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Conceptualizing online second language teacher self-efficacy

Lee Shzh-chen Nancy

Abstract

Many face-to-face classes were moved online during the Covid-19 pandemic. In second language teaching, many teachers also had to make rapid transition from physically teaching at the classroom to teaching remotely online. It raised some concerns as most teachers made this transition without adequate preparation, knowledge, and training about how to teach online. Second language teachers' ability to teach online therefore becomes an important topic for all stakeholders including language teachers, researchers, curriculum developers, and administrators. This paper examines and conceptualizes second language teacher self-efficacy to teach online. Four latent constructs of online teaching self-efficacy were proposed after reviewing literature: pedagogy, technology, communicative language teaching and, self-management. This paper concludes with some remarks for online teaching and implications for future research in online self-efficacy for second language teachers.

1. Introduction

In 2020, the outbreak of Covid-19 caused one of the biggest pandemics in modern human civilization. Countries around the world endeavored to slow down the spread of Covid-19 that many governments mandated or recommended social distancing in regions affected by the outbreak. Individuals applied different social distancing methods such as physically staying and working from home, limiting travelling and public transportation, and avoiding crowded areas. Many educational institutions also converted face-to-face classes into online formats in order to maintain social distancing. The transition occurred so rapidly that many teachers regardless of age, previous experience, and preferences with classroom information technology integration had to start teaching online with very little or almost no training, support, preparation, and knowledge of online teaching. For many teachers, throwing in their materials together overnight and learning how to teach online while they teach was not as effective as face-to-face teaching. Many teachers also struggled with making this transition and experienced difficulties with different aspects of online teaching. Almost two years have passed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and while many classes around the world have gone back to face-to-face teaching, the impact of emergency online teaching on teachers will inevitably remain.

Emergency online teaching that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic has not only traumatized teachers, but it has also led to new possibilities for more diversified teaching and learning styles. There are classes and content that can be more effectively offered online and there are also students who learn more effectively online or can only take classes online. Looking forward, the virtual

teaching and learning environment will no doubt remain as one part of the curriculum after the pandemic. Therefore, teachers' capability to teach online and how they perceive their ability to teach online becomes an important research question.

Teachers' self-efficacy is teachers' confidence in their ability to teach and support learners' learning (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). It has been of research interest because how teachers perceive their own capability is considered to directly and indirectly influence their teaching, which might directly and indirectly impact students' learning outcome. Self-efficacy plays a crucial role because it affects behaviors, affections, goals, aspirations, and expectations, as well as the attribution of successes and failures (Bandura, 1997).

In the research field of second language learning and teaching, teacher self-efficacy is a comparatively new concept compared to its wider implications in mainstream teaching. In addition, studies of second language teacher self-efficacy have predominantly focused on specific physical teaching contexts, such as Japanese high school English classroom (Nishino, 2012; Thompson & Woodman, 2019), Canadian adult TESOL program (Faez & Valeo, 2012), and communicative language teaching classroom (Ortaçtepe & Akyel, 2015). Therefore, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, very few teacher self-efficacy studies were conducted concerning teaching second language online.

This paper aimed to examine second language online teaching self-efficacy by reviewing and synthesizing literature of teacher self-efficacy, second language teacher self-efficacy, and online teacher self-efficacy. While there are differences between emergency online teaching and normal time online teaching, distinction will not be made in the present paper. It is hoped that this study will contribute toward conceptualizing online teaching self-efficacy for second language teachers to better understand teachers and to prepare for future more diversified teaching and learning styles.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Self-efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy is teachers' belief in their own ability to effectively handle specific tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional teaching activities (Thompson & Woodman, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). It is teachers' self-assessment of their personal teaching competence including knowledge, skills, personal traits, and strategies (Ortaçtepe & Akyel, 2015). Based on this definition, teachers' self-efficacy results from their cognitive ability to make explicit judgments regarding their own competence for a specific task in a specific situation. While teacher self-efficacy a simple idea, it has significant implications in determining teachers' academic outcomes (e.g., students' achievement and motivation) as well as their own well-being in the work environment (Chacon, 2005). Teachers with higher level of self-efficacy tend to invest more effort into teaching (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), be more open to changes and new pedagogies to meet the needs of students (Chacon, 2005), exhibit greater enthusiasm (Allinder, 1994),

and possess higher level of planning and organizing skills (Allinder, 1994). Finally, teachers who perceive themselves to be highly capable, tend to create more positive relationships with students, effectively conduct student-centered classroom, and cope effectively with problematic classroom behaviors (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

While many advantages for teachers to maintain high self-efficacy have been suggested by previous literature, problems with the teacher self-efficacy research still exist due to disagreement over its conceptualization (Tschanen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Without a clear and standardized conceptualization, the validity and reliability of its measurement is not possible because different conceptualizations would reveal different latent constructs of self-efficacy where the results cannot be compared across studies. In addition, there are also controversies regarding to what extent teacher self-efficacy beliefs are transferable across contexts given its context specific nature (Tschanen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Therefore, the conceptualization of teacher self-efficacy and its implication in different contexts awaits more research.

2.2 Second Language Teacher Self-efficacy

Based on Tschanen-Moran et al.'s (1998) original definition of teacher self-efficacy, second language teacher self-efficacy therefore refers to second language teachers' belief in their capability for all target language teaching related professional activities (Ortaçtepe & Akyel, 2015).

In the field of second language learning and teaching search, self-efficacy was first introduced by Bandura (1978) to describe learners' judgments of their own capabilities to attain designated goals. Following the research on learners, self-efficacy research on language teachers originated in the late 1970s. However, the research on teachers was not really established until Tschanen-Moran et al. (1998) conducted their study on pre-service and in-service United States Kindergarten-Grade 12 teachers' beliefs toward three dimensions of teaching: student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies. Since then, many other language teacher self-efficacy studies have used their survey instrument (Tschanen-Moran et al., 1998). However, it has also been questioned for having little relevance to second language teaching in different contexts because the instrument originally targeted at U.S. mainstream teachers and might not capture the beliefs of teachers in other contexts, for example, Asian teachers teaching in the Confucius context (Hoang & Wyatt, 2020; Wyatt, 2020). In addition, other Asian context based studies (e.g., Tsui & Kennedy, 2009) found it was impossible to separate teacher self-efficacy survey items for measuring student engagement and instructional pedagogy dimensions. This is because under the influence of Asian cultures, teachers working in the oriental contexts are expected to engage their students both inside and outside of the classroom (Tsui & Kennedy, 2009). It would be difficult to measure student engagement and instructional pedagogy dimensions in the Asian teaching contexts compared to non-Asian contexts. Therefore, the conceptualization of teacher self-efficacy would be different for teachers working in

different contexts and researchers need to develop individualized definitions after consulting with teachers in the target language context (Wyatt, 2020).

2.3 Online Teaching Self-efficacy

Online teaching self-efficacy is different from self-efficacy for teaching offline because there are many profound differences between virtual and face-to-face classroom (Corry & Stella, 2018; Rice, 2006). The characteristics and teaching experiences of both platforms cannot be directly compared so research specific to teacher self-efficacy in online education is justified. In addition, the context specific nature of self-efficacy research also suggests that online teaching needs to be differentiated from teaching in the physical classroom context. Teachers teaching online face challenges that are different from those of the traditional face-to-face physical classrooms (Horvitz, Beach, Anderson, & Xia, 2015). They further suggest that when teaching online, teachers need to play different pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles.

2.3.1 Pedagogical self-efficacy

Language teachers have high self-efficacy for instructional pedagogy (Chacon, 2005). However, when it comes to online teaching, the level of instructional pedagogy self-efficacy might be lower than when it is offered face to face because Lin and Zheng (2015) found the lack of physical classroom presence imposes challenges on second language teachers as they have to use more body language and eye contact when teaching compared to other subject teachers. Therefore, second language teachers need to spend more time explaining their instruction, content, and correcting students' linguistic outputs such as pronunciation since they could not see students' mouth shapes as clearly when teaching online. As the result, language teachers also use more multimodal instructions such as using PowerPoint to aid their synchronous online teaching.

2.3.2 Technological Self-efficacy

When it comes to examining teachers' self-efficacy toward technology, several studies have used the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) framework where technology is integrated into instruction (e.g., Ferdig, 2006; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). These studies suggest that technological knowledge is needed in addition to knowledge of the subject matter and instructional pedagogy. Besides knowing how to use technical devices, knowledge of the Internet is also needed for contemporary education (Lee & Tsai, 2010; Wallace, 2004). Online teaching requires new ways of instructions, such as synchronous (e.g., webinars, WhatsApp, WeChat), asynchronous (e.g., wikis, blogs, pre-recorded lectures), autonomous, and other collaborative modes of teaching and learning activities (Neo, 2003; Kohnke, 2020). Therefore, online teachers need to have, not only the capability of using technical devices but also the knowledge and skills of using the Internet. They need to have

the knowledge and skills to use Internet as a platform for information searching, teaching and learning as well as to integrate the Internet into classroom activities, and finally, to guide students in using the Internet for classroom activities. Therefore, Lee and Tsai (2010) added the Internet component into the previous framework and created the modified Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge-Web (TPCK-W) framework for understanding teacher technological self-efficacy. Lee and Tsai's (2010) study found teachers have low self-efficacy toward using the Internet for teaching. Possible reasons can be suggested such as the knowledge for specific software programs online quickly become outdated so that teachers have difficulties keeping updated with latest technological knowledge and skills (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

2.3.3. Communicative Language Teaching Self-efficacy

While a number of studies have been conducted on teachers' self-efficacy for using technology, up to date, very few self-efficacy studies have looked at language teachers' beliefs toward online social interactions and supporting learners' communicative competence development (Wyatt, 2020). Thompson (2020) was an exception where it looked at teachers' level of confidence at providing enjoyable communicative activities in English. In the communicative language teaching context, teachers use communicative tasks to maximize students' interaction and speaking time by assigning students into pair-work and group work (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). When it comes to online teaching, this social context can be created by utilizing online synchronous meeting tools such as Zoom, TEAMS or Skype, which include interactive features such as polls, chatting, and breakout rooms (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020). However, while these online platforms can assist students' communicative learning, they also impose more challenges as online teachers would need to endeavor in additional managerial roles such as monitoring students' interaction online, lack of willingness to respond to questions, and students' screen fatigue (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020). Finally, many synchronous online meeting platforms are considered to be new tools for teachers when teaching online. Therefore, many teachers may not be self-efficacious to offer online real-time communicative language teaching as it requires new digital competencies (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020; Starkey, 2020).

2.3.4 Self-management Efficacy

It is unknown if teachers are self-efficacious toward managing themselves when teaching online, as teachers' self-management efficacy when teaching online has been overlooked by previous literature. Nevertheless, Lin and Zheng (2015) found more time was needed to prepare for online lessons because more structured planning is required when teaching online. They also found online teaching requires more preparation time because some activities that could be conducted easily face-to-face need to be designed using specific online technologies such as assigning and allocating students into pair and group work using breakout rooms. Lin and Zheng (2015) further found in follow-up interviews that

teachers feel online synchronous classes are more intensive compared to face-to-face classes as more content is usually covered within the same class delivery time. Teachers are also required to do more grading of student assignments. Therefore, time management becomes an issue for online teaching because teachers feel that they need to have more rapid responses with students because of lack of physical classroom presence.

3. Conceptualizing Online Second Language Teacher Self-efficacy

Figure 1 proposes a new model for conceptualizing online teaching self-efficacy for second language teachers with four latent constructs: pedagogy, technology, communicative language teaching (CLT), and self-management. These four constructs overlap because they cannot be completely independent from other constructs, for example, teachers with higher technological self-efficacy, who perceive themselves to have good knowledge and skills of the usage of technology are likely to integrate this knowledge into their pedagogical instructions so they would likely have higher pedagogical self-efficacy and vice versa. Likewise, teachers with higher self-management efficacy, who perceive themselves to have good skills at organizing their professional and personal activities are likely to have higher pedagogical self-efficacy and vice versa.

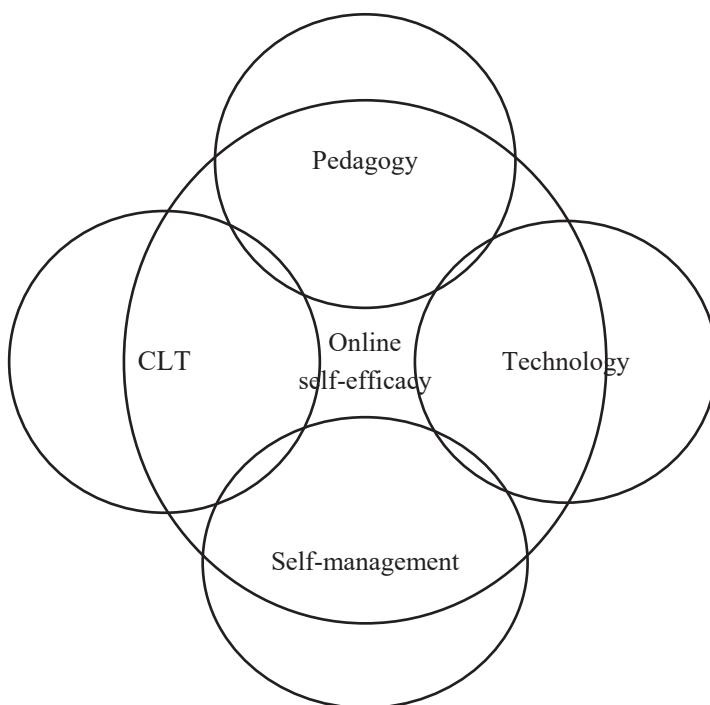


Figure 1. Four latent constructs of online second language teacher self-efficacy

4. Conclusion

This study examined second language teachers' self-efficacy for online teaching, a topic that

was overlooked prior to Covid-19 emergency online teaching. Despite many classes have gone back to physical classroom teaching, the online platform has certainly become a new style of teaching and learning. The present study reviewed and synthesized literature on teacher self-efficacy, second language teacher self-efficacy, and teacher online self-efficacy. It conceptualized online teaching self-efficacy for second language teachers using four latent constructs: pedagogy, technology, communicative language teaching, and self-management.

There are limitations in this paper because it was an attempt to examine teacher self-efficacy toward online teaching during the emergency online teaching. Therefore, what was conceptualized in this study might not apply for general online teaching in non-pandemic times. Cautions need to be made when referring to this model in the future as distinctions between emergency online teaching and non-emergency online teaching need to be made. In addition, the present study only covered four latent constructs (pedagogy, technology, communicative language teaching (CLT), and self-management) of online teaching and other possible latent constructs were not discussed. This narrowed down focus on four constructs might have oversimplified the complex nature of online teaching. Therefore, future studies need to explore other possible latent constructs to better understand second language teachers' self-efficacy for teaching and working online.

Despite this paper conceptualized second language teachers' online teaching self-efficacy with only four constructs and many other potential constructs were overlooked, it was an attempt to better understand teachers' efficacy beliefs when teaching online. It is hoped that this study could identify areas where teacher education interventions may be needed to contribute to future teacher education development.

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