative Empirical Study on the Influence Factors of Self-Efficacy among Thai HSK Teachers: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Manuscript received July 8, 2025; accepted September 9, 2025; published February 6, 2026.

Abstract—With the rapid development of international Chinese education, HSK courses have become an integral part of Chinese language instruction in Thai universities. As a core variable influencing teachers' instructional behavior and professional development, teacher self-efficacy has attracted extensive scholarly attention. However, existing studies tend to examine self-efficacy from a macro perspective, with limited attention to the specific factors influencing self-efficacy in particular teaching tasks, such as HSK test preparation. Grounded in Bandura's four classical sources of self-efficacy—mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states—this study adopts a grounded theory approach to investigate the key influencing factors through semi-structured interviews with 20 experienced HSK teachers, each with more than four years of teaching experience. The participants include 4 Thai and 16 Chinese teachers, a composition that reflects the actual structure of HSK instruction in Thai universities and may influence the cultural applicability of the findings. The results reveal six major categories influencing teacher self-efficacy: contextual conditions, emotional and physiological states, cognitive factors, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and mastery experience. These factors interact dynamically to shape teachers' instructional confidence. Notably, cognitive factors and contextual conditions emerged as additional categories that extend Bandura's original framework. In the context of HSK instruction, these newly identified factors highlight the impact of cultural adaptation and task complexity on teacher self-efficacy. This study not only enriches the theoretical understanding of self-efficacy but also provides empirical evidence for future research focused on task-specific teaching contexts.

Keywords—HSK courses, teachers' self-efficacy, influence factors

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of the “Belt and Road” initiative and the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and Thailand, the demand for Chinese learning in Thailand continues to grow. As an international standardized test of Chinese proficiency, HSK has become an important component of Chinese teaching in Thai universities. In this context, the teaching ability and professional development of HSK teachers have attracted significant attention. Teachers' self-efficacy, as a core variable affecting teachers' behavior and professional development, is directly related to teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. However, existing research mostly analyzes the composition of teachers' self-efficacy from a macro perspective, with little focus on specific influencing factors in particular teaching tasks (such as HSK test preparation). Therefore, this study explores the influence factors of self-efficacy among Thai

HSK teachers using a grounded theory approach, providing theoretical support and practical suggestions for optimizing teachers' professional development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-efficacy, a core concept proposed by Bandura, reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to complete specific tasks. In *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, Bandura systematically elaborates the theoretical framework of self-efficacy, identifying four main sources: direct experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states [1]. This theory provides a solid foundation for subsequent research.

Klassen and Chiu's research [2] delve into the impact of job satisfaction and teaching stress on teachers' self-efficacy, revealing the importance of stable and supportive work environments in enhancing teachers' self-efficacy. They argue that a stable and supportive work environment can significantly enhance teachers' self-efficacy, thereby improving teaching effectiveness.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik's research [3] further indicate a significant negative correlation between burnout and teachers' self-efficacy. This suggests that teachers' psychological states, especially burnout, have a profound impact on their self-efficacy. Therefore, paying attention to teachers' mental health is crucial for enhancing their self-efficacy.

Chen *et al.*'s research [4] focus on the relationship between teachers' emotional regulation ability and self-efficacy, emphasizing the important role of emotional regulation in influencing teachers' self-efficacy. The study finds that teachers who can effectively regulate their emotions often have higher self-efficacy, indicating that emotional management is a key factor in enhancing teachers' self-efficacy.

Hoy and Spero's research [5] explore the dynamic changes in teachers' self-efficacy during the early years of teaching. Their findings suggest that teachers' self-efficacy changes with the accumulation of teaching experience. This indicates that the cultivation of teachers' self-efficacy is an ongoing process that requires continuous accumulation of teaching experience to consolidate and enhance.

In summary, self-efficacy, as an important factor affecting teachers' behavior and professional development, is influenced by a variety of factors. These include direct experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, emotional and physiological states, as well as work environment, burnout, and emotional regulation ability [6].

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative grounded theory approach, using semi-structured interviews to initially explore influencing factors.

This study interviewed 20 HSK course teachers working in Thai universities (including Confucius Institutes) and language teaching institutions. These teachers exhibit diverse characteristics in terms of nationality, type of employer, education level, teaching experience, professional background, and teaching scope. All of them have over four years of teaching experience, indicating they are in the proficient stage of their teaching careers. Specifically, in terms of nationality, there are 4 Thai teachers and 16 Chinese teachers. This imbalance reflects the current structure of HSK instruction in Thailand, where Chinese native-speaker teachers are the main teaching force. While Thailand promotes the localization of Chinese teaching through local teacher training, Thai teachers are often stronger in classroom management and student engagement. However, for test-oriented tasks like HSK preparation, native Chinese teachers may have an advantage in linguistic precision and cultural nuance. In terms of employer type, 13 are from public universities, 4 from private universities, and 3 from language teaching institutions. In terms of education level, 3 hold bachelor's degrees, 9 hold master's degrees, and 8 are doctoral students or hold doctoral degrees. In terms of teaching experience, 3 have 1–3 years of experience, 13 have 4–10 years, and 4 have over 10 years. In terms of professional background, 16 have relevant majors (such as Chinese international education, Chinese, etc.), and 4 have unrelated majors. In terms of teaching scope, except for 2 teachers who do not teach intermediate HSK courses, the rest cover HSK courses from beginner to intermediate levels.

IV. DATA COLLECTION

This study uses semi-structured interviews, with interview outlines designed around teachers' teaching practices, classroom management, and student performance, among other aspects. The main questions are as follows:

How do you usually help students of different levels improve their Chinese proficiency?

How do you stimulate students' interest and initiative in the classroom? What strategies have you used?

How do you maintain classroom order? How do you respond to teaching challenges?

When students make slow progress or perform poorly in exams, what teaching adjustments do you make?

Are there moments when you feel confident in your teaching ability? Please provide examples.

What do you think are the main factors influencing the self-efficacy of HSK teachers?

Interviews were conducted both online (via Tencent Meeting) and offline, lasting approximately 1 hour. After the interviews, NVIVO11 software was used for three-level coding analysis of the data.

V. RESEARCH RESULTS

This study adopts a grounded theory coding approach to systematically analyze 20 interview transcripts and gradually

extract and summarize the core factors influencing teachers' self-efficacy. The research process is divided into four stages: initial coding (open coding), axial coding, selective coding, and result interpretation. Each stage of the research process and its outcomes are described in detail below.

Step 1: Open Coding

In the initial stage, 102 important "reference points" were identified and extracted from the 20 interview transcripts. These reference points represent personal observations or statements related to the research questions. For example, interview statements such as "The school atmosphere has a big impact on me" or "It's hard for me to balance family and work due to the heavy workload" were marked as reference points. The goal of this stage was to capture as comprehensively as possible all content in the interviews related to the research topic, laying a foundation for subsequent coding.

Step 2: Axial Coding

In this stage, the 102 reference points were grouped into 33 more abstract subcategories or sub-nodes. This process involved identifying patterns and relationships among the individual reference points. For instance, "The school atmosphere has a big impact on me" and "Teaching requirements and assessment standards affect me" were grouped under the sub-node "Perception of the work environment". Through this process, we gradually distilled higher-level abstract concepts from concrete data, preparing for the final selective coding phase.

Step 3: Selective Coding

In the final coding phase, the 33 sub-nodes were further synthesized into six core categories or influencing factors:

Contextual Conditions (Reference Count: 8): These factors are related to the external environment surrounding the research phenomenon, such as perception of the work environment, teaching requirements, assessment standards, course schedule, classroom atmosphere, and policy changes. The relatively low reference count suggests these factors were mentioned less frequently or perceived as having a smaller impact compared to other categories.

Emotional and Physiological States (Reference Count: 19): This category includes internal emotional and physiological conditions of participants, such as job satisfaction, emotions, personality traits, cultural confidence, student needs, student abilities, burnout, self-motivation, and attribution errors. The relatively high reference count indicates these internal factors had a significant influence on the outcome [7].

Cognitive Factors (Reference Count: 4): This category focuses on psychological processes and beliefs, such as intercultural cognition, professional cognition, and self-perception. Although the reference count is low, these cognitive factors reflect aspects of metacognitive theory, particularly person knowledge and task knowledge—teachers' judgments about their own abilities, task objectives, and perceived task difficulty. These elements are often shaped by individual differences and accumulated teaching experience. Although cognitive factors were referenced less frequently, participating teachers explicitly articulated elements related to personal cognition, such as their understanding of international Chinese education, attitudes toward intercultural communication, and reflections

on their professional identity. These expressions reflect an active cognitive construction of teaching roles and tasks, which carry substantial theoretical and practical significance. The relatively low frequency may not indicate limited influence; rather, such reflective insights often emerge in specific pedagogical contexts or at more advanced stages of professional development, suggesting a “low-frequency, high-significance” pattern. This finding underscores the importance of attending to teachers’ cognitive constructions regarding educational philosophy and cultural engagement, as these perspectives offer critical insight into the formation of teaching self-efficacy. The low reference count suggests cognitive factors may play a lesser role in the phenomenon compared to others.

Vicarious Experiences (Reference Count: 10): This refers to learning through observing others, including others’ experiences, family background, student behavior, and lack of professional resources. A moderate reference count indicates that learning from others’ experiences has a noticeable influence.

Verbal Persuasion (Reference Count: 25): This category emphasizes the impact of communication and feedback, including salary and benefits, exam performance, classroom participation, interpersonal relationships, feedback from others, and student performance in class. The high reference count suggests verbal persuasion has a strong influence on the outcome.

Direct Experience (Reference Count: 36): This represents firsthand experience and its impact, such as preparation, experiences of success and failure, achievement goals, teaching autonomy, academic growth, and teachers’ professional competence. The highest reference count suggests direct experience is the most influential factor [8].

Step 4: Result Interpretation

The results are summarized in Table 1. The reference count for each core category provides a quantitative overview of the relative importance of each factor based on the interview data. For example, the high reference counts for “Direct Experience” and “Verbal Persuasion” indicate that practical experience and feedback significantly influence the outcome. In contrast, “Cognitive Factors” and “Contextual Conditions” appear to have less influence based on the collected data. This finding aligns with the grounded theory coding process, where initial reference points are gradually categorized into increasingly abstract levels until six core influencing factors are identified.

A key strength of this study lies in its inductive approach, which allows themes to emerge organically from the data rather than being predetermined. This inductive process ensures the objectivity and reliability of the findings, as they are derived through a step-by-step analysis of actual interview data. Further analysis could explore the relationship between these factors and specific outcomes in the study. For example, a deeper examination could be conducted on how “Direct Experience” specifically affects teachers’ self-efficacy, or how “Emotional and Physiological States” may moderate the influence of other factors. These insights could provide more nuanced theoretical support and practical guidance for teacher professional development.

The interview results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution table of coded influencing factors affecting HSK teachers’ self-efficacy

Third-level Coding	Second-level Coding	Reference Count
Contextual Conditions	Work Environment Perception; Teaching Requirements and Assessment Standards; Course Time Setting; Classroom Atmosphere; Policy Changes	8
Emotional & Physiological States	Misattribution; Job Satisfaction; Emotions and Personal Traits; Cultural Confidence; Student Demand; Student Ability; Professional Burnout; Self-Motivation	19
Cognitive Factors	Cross-cultural Cognition; Professional Cognition; Self-Cognition	4
Vicarious Experiences	Observing Others’ Experiences; Family Environment; Student Behavior; Lack of Specialized Materials	10
Verbal Persuasion	Salary and Benefits; Exam Results; Classroom Participation; Interpersonal Relationships; Feedback from Others; Students’ Classroom Performance	25
Direct Experience	Preparation; Success and Failure Experiences; Achievement Goals; Teaching Autonomy; Academic Advancement; Teachers’ Professional Ability	36

VI. DISCUSSION

In the study of factors influencing the self-efficacy of Thai HSK teachers, contextual conditions are an indispensable important variable. Teachers’ perception of the work environment, including school atmosphere, teaching requirements, and assessment standards, directly affects their teaching confidence. The rationality of course time settings is also crucial; long courses can easily lead to student inattention, thereby weakening teachers’ classroom control. The positivity of the classroom atmosphere directly affects teachers’ emotional states and teaching confidence, while the frequency of policy changes affects teachers’ perception of job stability. The continuity and consistency of policies help teachers formulate long-term career plans and enhance their positive teaching attitudes.

In terms of emotional and physiological states, teachers’ subjective experiences and emotional regulation abilities play a key role. The misattribution effect may lead teachers to confuse students’ learning conditions with their own abilities, thereby affecting their self-efficacy. Job satisfaction is constrained by workload and family balance, which has a profound impact on teachers’ emotional states [9]. Individual personality traits and emotional regulation abilities determine teachers’ performance in classroom interactions, thereby affecting teaching effectiveness. Cultural confidence plays a unique role in international Chinese education; teachers’ sense of achievement and pride in spreading Chinese culture significantly enhances their professional identity. Additionally, students’ demands and learning abilities pose challenges to teachers’ adaptability, and long-term repetitive teaching tasks can lead to burnout, while strong self-motivation is the intrinsic support to resist burnout and enhance teaching beliefs.

From a cognitive perspective, teachers’ cross-cultural cognitive abilities significantly affect classroom management and teaching strategy adjustments. Understanding and respecting diverse cultures helps teachers build an effective teaching environment in heterogeneous cultural contexts. At

the same time, teachers' mastery of the fundamental knowledge of international Chinese education forms an important basis for their professional cognition, thereby enhancing teaching confidence. Long-term teaching practice and accumulated experience help teachers develop a higher level of self-cognition, enhancing their professional confidence and self-positioning.

The accumulation of vicarious experiences is also an important source of self-efficacy. By observing others' teaching experiences, especially the classroom practices of experienced teachers, novice teachers can identify their own shortcomings and improve them. Family background, especially the occupational characteristics of family members, has a subtle influence on teachers' career choices and teaching philosophies. Students' classroom behavior and learning attitudes not only reflect teaching effectiveness but also directly impact teachers' confidence. The lack of specialized and targeted teaching materials often makes teachers feel overwhelmed in actual teaching, thereby weakening their sense of efficacy.

Verbal persuasion, as an external feedback mechanism, also occupies an important position in influencing teachers' self-efficacy. Economic incentives such as salary and benefits are directly linked to teachers' job satisfaction and teaching enthusiasm. Students' exam results and classroom participation are important feedback mechanisms for teaching effectiveness, helping teachers reflect on and adjust their teaching strategies. The quality of interpersonal relationships among colleagues and between superiors and subordinates affects teachers' sense of professional support, while positive feedback from peers, leaders, or students helps teachers form self-affirmation and teaching beliefs [10]. Students' classroom performance, especially their learning motivation and interest, also provides important external encouragement for teachers.

Direct experience, as the core source of self-efficacy, is the foundation for teachers to build teaching confidence and adjust teaching strategies. Adequate preparation provides a guarantee for classroom teaching and is a prerequisite for enhancing teachers' sense of efficacy. Successes and failures in teaching continuously feedback and shape teachers' teaching abilities and self-evaluation. The achievement goals held by teachers influence their teaching behavior choices and professional development plans, and intrinsic goal orientation can enhance their ability to meet challenges. Furthermore, the degree of teaching autonomy determines whether teachers can flexibly respond to classroom situations and improve their teaching performance. Finally, academic advancement, as an important part of teachers' professional development, helps enhance their professional knowledge and academic confidence.

By incorporating cognitive and contextual factors, this study enriches and extends Bandura's theoretical framework of self-efficacy [11]. Cognitive factors correspond to person knowledge and task knowledge within metacognitive theory, reflecting teachers' self-assessment and task analysis as critical elements in the formation of teaching competence [12]. Contextual conditions align with practical factors such as workplace support and job satisfaction. Notably, in the context of HSK instruction, this study reveals the unique

influence of cultural adaptation and task complexity on teacher self-efficacy, thereby broadening the application of the theory within specific instructional settings.

VII. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study, grounded in grounded theory, conducted in-depth interviews with Thai HSK teachers to systematically explore the multiple factors influencing teacher self-efficacy and their dynamic interactions. The findings reveal that self-efficacy is jointly influenced by six key factors: contextual conditions, emotional and physiological states, cognitive factors, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and mastery experience. These factors interact dynamically within specific teaching contexts.

The grounded theory approach enables the capture of implicit variables and complex mechanisms in real teaching environments, providing a more comprehensive depiction of the development of self-efficacy compared to traditional quantitative methods. The study highlights that teachers' professional abilities, classroom feedback, emotional states, and work environment are core determinants of self-efficacy. Accordingly, enhancing teacher self-efficacy requires optimizing educational policies and support systems, alongside improving teachers' positive perceptions of teaching effectiveness through professional development, feedback mechanisms, and psychological support, thus fostering a stable and constructive teaching ecosystem. This has significant theoretical and practical implications for improving the quality of HSK courses and the overall level of international Chinese education.

This study not only supports Bandura's core proposition of multiple factors influencing self-efficacy but also, for the first time in the specific context of HSK teaching, systematically expands the cognitive and contextual dimensions, providing new theoretical perspectives and empirical foundations for future research on teacher self-efficacy in task-specific instructional contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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