



A Study on Defining and Evaluating Teacher Self-Efficacy for Pre-Service English Teachers in China

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) is essential to instructional quality and student learning, yet research has largely overlooked pre-service teachers, particularly in the context of English language education in China. This article aimed (1) to explore the definition and components of TSE of pre-service English teachers; (2) to investigate the current status of TSE among pre-service English teachers.

Materials and Methods: Grounded in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted with five experts in educational psychology to clarify the definition and components of self-efficacy among pre-service English teachers. In the quantitative phase, a self-developed questionnaire was administered to 40 pre-service English teachers from Liupanshui Normal University in Guizhou Province, China, to examine their current levels of TSE.

Results: The study established a definition of TSE for pre-service English teachers and, building on previous theories, proposed and updated three dimensions of TSE specifically adapted to the Chinese educational context: classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. The findings also indicated generally insufficient TSE among participants (moderate level, $M = 3.15$), emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and reflective practice in teacher education programs to enhance pre-service English self-efficacy.

Conclusion: This study deepens the understanding of TSE among pre-service English teachers in the Chinese context. It highlights the need to strengthen teacher education programs by addressing gaps in TSE. The findings provide valuable insights for developing more effective training and support strategies for future teachers.

Keywords: Teacher Self-Efficacy; Pre-service English Teacher; Definition and Components; Current Status

Introduction

Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) plays a crucial role in shaping educators' professional development and enhancing their effectiveness in the classroom (Gordon et al., 2023). TSE refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to successfully organize, implement, and complete teaching tasks in specific educational contexts (Bandura, 1997). It has been widely recognized that TSE is closely related to various aspects of teaching, including instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement, all of which significantly impact student learning outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Despite the widespread acknowledgment of TSE's importance, most existing research has primarily focused on the self-efficacy of in-service teachers, often overlooking the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers (Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020; Tien & Hamid, 2020; Valtonen et al., 2023). Pre-service teachers are in a critical developmental stage before entering the workforce, during which their self-efficacy and teaching skills are still evolving (Anip et al., 2020). This phase of self-efficacy development is crucial, as it can directly influence their future teaching performance and career progression. Therefore, research on TSE of pre-service teachers is of particular importance (Ma et al., 2022; Song et al., 2025).

In the context of China, pre-service English teachers face unique challenges. On the one hand, many pre-service English teachers demonstrate confidence in their ability to manage classrooms and engage students, but often lack the necessary strategies to address diverse classroom needs effectively (Deng, 2011; Song et al., 2025). On the other hand, factors such as limited teaching experience, cultural expectations, and the evolving nature of the educational system may contribute to their levels of TSE. Understanding these dynamics is critical, as TSE has been shown to correlate with increased job satisfaction, better student-teacher relationships, and improved student achievement (Yan & Sin, 2014).





While there is a body of research examining TSE in China, particularly among in-service teachers (Chen, 2022; Lin, 2019; Wang et al., 2020), studies focusing specifically on pre-service English teachers remain relatively scarce. Existing literature lacks a comprehensive exploration of regional disparities in TSE across different areas of China, where cultural and institutional differences could significantly influence pre-service teachers' perceptions of their teaching abilities. Furthermore, while TSE has been examined across various subject areas, there is a notable gap in research addressing TSE of pre-service English teachers and the specific challenges they face within their field. Although previous studies have shown that Chinese pre-service English teachers lack TSE (Wang et al., 2020; Yan & Sin, 2014), these claims have not been sufficiently substantiated with robust empirical data. There is, therefore, a critical need for further empirical research to explore TSE levels of pre-service English teachers and identify the factors that influence their development, to provide theoretical and practical insights for teacher preparation programs.

Despite its importance, few studies have empirically examined TSE among Chinese pre-service English teachers using a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, this study pursues two interrelated objectives: first, to conceptualize TSE for pre-service English teachers and delineate its essential dimensions; and second, to evaluate the current TSE profiles of pre-service English teachers in China. This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating surveys, teacher interviews, and behavioral observations to gather both qualitative and quantitative data.

The overarching goal is to develop a robust, comprehensive framework for understanding and assessing TSE in pre-service English teachers. The findings are expected to inform the design of targeted teacher training programs and policy interventions aimed at enhancing TSE among future educators. By contributing to the academic discourse on TSE, this study offers valuable insights into how pre-service English teachers in China perceive their professional capabilities. It also lays the groundwork for future research on interventions and professional development programs that can help enhance self-efficacy, thereby fostering better teaching practices and improving educational outcomes.

Objectives

1. This study aims to explore the definition and components of TSE of pre-service English teachers.
2. This study aims to investigate the current status of TSE among pre-service English teachers.

Literature review

Self-Efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy, initially proposed by Bandura (1977) within the framework of social cognitive theory, underscores the significance of individual agency in the face of environmental constraints. Bandura (1997) later elaborated on this notion by identifying four core sources of efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. This framework has been widely adopted in educational research to explain how individuals' confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks influences their motivation, perseverance, and performance outcomes. Over the years, self-efficacy theory has provided a foundational lens for understanding teacher motivation and professional growth (Song et al., 2025). However, its applicability to the domain of language teacher education has been increasingly scrutinized. In particular, Wyatt (2018) argues that Bandura's original model may fall short in explaining the complexities of teacher agency in contexts where language instruction is deeply entangled with identity formation and intercultural competence. For pre-service English teachers, especially those preparing to teach in non-native language settings, self-efficacy is not merely a reflection of their pedagogical readiness but is also shaped by their ongoing development of linguistic proficiency and their negotiation of cross-cultural understanding (Ma et al., 2022).

Traditional Measures of Teacher Self-Efficacy

Traditionally, TSE has been measured through the tripartite model proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), which includes dimensions of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student





engagement. While this model has demonstrated strong psychometric validity in studies involving in-service teachers across various educational contexts, its relevance to pre-service teachers, particularly those in culturally and linguistically diverse settings, has been called into question (Wyatt, 2018). Recent research has suggested the need to incorporate additional culturally sensitive dimensions into the TSE construct (Lin, 2019; Chen, 2022). In East Asian contexts, Hu (2025) proposes the inclusion of a 'cross-cultural self-efficacy' dimension, referring to a teacher's perceived ability to mediate between Western pedagogical paradigms and local educational traditions. This added dimension is especially salient in the Chinese context, where teacher education often involves reconciling conflicting instructional ideologies.

Challenges in Pre-service English Teacher Self-Efficacy Development

In China, the development of TSE among pre-service English teachers is shaped by the unique sociocultural and institutional pressures of a high-stakes, exam-oriented educational system (Hu, 2025; Yan & Sin, 2014). While teacher education programs promote communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches aligned with global trends, the reality in many secondary schools continues to prioritize grammar-translation methods due to the demands of standardized testing (Li, 2021). As a result, pre-service teachers often experience a disconnect between the pedagogical theories they learn in teacher education programs and the practices they observe or are expected to implement during school-based teaching practicums. This mismatch not only creates cognitive dissonance but also hinders the development of a stable and confident teaching identity (Deng, 2011).

The transition from university coursework to actual classroom teaching is frequently accompanied by what is known as the "practicum shock" (Zou et al., 2023). For example, a pre-service English teacher who has been trained to focus on communicative language teaching (CLT) might find themselves in a classroom where the emphasis is placed on grammar-translation methods to prepare students for standardized exams. As Ma et al. (2022) point out, university instructors tend to emphasize learner-centered approaches grounded in modern educational theory, whereas mentor teachers in practicum schools may prioritize exam performance and traditional instruction. This divergence reflects a broader phenomenon described by Holliday (1994) as "methodological split", in which teachers struggle to reconcile theoretically endorsed practices with the prevailing expectations of the local classroom environment. For instance, pre-service teachers trained in project-based learning may struggle to implement such methods in classrooms where teachers prioritize rote memorization and direct instruction due to exam-centric curricula. This misalignment can lead to confusion in teaching choices and a decrease in self-efficacy as they try to balance their theoretical training with the more traditional classroom expectations. For pre-service teachers, this split often manifests as uncertainty in teaching decisions, tension between idealism and pragmatism, and a decline in TSE.

In addition, Chinese cultural values, such as collectivism and respect for tradition, play a significant role in shaping pre-service teachers' self-perceptions and responses to teaching challenges. The emphasis on group harmony and deference to authority often leads to a more passive approach to pedagogical innovation, with pre-service teachers less likely to challenge established methods or implement novel teaching strategies. Furthermore, the cultural value of "saving face" may discourage teachers from openly acknowledging their struggles or seeking help, potentially exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and impacting their self-efficacy (Dong & Soransataporn, 2012).

Research gap

Although existing research has shed light on the development of TSE among pre-service teachers in China, several critical gaps remain:

First, there is a lack of research exploring regional disparities in TSE across different parts of China.

Secondly, while some of the studies have investigated the development of TSE in China (Hu, 2025; Li, 2021; Wang, 2020), especially among in-service teachers, there is still a significant gap in research that specifically examines pre-service English teachers.

Third, while prior research suggests that pre-service English teachers in China tend to report low levels of TSE, such claims have yet to be substantiated with robust empirical data.



In summary, while the theoretical foundation of TSE is well established, the current body of literature reveals a clear research gap concerning pre-service English teachers, particularly within the Chinese educational context. Investigating how this group understands, experiences, and constructs their TSE is essential to deepening our understanding of pre-service teacher professional development and informing the design of more effective teacher education programs.

Conceptual Framework

This study combines the concept of self-efficacy from social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) with the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) to examine the teacher self-efficacy of pre-service English teachers in China. Using a mix of literature review, expert interviews, and questionnaire surveys, it investigates the definitions, components, and current status of teacher self-efficacy, offering a comprehensive understanding of their professional confidence. The detailed framework is presented below (see Figure 1).

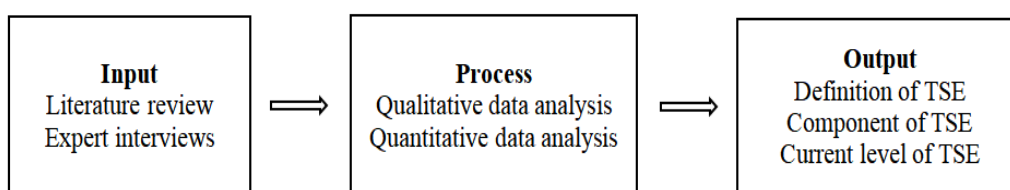


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study aims to explore the definition and components of pre-service English teachers' TSE and to investigate the current status of their TSE. A mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, is employed to achieve the research objectives. The first phase of the study focuses on defining TSE and identifying its components through a literature review and expert interviews, followed by a survey to assess the current status of TSE among pre-service English teachers.

Population and Sample

The qualitative participants consist of five experts with extensive experience in the field of educational psychology. These experts provided in-depth insights into the definition and components of TSE of pre-service English teachers during semi-structured interviews. All participants are senior scholars in the fields of education or psychology, and their professional backgrounds and experience offer valuable theoretical support and practical guidance for the study.

The population for the quantitative phase consists of 40 pre-service English teachers from Liupanshui Normal University in Guizhou Province, China, who are enrolled in an undergraduate English teacher training program. The sample size of 40 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table and selected through simple random sampling. While this table is commonly used for estimating sample sizes in finite populations, its effectiveness relies on assumptions of population homogeneity and sufficient statistical power. In this study, the sample size is appropriate given the manageable population and the exploratory nature of the research. However, a sample size of 40 may limit the generalizability of the findings and reduce statistical power for detecting small effects.

Research Instruments

This study is divided into two phases: the first phase is qualitative research, and the second phase is quantitative research. Different research tools are employed for each phase, as outlined below.

(1) Semi-Structured Interview:

The research instrument employed in the qualitative phase was a semi-structured interview, designed to investigate the Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) of pre-service English teachers. The protocol consisted of



open-ended questions aimed at eliciting in-depth responses from five experts with extensive backgrounds in language education and educational psychology. Interviews were conducted individually between March and April 2024, each lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The questions were designed to explore experts' conceptualizations of TSE in the context of pre-service teacher preparation, including its key components and influencing factors. Example questions included: "How would you define teacher self-efficacy in the context of pre-service English language teaching?" and "What factors do you believe most significantly contribute to the development of self-efficacy among pre-service teachers?".

(2) Teacher Self-Efficacy questionnaire:

The quantitative phase of this study utilizes a questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire is designed to measure TSE among pre-service English teachers. It consists of 24 items, which are divided into three components: Instructional Strategies Efficacy, Classroom Management Efficacy, and Student Engagement Efficacy. A 5-point Likert scale is used to assess participants' levels of agreement or disagreement with each statement, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The questionnaire was developed based on insights gathered from the literature review and expert interviews. To ensure cultural appropriateness for the Chinese context, the questionnaire was translated and then back-translated by bilingual experts. This back-translation process helped identify and resolve any discrepancies in meaning or cultural relevance. The validity of the questionnaire was assessed using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) (Turner & Carlson, 2003). The IOC values for each item were calculated by three subject matter experts, and the results showed that all items had an IOC score greater than 0.67, indicating strong content validity. In terms of reliability, the questionnaire underwent a pilot test with 50 pre-service English teachers, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.972, which indicates excellent internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951).

Data Collection

In the qualitative phase of the study, data are primarily collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview design is based on the findings from the literature review to explore the definition and components of TSE. The participants consist of five experts with extensive experience in educational psychology. The interview questions focus on the definition and constituent factors of TSE in pre-service English teachers, specifically addressing the experts' views on the definition of TSE and their understanding of its various components. The interviews took place over one week in January 2025. A flexible semi-structured approach was adopted to allow for in-depth exploration of valuable insights based on the participants' feedback, while maintaining a consistent framework. The interviews are audio-recorded to facilitate subsequent analysis.

Phase 2 (Quantitative):

In the quantitative phase of the study, data were collected through a survey administered to 40 pre-service English teachers at Liupanshui Normal University in Guizhou Province, China. The survey was conducted in February 2025. The participants were selected based on their enrollment in an undergraduate English teacher training program, ensuring a representative sample of pre-service teachers. The survey focused on the components of Teacher TSE, capturing participants' perceptions of their teaching efficacy across various dimensions.

Data Analysis

The analysis process integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches:

(1) Qualitative Analysis:

The qualitative data from the literature review and expert interviews were analyzed through thematic content analysis. Segments of text were first coded inductively based on recurring concepts related to teacher self-efficacy (e.g., instructional adaptability, classroom management). These initial codes were then grouped into broader categories to identify emerging dimensions. For example, frequent references to real-time decision-making in complex classroom scenarios led to the formulation of a new dimension, adaptive classroom decision-making. Insights from expert interviews also prompted refinement of item phrasing in the quantitative phase to align with authentic teaching contexts.





(2) Quantitative Analysis:

Data collected from the TSE questionnaire administered to pre-service English teachers were analyzed using SPSS 24.0. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were computed for the overall sample and each subcomponent of TSE. Furthermore, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in TSE scores across various subcomponents. Since the sample was divided into two independent groups, an independent samples t-test was employed to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) scores between the groups. This test is appropriate for comparing the means of two unrelated groups on a continuous outcome variable. The null hypothesis tested was that there is no significant difference in TSE scores between the two groups, while the alternative hypothesis posited the existence of such a difference. Table 1 presents the interpretive range of mean scores to contextualize the results.

Table 1 The Range of Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Score Range	Respondents' Perceptions Level
4.21-5.00	Highest
3.41-4.20	High
2.61-3.40	Moderate
1.81-2.60	Low
1.00-1.80	Lowest

Results

Objective 1. To explore the definition and components of TSE of pre-service English teachers. The conceptualization of TSE of pre-service English teachers and its key components was established by synthesizing insights from existing literature and expert perspectives.

(1) The definition of TSE of pre-service English teachers

Previous research commonly conceptualizes TSE as the beliefs that educators hold, grounded in their experience and professional expertise, regarding their capacity to organize, execute, and complete instructional tasks within specific teaching contexts. Bandura (1997) originally defined TSE as "judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances". Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) further underscored its context specificity, arguing that teachers assess their likelihood of achieving instructional goals in particular classroom environments. Kasalak and Dagyar (2020) and Berkant and Baysal (2018) focused on core teaching responsibilities, describing TSE as teachers' (or preservice teachers') convictions about their competence in classroom management, instructional strategy implementation, and the promotion of student engagement. More recently, Ma et al. (2022) added a goal-oriented perspective, noting that TSE also encompasses teachers' self-expectations and evaluations concerning the attainment of everyday teaching objectives. Collectively, these definitions portray TSE as a critical psychological resource, rooted in confidence and professional commitment, that shapes instructional behaviors and, ultimately, student learning outcomes.

In previous studies, TSE of pre-service English teachers has generally adhered to the classical definition of teacher self-efficacy (TSE). For example, Song et al. (2025) describe TSE of pre-service English teachers as pre-service teachers' confidence or perceived ability to complete teaching tasks (such as classroom management, student engagement, and the application of teaching strategies) in real teaching situations. Deng (2011) further emphasizes that TSE of pre-service English teachers refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to effectively execute teaching tasks, with this belief influencing not only their teaching behaviors but also student learning outcomes and overall job satisfaction. Sogutlu (2022) defines TSE of pre-service English teachers as teachers' confidence and perceived ability to effectively complete teaching tasks.

Based on the literature review on TSE and its specific application to pre-service English teachers, this study conducted expert interviews. According to the discussions from the expert interviews, TSE of pre-service English teachers can be summarized as: their psychological belief or confidence in their ability



to successfully carry out key teaching tasks—instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. It is essential for their preparedness, resilience, and motivation, and plays a significant role in their decision to pursue and persist in a teaching career.

(2) The components of TSE of pre-service English teachers

Through a review of the literature, this study finds that the components of TSE largely follow the framework proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), which includes three key dimensions: classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. These components have been widely adopted and adapted in subsequent studies to explore how teachers' beliefs in their ability to manage the classroom, design effective lessons, and engage students influence their teaching practices and overall effectiveness.

Previous research has also specifically examined the self-efficacy of pre-service English teachers, offering more granular categorizations of its components. These studies further refine the dimensions of TSE in the context of pre-service English teachers. Cania et al. (2024) examined TSE of pre-service English teachers and identified three key dimensions: classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. Classroom management refers to teachers' confidence in their ability to manage the classroom and control student behavior; instructional strategies involve confidence in designing and implementing effective teaching methods; and student engagement pertains to teachers' ability to stimulate student interest and foster classroom interaction. Ma et al. (2021) identified four dimensions of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy: classroom management, student engagement, instructional strategies, and flexibility. Classroom management and student engagement focus on teachers' ability to maintain classroom order and engage students in learning, respectively. Instructional strategies relate to curriculum design and classroom organization, while flexibility refers to teachers' ability to adapt to unexpected teaching situations. Similarly, Sogutlu (2022) categorized TSE of pre-service English teachers into three dimensions: classroom management, student engagement, and instructional strategies.

Based on the components of TSE of pre-service English teachers, which are identified in the literature, this study further deepens the understanding of these components through expert interviews. During the interviews, experts emphasized the importance of developing a strong sense of self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement, while also highlighting the necessity of stimulating students to actively engage in learning activities. Based on the results of the expert interviews, this study incorporates flexibility and adaptability into the dimension of instructional strategies' self-efficacy.

The inclusion of flexibility and adaptability in the dimension of instructional strategies' self-efficacy is based on expert opinions, which emphasize that teachers' self-efficacy in practice is not solely dependent on fixed teaching methods. Rather, it requires the ability to adapt to varying teaching contexts and student needs. Flexibility and adaptability reflect a teacher's capacity to adjust strategies and methods in a dynamic teaching environment, which is crucial for enhancing both teaching effectiveness and self-efficacy. Furthermore, recent literature from the past five years highlights that the ability of teachers to flexibly modify their teaching methods and strategies in response to an ever-changing educational landscape is an essential component of instructional self-efficacy (Ma et al., 2021; Song et al., 2025).

Table 2 Expert interview findings on components of pre-service English teachers' TSE

TSE Dimension	Definition	Insights from Expert Interviews
Classroom Management Efficacy	Teachers' confidence in managing classroom order and addressing student behavior.	Experts emphasized the importance of developing strong self-efficacy in maintaining classroom order.
Instructional Strategies Efficacy	Teachers' ability to design and implement effective teaching methods.	Experts highlighted the need to incorporate flexibility and adaptability in instructional strategies.



TSE Dimension	Definition	Insights from Expert Interviews
Student Engagement Efficacy	Teachers' ability to stimulate student interest and promote active participation in the classroom.	Experts stressed the necessity of encouraging students to actively participate in learning activities.

Through the analysis of the expert interviews, three key dimensions of TSE of pre-service English teachers were identified (see Table 2): first, Classroom Management Efficacy, which refers to teachers' confidence in managing classroom order and addressing student behavior; second, Instructional Strategies Efficacy, which includes teachers' ability to design and implement effective teaching strategies, as well as their capacity to adapt to unforeseen teaching situations; and third, Student Engagement Efficacy, which pertains to teachers' ability to stimulate student interest and promote active participation in the classroom.

Objective 2. To investigate the current status of TSE among pre-service English teachers. In the second phase of the study, the researchers adapted the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) to better suit the context of pre-service English teachers in China. The modified questionnaire covers the three components of TSE: Classroom Management Efficacy, Instructional Design Efficacy, and Student Engagement Efficacy, with 24 items specifically tailored for this context.

Table 3 Current status of teacher self-efficacy among pre-service English teachers

Pre-test	Group	n	M	SD	Mean Difference	T value	P value	95% CI of the Difference	
Overall TSE	1	20	3.15	0.16	-0.02	-0.33	0.74	-0.12	0.09
	2	20	3.17	0.16					
Classroom Management	1	20	3.11	0.21	-0.13	-1.93	0.06	-0.27	0.01
	2	20	3.24	0.22					
Instructional Strategies	1	20	3.16	0.29	0.04	0.50	0.62	-0.13	0.22
	2	20	3.12	0.26					
Student Engagement	1	20	3.18	0.19	0.04	0.70	0.49	-0.07	0.15
	2	20	3.14	0.15					

Table 3 presents the current status of the overall TSE of pre-service English teachers and its three components: classroom management efficacy, instructional strategies efficacy, and student engagement efficacy. Independent t-tests were conducted to examine the differences in TSE between Group 1 and Group 2, with the grouping designed as a preparatory step for subsequent intervention research. The results presented in Table 3 are discussed as follows.

1. Overall TSE

The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the overall TSE scores between Group 1 ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.16$) and Group 2 ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.16$), $t(38) = -0.33$, $p = 0.74$. The mean difference was minimal (-0.02), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.12 to 0.09. These results indicate that both groups exhibited similar overall TSE levels at the beginning of the study.

2. Classroom Management Efficacy

For the Classroom Management Efficacy sub-scale, no significant difference was observed between Group 1 ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.21$) and Group 2 ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.22$), $t(38) = -1.93$, $p = 0.06$. The mean difference was -0.13, with a 95% confidence interval of -0.27 to 0.01. These findings suggest that participants in both groups demonstrated relatively similar levels of self-efficacy regarding classroom management before the intervention.

3. Instructional Strategies Efficacy

For the Instructional Strategies Efficacy sub-scale, no significant difference was found between Group 1 ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.29$) and Group 2 ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.26$), $t(38) = 0.50$, $p = 0.62$. The mean difference was 0.04, with a 95% confidence interval of -0.13 to 0.22. These results suggest that both groups were comparable in terms of their perceived efficacy in using instructional strategies before the intervention.

4. Student Engagement -Efficacy

Similarly, no statistically significant difference was found for the Student Engagement sub-scale. Group 1 ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.19$) and Group 2 ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.15$) showed a mean difference of 0.04, $t(38) = 0.70$, $p = 0.49$, with a 95% confidence interval of -0.07 to 0.15. These findings suggest that both groups were similar in terms of their self-efficacy in engaging students at the beginning of the study.

Based on the results, the overall TSE of Chinese pre-service English teachers is at a moderate level ($M = 3.15$ and 3.17). The mean scores across the three dimensions—classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement—all fall within the 2.61–3.40 range, indicating that while respondents possess a certain degree of TSE in their teaching abilities, there remains considerable room for improvement in developing stronger TSE before entering the profession.

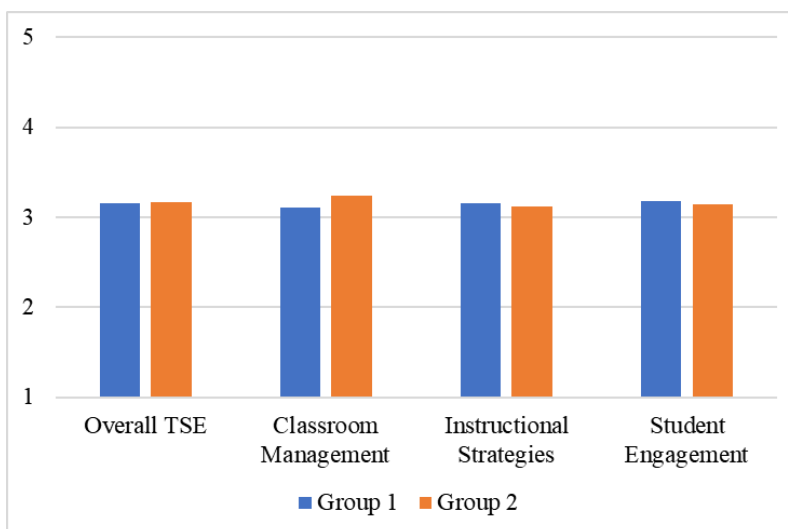


Figure 2 Analysis of the Current Situation of TSE

Figure 2 provides a visual comparison of Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) scores across two groups, indicating minimal differences in overall TSE as well as in its subdomains—classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. The similar heights of the bars suggest that both groups reported relatively comparable and moderate levels of self-efficacy across all dimensions.

A moderate level of Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) reflects a developing but not yet fully consolidated sense of instructional competence. Teachers at this level generally demonstrate confidence in routine pedagogical practices, such as classroom management, student engagement, and instructional delivery, yet may exhibit hesitation or reduced self-assurance in complex or high-stakes teaching contexts. Practically, this indicates that while foundational teacher preparation has been achieved, continued, targeted professional learning remains essential to strengthen domain-specific efficacy beliefs and support adaptive, evidence-informed teaching practices.

Expert interviews further confirmed this interpretation. One mentor teacher noted, "They know what to do in a normal class, but once something unexpected happens—like a difficult question or a disruptive student—they often freeze or look to us for help." This suggests that while foundational teacher preparation has been achieved, pre-service teachers still require structured opportunities to translate theory into practice across varied and unpredictable scenarios. Another expert remarked, "Their confidence is there, but it's



fragile. It depends a lot on whether things go as planned." Practically, this indicates that continued, targeted professional learning remains essential to strengthen domain-specific efficacy beliefs and support adaptive, evidence-informed teaching practices.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the definition, components, and current status of TSE among pre-service English teachers in China. The findings provide valuable insights into the conceptualization of TSE, its key components, and the current levels of TSE among pre-service English teachers.

This study defines TSE of pre-service English teachers as the belief in one's ability to effectively organize, execute, and complete teaching tasks within specific teaching contexts. These findings align with Bandura's (1977) original definition of self-efficacy and respond to existing literature (Sogutlu, 2022; Song et al., 2025), which conceptualizes TSE as a teacher's belief in their ability to organize, execute, and complete teaching tasks within particular teaching settings. Furthermore, this study explores the components of TSE for pre-service English teachers, including classroom management efficacy, instructional strategies efficacy, and student engagement efficacy. These findings are consistent with the original definition of self-efficacy and extend the work of scholars such as Cania et al. (2024) and Ma et al. (2021), who emphasize the critical role of classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement in shaping pre-service teachers' self-efficacy.

In addition, expert interviews highlighted the importance of making them actively participate in classroom activities. This insight led to the inclusion of flexibility within the dimension of instructional strategies' efficacy. This addition reflects that TSE should consider the specific characteristics of different disciplines and further enrich its application in the professional preparation of pre-service English teachers (Wyatt, 2018). Overall, this study not only strengthens the existing dimensions of TSE but also introduces significant refinements, enhancing our understanding of how pre-service English teachers can develop their TSE during their professional preparation.

The second objective of this study was to investigate the current status of TSE among pre-service English teachers. The results indicated that the overall TSE scores were moderate, with no significant differences found between the two groups of participants (Group 1 and Group 2) at the outset of the study. This suggests that both groups exhibited similar levels of TSE regarding their teaching abilities before the intervention.

Specifically, the three dimensions of TSE—classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement—had mean scores all falling within the moderate range, indicating that the participants had a reasonable level of confidence in their teaching abilities, but there was room for improvement before entering the profession. Additionally, this study randomly assigned the sample into two groups, and the results revealed no significant differences between the groups in overall TSE and its three dimensions: classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. This finding aligns with the studies of Deng (2011) and Li (2021), which suggest that the self-efficacy levels of pre-service teachers in China still require improvement. Specifically, while pre-service English teachers demonstrate confidence and belief in certain areas, there remains considerable potential for enhancing their self-efficacy levels before they enter the workforce. One possible explanation for the lack of statistically significant differences between the two groups is their shared institutional background. All participants received similar training within the same educational context, which likely contributed to consistent efficacy perceptions.

In light of these findings, teacher educators may consider revising practicum strategies to include more adaptive, reflective, and context-specific tasks. Such interventions could foster stronger, more resilient self-efficacy beliefs and better prepare pre-service teachers for diverse classroom demands.

Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of TSE among pre-service English teachers in the Chinese education context by clarifying its conceptual definition and delineating its core dimensions. Three principal dimensions—classroom management, instructional strategies (now refined to include flexibility



and adaptability), and student engagement—emerge as the foundational elements shaping pre-service teachers' efficacy beliefs. By synthesizing insights from existing literature and integrating discipline-specific refinements, this study proposes a multidimensional framework that captures both the stability and contextual nuances of TSE in the English-teaching domain. The incorporation of flexibility into the instructional strategies dimension underscores the dynamic realities of contemporary classrooms and highlights the importance of adaptive expertise in teacher preparation. Moreover, the findings reveal that the overall TSE levels of Chinese pre-service English teachers remain at a moderate level, with substantial gaps from the "high" or "highest" efficacy thresholds. This suggests that, before entering the profession, pre-service teachers' confidence and perceived competence require further enhancement.

In sum, this research not only consolidates existing TSE theory within the context of pre-service English education but also extends it by emphasizing adaptability as a critical competency. The resulting framework offers a robust foundation for future research and intervention design aimed at cultivating highly efficacious, resilient, and contextually responsive teachers. It is recommended that the core findings of this study be integrated into national teacher preparation standards to better align training programs with the evolving demands of English language education.

Recommendation

1. Recommendations for Teacher Education Practice

Based on the findings of this study, teacher education programs should incorporate adaptive teaching modules within practicum experiences, allowing pre-service English teachers to practice flexibility in responding to unplanned classroom situations (e.g., spontaneous student questions, disruptions, or time management challenges). These modules should be paired with structured peer and mentor feedback to offer mastery experiences that strengthen instructional self-efficacy. Furthermore, reflective supervision sessions—where trainees systematically analyze their teaching episodes with experienced mentors—should be regularly embedded in the curriculum. In addition, teacher education curricula in China should be revised to explicitly target the development of self-efficacy. For instance, course content should emphasize active problem-solving, classroom simulations, and progressive responsibility in teaching tasks to build confidence. Practicum arrangements should ensure that student teachers are gradually exposed to authentic teaching challenges with adequate support, fostering a sense of competence and control over time.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was drawn from a single region in China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or institutional contexts. Second, the relatively modest sample size could affect the robustness and stability of the statistical results. Third, the cross-sectional research design captures teacher self-efficacy at a single time point, preventing conclusions about its developmental trajectory or causal relationships. Finally, potential self-report bias cannot be ruled out, as the data relied primarily on participants' subjective perceptions. Future research should address these limitations through broader sampling, multi-wave data collection, and mixed-method approaches that triangulate self-reports with observations or third-party evaluations.

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