

Exploring Relational Self-Efficacy Among Teachers in Sabah, Malaysia: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine relational self-efficacy among teachers in Sabah, Malaysia. It aimed to determine (1) if there were any significant differences in relational self-efficacy among teachers by way of age, gender, and job experience and (2) the percentages of agreement in relational self-efficacy among teachers in Sabah, Malaysia. The sample consisted of 69 teachers, who completed the Teacher Relational Self-Efficacy Scale on Google Forms. Data were subsequently transferred onto a spreadsheet and analyzed by using SPSS 26.0. Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if significant gender differences existed in teacher relational self-efficacy, while Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if significant differences existed in terms of age and work experience. Findings showed nonsignificant differences in relational self-efficacy by way of age, gender, and job experience. Further, descriptive statistics showed that the mean score of relational self-efficacy was 32.91 for males and 32.35 for females, implying that teachers tend to have an average level of relational self-efficacy. In light of the findings, recommendations were made on how to increase teacher relational self-efficacy in Sabah, Malaysia.

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Contribution/Originality: This research offers a valuable contribution by examining teacher relational self-efficacy in Sabah, Malaysia. Besides narrowing the gap that exists in educational psychology in the Malaysian context, it is the first quantitative study that examines teacher relational self-efficacy in the island state. Therefore, it adds to the very limited evidence base on teachers' conviction in their capacity to accomplish particular teaching and learning outcomes by executing actions needed to

produce desired results within the educational context in Sabah.

1. Introduction

Teacher self-efficacy has received widespread attention in the educational field since its conceptualization 40 years ago. Extensive research in the USA has shown that teacher self-efficacy is significantly linked to instructional effectiveness, psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, innovative teaching practices, personal accomplishment, internship experience, and students' academic achievement. Additionally, teachers with high self-efficacy tend to experience less job stress and encounter fewer difficulties when dealing with problematic students (Gkolia, Belia, & Koustelios, 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Michos et al., 2022).

According to the behavioral theory of social-cognitive change (Bandura, 1977; 1993; 2006), teacher self-efficacy is defined as teachers' belief in their capability to adequately handle pedagogic issues and challenges related to their profession. After reviewing 40 years of teacher self-efficacy research, Zee and Koomen (2016) concluded that teachers' self-referent judgments of capability exert a powerful influence on a broad spectrum of adjustment outcomes of classroom ecology. In general, teacher self-efficacy tends to have a positive association with technological acceptance, teachers' emotional intelligence, online instruction, professional development, and internship experiences (Cardullo, et al., 2021; Cordova, 2021; Dolighan & Owen, 2021; Michos, et al., 2022; Valente et al., 2020).

1.1. Significance of the Study

Although widely researched in Europe and America, conceptualization and application of teacher self-efficacy in the Malaysian context is still relatively new. A review of literature showed that no research on teacher self-efficacy has been conducted in the Bornean state of Sabah. It is imperative to gain deeper insight into Malaysian teachers' self-efficacy because it equips them with the perceived self-assertiveness and self-competence to promote students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. It also deserves urgent attention as it often impacts teachers' professional and personal lives in terms of interpersonal relationships, job performance, and psychological wealth, as well as how they care for themselves and others.

Further, research on self-efficacy provides a relevant and coherent framework for teachers to become effective classroom managers characterized by effective self-organization, self-reflection, and self-regulation. Therefore, the construct should be thoroughly researched and subsequently integrated into Malaysian teachers' professional development programs to augment their pedagogic agency and instructional effectiveness in line with SDG 4 Quality Education. As aforementioned, there is very little research that offers an interdisciplinary perspective in the examination of teacher self-efficacy in the Malaysian educational landscape; therefore, this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in education psychology by yielding pragmatic information for school leaders and policymakers to implement self-efficacy programs that can reinforce the psychosocial attributes and professional standards among Malaysian teachers. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate teacher relational self-efficacy in Sabah, Malaysia. To guide the study, two research questions were formulated for the study:

- i. Are there any significant differences in teacher relational self-efficacy in relation to age, gender, and job experience?
- ii. What are the descriptive statistics for teacher self-efficacy in Sabah, Malaysia and what do they imply?

2. Review of Literature

A literature review was conducted to obtain a comprehensive survey of scholarly sources on self-efficacy, which provided an overview of existing knowledge related to the construct, while helping the authors to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in the research through analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of the literature. It situated the current research within the broader educational context, besides justifying the need for the research and positioning it within the existing scholarly inquiry and discussion. Lastly, the research summaries were described in direct chronology, starting from 2012.

2.1. Collective Efficacy and Classroom Management

Research shows that self-efficacy tends to have an impact on teachers, preservice teachers, and students. [Gibbs and Powell \(2012\)](#), who examined the individual and collective efficacy among primary and nursery school teachers in relation with students' behavior, disclosed that teachers' individual efficacy beliefs tend to be significantly related to classroom management, students' engagement, and teaching methods. Moreover, confronting external influences in collective efficacy was found to be negatively related to the number of children sanctioned; it also tends to reduce the harmful effects related to poor socioeconomic status.

On the other hand, [Derrington and Angelle \(2013\)](#) investigated the association between collective efficacy and leadership ability among teachers. Findings revealed that collective efficacy tends to be significantly related to leadership ability. Additionally, collective efficacy was found to be significantly associated with shared expertise, shared leadership, supra practitioner, and principal selection. Lastly, the two highest rated items were found to be the extent to which teachers solicit colleagues' help concerning disciplinary problems and willingness to assist peers on teaching unfamiliar topics or skills.

In their investigation into the relationships among teachers' collective efficacy, self-efficacy, occupational resources, occupational demands, sense of belonging, and teacher involvement, [Skaalvik and Skaalvik \(2019\)](#) imparted that three occupational resources and occupational demands tend to be positively correlated. Time constraint was found to be significantly related to all occupational resources, while collective efficacy and self-efficacy tend to be moderately correlated. Additionally, both collective efficacy and self-efficacy were found to be positively correlated with occupational resources. Lastly, sense of belonging was found to be positively correlated with occupational resources, collective efficacy, and self-efficacy, while involvement tends to be positively correlated with all occupational resources, collective efficacy, and sense of belonging.

[Jaggernaut and Jameson-Charles \(2015\)](#), who investigated the efficacy of secondary school teachers undergoing in-service training, indicated that older in-service teachers tend to demonstrate higher efficacy, while those over 45 years tend to display significantly higher efficacy in classroom management than their younger peers. Besides, teachers at government-assisted schools tend to exhibit significantly higher

efficacy for student engagement and classroom management compared to those at full-government schools.

Further, [Bedir \(2015\)](#), who examined the teaching efficacy among primary and secondary school teachers, published that teachers tend to regard themselves as efficient in class management, while perceiving instructional methods/strategies as their least efficient. Lastly, significant differences were found in teachers' perception of teaching efficacy in terms of faculty, gender, course match, in-service training, branch, and seniority.

In their study, [Malinen, Närhi, and Savolainen \(2024\)](#) assessed the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and classroom behavioral climate. Findings revealed that behavior management tends to significantly influence classroom behavioral climate, but not vice versa. Findings imply the cruciality of raising teachers' beliefs and perceived self-competence in their ability to set clear expectations, foster collegial relationships, and propagate a supportive learning culture to promote proactive engagement, self-discipline, respectful communication, cooperation, and responsible task completion amongst students.

The self-efficacy and performance among teachers were analyzed by [Gamuza, Lachica, and Bautis \(2025\)](#). Findings revealed that teachers tend to demonstrate high self-efficacy in terms of classroom management and instructional delivery. Additionally, significant differences in self-efficacy and performance were found by way of age, teaching experience, and educational attainment. Teachers with higher qualifications tend to demonstrate greater confidence and effectiveness, while older, married, and more experienced teachers tend to earn higher performance ratings. Findings imply the importance of teacher training on adaptive instruction and learner support; targeted programs should be implemented to enhance the self-efficacy among younger and less experienced teachers, which can optimize instructional support and performance.

The influence of academic optimism/collective efficacy on teacher self-efficacy was examined by [Mavi, Tuti, and Ozdemir \(2025\)](#). Findings revealed that academic optimism and self-efficacy among teachers tend to be significantly related. Further, the relationship between the two variables was found to be mediated by the professional development and subjective wellbeing among teachers. Findings imply that academic optimism is an important aspect of collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents, which represents a shared belief among teachers that they can positively impact student achievement. Teacher self-efficacy contributes to the collective efficacy, which is a component of academic optimism, while a supportive, optimistic school environment helps bolster teachers' belief in their own capabilities. Overall, both academic optimism and self-efficacy are associated with increased teacher job satisfaction, better instructional practices, and improved student achievement.

2.2. Attitudes, Values, and Motivation

Additionally, [Marzuki et al. \(2017\)](#) surveyed the degree to which ethics education was integrated into the curriculum by accounting teachers and its relationship with self-efficacy in teaching ethics. Findings revealed that attitudes toward ethics education and support from department heads and peers tend to have a significant and positive impact on self-efficacy. Moreover, self-efficacy and peer support were found to have a direct and positive influence on the integration of ethics education into the curriculum. Lastly, self-

efficacy appears to be a significant mediator in the interrelationships among attitudes, department heads, and peers.

In their study, [Barni, Danioni, and Beneven \(2019\)](#) delved into the relationships between teachers' self-efficacy and their moral-ethical values (willingness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence). Findings showed that conservation values tend to be positively related to self-efficacy, regardless of the type and level of teaching motivation. Lastly, teaching motivation was found to be significantly influence the relationship between self-efficacy and willingness to change and between self-efficacy and self-transcendence.

In their survey on biology teachers' motivational orientations (self-efficacy, subject-matter enthusiasm, and enthusiasm for subject teaching), [Mahler, Großschedl, and Harms \(2017\)](#) concluded that a significant relationship tends to exist between perceived quality of teacher education and self-efficacy, implying that self-efficacy appears to improve with increasing perceived teacher education quality. Moreover, participation in career development courses and self-study were found to be significantly related to self-efficacy. Lastly, self-efficacy and subject-matter enthusiasm were found to be positively related to subject-matter knowledge, while career development and self-study tend to be positively linked to self-efficacy.

On the other hand, [Demirtaş \(2018\)](#), who studied teacher candidates' self-efficacy, affection levels for children, and motivation, claimed that teacher candidates tend to demonstrate a high level of affection for children, besides obtaining higher than average scores in teaching motivation and self-efficacy. showed greater inner motivation to teach rather than external motivation. Moreover, teacher candidates were also found to demonstrate sufficient capacity for classroom management, application of educational strategies, and student motivation. Overall, self-efficacy beliefs, students' participation, teaching motivation, and teaching strategies tend to significantly and positively predict affection for children.

Lastly, [Cardullo et al. \(2021\)](#), who assessed the relationship between teachers' motivational self-efficacy and learning management system (LMS), claimed that perceived usefulness of LMS and its quality tends to significantly predict teachers' motivational self-efficacy in online instruction. Further, LMS functions and Internet speed were found to predict teachers' ability to motivate students online, while positive LMS perceptions and facilitating school or district conditions tend to predict their confidence to engage students online.

2.2. Pedagogical Practices, Training, and Professional Development

In their inquiry into the relationships among efficacy, differentiated instruction, and collaboration among elementary school teachers, [Goddard and Kim \(2018\)](#) disclosed that collaboration tends to be significantly related to differentiated instruction, while differentiated instruction tends to be significantly related to efficacy. Additionally, teachers' collaborative work was found to significantly influence school enhancement, curriculum, pedagogy, and career development, while teacher efficacy was found to be strengthened by mastery experiences via collaboration and practice of differentiated instruction.

The impact of self-efficacy training on English teachers was explored by [Alibakhshi, Nikdel and Labbafi \(2020\)](#). Findings showed that self-efficacy tends to exert an influence on teachers' pedagogical practices, psychological wellbeing, and occupational satisfaction, and students' motivation and academic achievement. Additionally, [Kazanopoulos, Tejada, and Basogain \(2022\)](#), who investigated the effect of self-efficacy training on teachers' inclusive practices, found that special education teachers tend to have higher efficacy in using inclusive techniques, collaborating, and addressing disruptive behaviors. Moreover, training was found to significantly influence teachers' self-efficacy in terms of inclusive practices, with special education teaching experience having a significant influence on all components of self-efficacy.

[Cordova \(2021\)](#) investigated the impact of a professional development program on collective teacher efficacy of three lead teachers and a site supervisor. Findings revealed that the program tends to significantly increase one teacher's self-perception/capabilities. Additionally, all four participants were found to demonstrate an increased willingness to offer assistance to other staff, besides demonstrating improved feelings about the program, which tends to enhance collective teacher efficacy and positively impact instructional practices. In their investigation into teachers' efficacy for online teaching, [Dolighan and Owen \(2021\)](#) found that significant relationships tend to exist between teacher efficacy and online professional development. Teachers who took online professional development courses before fully transitioning to online instruction were found to demonstrate significantly higher virtual teaching efficacy.

Similarly, in their quantitative analysis on the impact of a professional education program on teacher self-efficacy, [Purniningtyas, Fauziati, and Rochsantiningasih \(2024\)](#) found that teachers with high self-efficacy tend to consistently demonstrate job motivation, perseverance, and sociability, which are critical traits for effective classroom management. Moreover, the structured components of the program (material deepening, learning tool development, pedagogy) were also found to significantly improve teacher self-efficacy. Findings imply that well-designed professional development programs not only enhance teacher self-efficacy, but also equip them with effective classroom management skills.

Lastly, [Jud et al. \(2025\)](#) investigated teacher self-efficacy (mastery and vicarious experiences) in promoting self-regulated learning within a professional development program. Both control and experimental groups were exposed to mastery and vicarious experiences. Findings showed that the experimental group tends to focus on developing competencies for promoting self-regulated learning. While the professional development program has developed teacher self-efficacy/self-regulated learning for both groups, the experimental group was found to show higher improvement.

2.3 Instructional Quality, Differentiated Instruction, and STEM Instruction

[Cayirdag \(2017\)](#), who investigated the relationship between teachers' creative instruction and teaching for innovation, divulged that creative self-efficacy and locus of control tend to explain 65 percent of the variance, with creative self-efficacy and internality acting as significant predictors.

Asserting that teacher self-efficacy is an important dimension of instruction, [Ismail and Wahid \(2018\)](#) summarized that 50 percent of classroom delivery tends to be unsatisfactory, characterized by dull and unattractive teaching, with teachers adopting

the passive lecture method. Their findings indicated that teachers need to make a paradigm shift in content delivery, which requires them to develop high self-efficacy in applying information technology to meet the needs of the Z and Alpha generations. Further, in their investigation into the direct and indirect paths between teacher self-efficacy and student outcomes, [Jerrim et al. \(2024\)](#) illustrated that the link between teacher self-efficacy and instructional quality tends to rely on how lesson quality is assessed, yielding large effects when it is based on teacher reported outcomes.

In their research study, [Kalinowski et al. \(2024\)](#) focused on teachers' professional characteristics needed to successfully implement differentiated instruction. Findings showed that teacher self-efficacy and enthusiasm tend to be positively related to differentiated instruction for students with different achievement levels. Besides, assessment techniques were found to be positively related to all achievement levels, except for high achievers. Findings imply that teacher training programs should promote differentiated instruction by strengthening teacher self-efficacy, assessment methods, and enthusiasm.

Lastly, [Sellami et al. \(2025\)](#) posited that teachers tend to possess high self-efficacy in STEM instruction. Moreover, teachers with high self-efficacy and advanced degrees were found to have significantly higher confidence in designing STEM lessons, managing classroom behavior, teaching STEM subjects, motivating students, and assessing student performance. Findings highlight the importance of targeted professional development in promoting positive attitudes toward STEM and inclusive teaching practices by enhancing teacher self-efficacy.

2.4. Other Influential Factors

[Batool and Shah \(2018\)](#), who surveyed the causative factors of school teachers' efficacy, imparted that subject specialization tends to significantly influence teacher efficacy the most, followed by gender, class size, and teaching experience. Moreover, significant differences in efficacy were also found between public and private school teachers, between the more experienced and less experienced ones, between males and females, and between teachers with large classes and those with small ones.

In their study on the impact of emotional intelligence on teachers' efficacy, [Valente et al. \(2020\)](#) reiterated that teachers with better skills in perceiving, understanding, expressing, classifying, managing, and regulating emotions tend to demonstrate higher efficacy. Additionally, teachers with better skills in perceiving and managing emotions were found to enhance students' personal development, besides establishing a positive and self-regulatory teaching and learning environment. Lastly, findings imply that, to thrive in a complex and challenging school environment, teachers must develop the critical emotional skills to enhance their efficacy.

On the other hand, [Baş \(2021\)](#) surveyed the impact of student-related and school-related factors on teachers' efficacy. Findings showed that both student-related and school-related factors tend to have a significant impact on teacher efficacy. Parental involvement (student-related factor) and class size (school-related factor) were found to be the most substantial predictors of teacher efficacy, with social and academic dimensions of school climate as significant contributors.

In their two quantitative studies that probed the relationships among teacher self-efficacy, internship experiences, and teaching enthusiasm in relation to a mobile portfolio app, [Michos et al. \(2022\)](#) found that internship experience tends to have a significant influence on teaching enthusiasm, with self-efficacy increasing over time. Further, self-efficacy teaching internship, internship experience, and different study groups were found to explain more than 30 percent of the variance in self-efficacy. Moreover, internship experience was found to significantly predict self-efficacy, implying that it tends to have a positive overall effect on self-efficacy and teaching enthusiasm.

In their investigation, [Wang et al. \(2024\)](#) examined the impact of resilience and teaching satisfaction on the relationship between self-efficacy and teacher wellbeing. Findings revealed that both resilience and teaching satisfaction tend to mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and teacher wellbeing. Additionally, teaching satisfaction tends to primarily enhance teacher job commitment and professional growth, while resilience tends to play a crucial role in positive adaptation, stress management, and emotional regulation amongst teachers.

Finally, in a recent study, [Ordynans et al. \(2025\)](#) probed the ways in which teachers from diverse teaching contexts tend to derive meaning of their work by focusing on three factors, including teacher self-efficacy (internal), teacher-student relationship building (behavioral), and teaching context (environmental). Findings revealed that the three factors tend to influence one another as well as teachers' perceptions of their work. Further, teacher self-efficacy was found to both influence and be influenced by their relationships with students, a dynamic that tends to be impacted by the teaching context and their perceived fit within it. Findings imply that teacher preparation programs should emphasize the relational and contextual aspects of teaching, including the enhancement of teacher-student relationships and greater alignment between the school environment and teachers' moral-ethical values.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

A quantitative survey approach was adopted to systematically investigate teacher relational self-efficacy. The research design was directly related to the primary purpose of the current study, which was to explore 69 secondary school teachers' self-efficacy using a validated scale. Via the quantitative method, the authors were able to numerically evaluate teacher relational self-efficacy by using a reliable measurement tool. Lastly, the research approach was also appropriate to determine if significant differences existed in relational self-efficacy by way of gender, age, and job experience through nonparametric testing (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests).

Besides, a Likert-scale questionnaire was administered on Google Forms, which facilitated efficient data collection from teachers, while warranting adequate representation within the sample. The survey method could enhance not just the reliability and validity of the research findings, but also their generalizability to broader educational contexts. Furthermore, the study design also permitted effective statistical analysis via SPSS 26.0, which could furnish numerical-based information required to interpret data and report findings, derive meaningful conclusions, and make recommendations on how teachers can enhance their relational self-efficacy to

positively influence students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, besides managing their own psychological wealth.

3.2. Research Location

This study was conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, where 18 large secondary schools are located. The location can provide a sufficiently representative sample of the teacher population in Sabah, thus allowing for a relatively accurate assessment of teacher relational self-efficacy.

3.3. Sample and Justification

A total of 69 teachers ($n = 69$) from three large secondary schools in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah participated in the study. Initially, the first author contacted principals of nine randomly chosen secondary schools via email and phone, but eventually, only three agreed to share the survey link with teachers and urge them to respond. Additionally, the first writer also shared the survey link with 15 secondary school teachers via Messenger and requested them to share it with teaching colleagues; all were reminded to complete the questionnaire within seven days.

The sample size was grounded on the central limit theorem, which states that a minimum of 30 respondents is generally adequate to ensure sufficient statistical power for basic survey research (Roscoe, 1975; RUBIKTOP, 2023). Therefore, the current sample size can be considered large enough for the sampling distribution of the mean to be approximately normal. It also offers the statistical validity to allow the authors to utilize appropriate statistical tests to make inferences about the teacher population in Sabah. Lastly, as the sample size is greater than 30, the standard error (variability of the sample mean) is reduced significantly, leading to more precise estimates of the population mean.

3.4. Instrument

The eight-item Teacher Relational Self-Efficacy Scale (Robinson, 2020) was adapted to collect data. Responses for each item were based on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted by Robinson (2020) showed that the scale fit a one-factor model, $\chi^2(20) = 26.73$, $p = .14$; RMSEA = .07, 90% CI [.00, .13]; CFI = .956. After extracting a factor score for the scale, it was found that the correlation with the unit-weighted composite was .99. To determine its suitability for the current study, it was pilot-tested on 25 teachers and data was analyzed by using SPSS 26.0. Results showed that its Cronbach's alpha is 0.889, indicating high internal consistency. The full score is 40 (high = 36-40, average = 32-35, low = less than 32).

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

After being informed of the ethical guidelines in survey research, teachers were required to complete the scale on Google Forms. Informed consent in relation to the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and the possibility to withdraw at any time without any repercussions was emphasized. All teachers were anonymized and the data were kept strictly confidential. Only general information was solicited and would be solely used for scholarly purposes.

Data were transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 26.0. First, means and percentages on teacher relational self-efficacy were calculated. Second, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in relation to age and job experience. Third, Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender.

4. Findings

Descriptive statistics showed that male and female teachers obtained a mean score of 32.63, indicating an average level of relational self-efficacy (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Self-efficacy Means
Gender	Male	23	33.3%	32.91
	Female	46	66.7%	32.35
Age	25-35	13	18.8%	32.77
	36-45	25	36.2%	32.24
	46-55	20	29.0%	32.70
	56-60	11	15.9%	32.64
Job title	Inclusive teacher	5	69.6%	35.60
	Regular teacher	48	7.2%	32.15
	Special education	16	23.2%	32.75
Job experience	1-5 years	8	11.6%	32.38
	6-10 years	11	15.9%	32.91
	11-15 years	18	26.1%	33.50
	16-20 years	9	46.3%	29.67
	More than 20 years	23	11.6%	32.78

Mean values: High = 36 to 40; Average = 32 to 35; Low = Less than 32

Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant gender differences, while Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed no significant differences in terms of gender and job experience (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis Results

Age	Sample size	Mean rank	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	p-value
25 – 35	13	35.85	0.51	3	0.997
36 – 45	25	34.38			
46 – 55	20	35.13			
56 – 60	11	35.18			
Gender	Sample size	Mean rank	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	p-value
Male	23	35.72	-0.215	1	0.829
Female	46	34.64			
Job experience	Sample size	Rank	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	p-value
1-5 years	8	34.13	3.45	4	0.485
6-10 years	11	37.82			

11-15 years	18	38.5
16-20 years	9	24.44
More than 20 years	23	35.35

Percentages of “strongly agree” and “agree” for each item were collapsed to get an overall impression of relational self-efficacy. First, between 78.3 to 79.7 percent strongly agreed/agreed that they could (1) make students enjoy attending school and (2) support students emotionally. Second, 88.4 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that they could (1) build positive relationships with all their students and (2) get students to trust them. Third, 87 to 89.9 percent strongly agreed/agreed that they (1) felt capable of designing relationship activities in their classroom, (2) could improve the relationship with students even if it started out poorly, (3) could cultivate a positive relationship with under-performing students, and (4) could build positive relationships with students who come from different backgrounds (see [Table 3](#)).

Table 3: Percentages of Agreement on Self-efficacy Items

Item	1	2	3	4	5	4+5 (Collapsed)
I can build positive relationships with all my students.	0.0%	2.9%	8.7%	62.3%	26.1%	88.4%
I can support students emotionally.	0.0%	2.9%	17.4%	58.0%	21.7%	79.7%
I can make students enjoy coming to school.	0.0%	0.0%	21.7%	55.1%	23.2%	78.3%
I can get my students to trust me.	0.0%	0.0%	11.6%	66.7%	21.7%	88.4%
I feel capable of designing relationship building activities in my classroom.	0.0%	1.4%	14.5%	63.8%	20.3%	84.1%
I can improve the relationship with a student even if it starts out poorly.	0.0%	1.4%	14.5%	63.8%	20.3%	84.1%
I can cultivate a positive relationship with students who are not performing well.	1.4%	0.0%	11.6%	66.7%	20.3%	87%
I can build positive relationships with students who come from different backgrounds from me.	0.0%	0.0%	10.1%	58.0%	31.9%	89.9%

Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral =3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1

5. Implications, and Recommendations

5.1. Implications

5.1.1. Nonsignificant Differences

Findings revealed no significant differences in teacher self-efficacy in relation to age, gender, and job experience, which were supported by previous research. [Nikoopour et al. \(2012\)](#), who examined the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among English language teachers, found no significant age and gender effects on both variables. [Sarfo et al. \(2015\)](#), who investigated teacher self-efficacy in relation to instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement, disclosed that both male and female teachers did not differ in terms of student engagement efficacies and classroom management. Additionally, [Yusof and Mariani \(2017\)](#), who studied teacher self-efficacy in relation to gender, teaching experience, and teacher training,

disclosed no significant gender differences in relation to self-efficacy and teacher training.

Further, [Strunc and Murray \(2019\)](#), who asked teachers gender-neutral questions about self-efficacy, found no significant gender differences, which suggests that gender outcomes in education might not be due perceived self-efficacy alone. On the other hand, [Mitchell \(2019\)](#), who investigated the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and classroom management found no significant differences in relation to age, gender, education level, teaching experience, grade level taught, and class size, implying that teachers' characteristics are not significant predictors of self-efficacy.

In their study, [Rezaian and Abdollahzadeh \(2020\)](#) discovered no significant differences between collective teacher efficacy and self-efficacy and their respective subscales. Moreover, no significant age, experiential, and gender differences were found in teacher perceptions across all subscales of collective teacher efficacy or teacher self-efficacy, implying that self-efficacy tends to be stable once established. Finally, [Kazanopoulos, Tejada, and Basogain \(2022\)](#), who analyzed the effect of a training program on teacher self-efficacy, concluded that age and gender did not significantly influence teacher self-efficacy in relation to inclusive practices.

5.1.2. Possible Reasons for Average Relational Self-Efficacy

Findings imply that Sabahan teachers tend to have an average level of relational self-efficacy, rather than high. Teacher self-efficacy can be affected by five factors. First, about 418,000 teachers in Malaysia continue to carry heavy workloads, often being assigned tasks unrelated to their core professional responsibilities. One of the contributors to the overwhelming workload is the current user-unfriendly online data entry system, which complicates administrative tasks. Besides the lack of clear guidelines to prevent non-urgent disruptions outside official working hours, other issues include the ongoing shortage of teachers due to retirements and the addition of new classes ([Malay Mail, 2025](#)).

Second, [Ligin and Ompok \(2025\)](#), who examined the relationship between perceived organizational support and teacher motivation at rural primary schools in Sabah, concluded that a more appropriate support and reward system is needed to boost their motivation, which will lead to high self-efficacy.

Third, [Roslan, Mosin, and Gani \(2025\)](#), who explored the professional challenges faced by teachers at remote Sabah, revealed that their instructional management and job satisfaction tend to be adversely affected by inadequate infrastructure, including poor road access, limited school facilities, unstable electricity supply, and weak Internet connectivity, which can affect their self-efficacy. Other concurrent factors that impact on their self-efficacy are psychosocial challenges, such as, professional isolation, excessive workload, and limited opportunities for career development.

Fourth, [Kaur et al. \(2024\)](#) reiterated that burnout tends to be a significant issue among teachers in Malaysia, with teacher self-efficacy showing a significant correlation with it. In other words, teacher self-efficacy can be adversely affected by various factors of burnout, including demographics, work-related issues, stress, work life areas, and psychological distress.

Finally, Malaysian teachers are currently required to use the Training Management System of Ministry of Education Malaysia to manage their continuing professional development and training, which poses a serious administrative burden that significantly affects their primary responsibilities. Many teachers often have to spend many hours navigating the system after school or during weekends, just to ensure that they meet all the requirements. This leaves them with little time to focus on lesson preparation and students' needs, while others maintain that the system does not function properly and frequently crashes during peak hours, forcing them to redo their work. Moreover, the technical issues tend to further increase teachers' stress levels and infringe on their personal time and wellbeing (Hilkmy, 2025).

5. Mastery and Vicarious Experiences, Social Persuasion, and Positive States

Teacher self-efficacy can be developed from mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and positive interpretations of physiological and emotional states (The Education Hub, 2019). First, teachers can improve their self-efficacy through previous successful accomplishments; these accomplishments may include favorable in-school and out-of-school experiences as well as opportunities to conduct workshops and deliver presentations related to their field. Further, they can also demonstrate their resourcefulness in terms of content mastery, professional development, and time management.

Second, teachers can enhance their self-efficacy through vicarious experience, which is usually attained through observation, hearing, and reading. For example, they can observe successful peers who have similar levels of proficiency and experience, which can strengthen their belief and confidence in their own capabilities to teach in similar ways. Besides, they can also critique their own teaching through film or video-tape footage (self-modelling), while visualizing themselves teaching in a future situation via cognitive self-modelling (The Education Hub, 2019).

Third, social persuasion tends to have a strong influence on teacher self-efficacy. Authentic and heartfelt feedback from the principal and colleagues, parental acknowledgement and gratitude, and students' learning enthusiasm are some powerful forms of social persuasion that often increase teachers' self-efficacy. Lastly, teachers can increase their self-efficacy through positive interpretations of physiological and emotional states. For example, they can boost their self-efficacy by instilling a sense of enthusiasm before introducing new subject matter, while displaying favorable feelings after delivering a fruitful lesson (The Education Hub, 2019).

5.3. Growth Zone, Novel Goals, Future Orientation, and Reframing

Celestine (2019) reiterated that individuals can adopt four measures to improve their self-efficacy. First, teachers should abandon their comfort zone to get involved in trial and error, novel learning, and opportunities to engage in new, meaningful pursuits. While teachers may find it frightening initially, they will eventually reap the benefits; the more they experience success when venturing beyond their comfort zone, the more they can improve their self-efficacy. Moreover, bouncing back and recovering from failure also enables them to increase their resilience. Teachers can venture into their growth zone by (1) developing a new skill, (2) meeting new people at social events, (3) training for an event (e.g., a fun-run, jungle-trekking), and (4) visiting a new place.

Second, teachers can increase their self-efficacy by building and sustaining goals across various areas, for example, work performance, healthful living, digital skills development, and food security. Third, by looking at the bigger picture, teachers can be motivated to improve their self-efficacy. They need to develop the power to look beyond short-term losses and not letting them diminish their self-trust and self-esteem. By affirming that they have future goals to achieve and upholding this perspective, teachers can develop high self-efficacy, which allows them to set priorities and implement their plans more efficiently (Celestine, 2019).

Lastly, teachers should to reframe obstacles and barriers by regarding them as a natural part of moving beyond their comfort zone and tackling fresh challenges. Assessing difficult problems and issues in a constructive way enables them reinforce their self-efficacy, which can be done on three ways. First, teachers can set implementation intentions by creating an if-then plan and deciding what actions they can take to eliminate those hindrances. Second, teachers should regard thought provoking predicaments as though they were a test of willpower, and subsequently attempt to find the most innovative solution, while remaining calm and collected while putting the solution into practice. Third, teachers should reflect on the hurdles and impediments that they have successfully overcome, which helps bring previous mastery experiences into view, thus allowing them to fortify their self-efficacy in the present (Celestine, 2019).

6. Limitations

Although it has produced new information on relational teacher self-efficacy in the Malaysian context, this study has some limitations. First, a questionnaire was administered to collect data, which could cause social desirability bias, whereby teachers might provide socially acceptable answers rather than indicating their authentic opinions. Besides, using the questionnaire also limited the ability to delve deeper into teachers' responses, unlike interviews or focus groups. Second, many teachers might not respond to the survey due to personal and job constraints, thus yielding a potentially biased sample that limited the representation of the target population. Third, the survey lacked depth and flexibility because it solely relied on preset questions, thus limiting the ability to capture the context or emotional nuances surrounding teachers' answers. To increase generalizability of findings, future research should use mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to gain deeper insight into the topic. Lastly, future research should also employ data gathered from multiple informant approaches (e.g., school administrators, students, teacher supervisors) to obtain a wider range of perspectives on teacher relational self-efficacy in different settings or contexts that can yield novel information in terms of situational variations.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study has strictly adhered to all ethical procedures involving the use of human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents who were ascertained of their anonymity, with their responses kept strictly private and confidential. They were also informed that the study was of low risk and that they could stop participating any time without any repercussions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no potential conflict of interest regarding this study in terms of the research or publication of this article.

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