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TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY IN RURAL THAILAND: INSIGHTS FROM PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES

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Abstract
This qualitative case study investigates how pre-service English teachers (PSETs) develop teacher self-efficacy (TSE) during teaching practicums in Thai rural schools. Grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory, the study examines the role of mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social and verbal persuasion, and emotional states in shaping TSE. Six final-year PSETs from a northern Thai university were purposefully selected to represent diverse perceptions of efficacy. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and self-reflections, and analyzed inductively using a multi-phase coding process. The results reveal that PSETs' self-efficacy developed through a dynamic and non-linear process. At the beginning, participants experienced mixed emotions and "reality shock," including resource shortages, multigrade classes, and limited mentorship. Over time, their TSE was strengthened through instructional successes, modeling from experienced teachers and peers, constructive feedback, and emotional resilience. These findings contribute to teacher education research by deepening understanding of TSE development in under-resourced contexts and offering practical implications for designing practicum programs that build professional competence and identity. It also highlights the need for teacher education to prepare PSETs for rural placements, equip mentors to provide targeted support, and promote reflective practices for emotional resilience.

Keywords: pre-service English teachers, rural practicum, teacher self-efficacy, teacher education

Introduction
Teacher education programs worldwide seek to prepare teachers for the diverse and complex demands of 21st-century classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Yet, with the rapid pace of educational change, training pre-service English teachers (PSETs) solely within controlled classroom settings may be insufficient. PSETs are at a fragile stage of professional growth, who are navigating both the challenges of adapting to classroom realities and constructing their teacher identity (Prabjandee, 2019). In this regard, the teaching practicum has been widely recognized as a crucial part of teacher preparation. It provides opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic contexts, develop professional skills, and

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confront the challenges of daily teaching (Allen & Wright, 2014; Nugroho, 2017). Through these experiences, PSETs learn to refine teaching strategies, strengthen classroom management, and connect with linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Tutyandari, 2023; Mudra, 2024).

A critical factor shaping success in these early experiences is teacher self-efficacy (TSE). TSE refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to organize and execute actions necessary to accomplish instructional tasks successfully (Bandura, 1997). High levels of TSE are associated with persistence, adaptability, and openness to innovative approaches (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Klassen & Durksen, 2014). Conversely, low efficacy is linked to heightened stress, reduced motivation, and eventual burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, 2014). For PSETs, the practicum marks a critical period for establishing efficacy beliefs, as they confront classroom realities for the first time.

In Thailand, teacher education reform has emphasized professional standards and policy alignment. However, scholars have questioned whether graduates are adequately prepared for demanding teaching environments, particularly in rural and resource-constrained schools (Bunwirat & Crocco, 2019; Kakkaew & Arpamo, 2024; Vibulphol, 2015). Research indicates that pre-service teachers often feel unprepared for professional responsibilities (Pojanapunya et al., 2023), and these challenges may be amplified in rural placements. Rural schools not only reflect systemic educational inequities (Azano & Stewart, 2015) but also face acute shortages of resources, qualified staff, and opportunities for professional growth. In Thailand, nearly half of all schools are classified as "small-sized" and located in rural areas (Durongkaveroj, 2023). Such conditions heighten instructional difficulties (Hudson & Hudson, 2008) and often contribute to "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984, as cited in Yuan & Lee, 2016) among novice teachers.

Understanding how PSETs develop TSE in these challenging contexts is critical, as early career experiences exert a long-term influence on professional growth and career trajectories (Yuan & Lee, 2014). While international scholarship has explored self-efficacy in teacher preparation, few studies have examined this process in Thailand, particularly in rural settings (Pandee et al., 2020). Existing research has largely focused on static measures of efficacy or urban practicum contexts, leaving limited insight into how efficacy beliefs are shaped, challenged, and reconstructed in under-resourced schools.

This study fills these gaps by exploring the development of TSE among PSETs participating in teaching practicums in Thai rural schools. Specifically, it examines how Bandura's (1997) four sources of efficacy play roles within rural practicum settings. This study deepens understanding of how PSETs handle the challenges of teaching in rural areas, and how teacher education programs can better prepare PSETs for diverse and under-resourced educational settings. Finally, supporting TSE during the practicum not only improves immediate teaching performance but also forms a professional identity and long-term career resilience.

Teacher self-efficacy and the four primary sources

Over the last forty years, teacher self-efficacy has become one of the most studied concepts in education research. TSE has been connected to teaching approaches, student success, teacher motivation, and professional development (Lazarides & Warner, 2020; Li, 2023; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Bandura (1997)

described self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability to organize and carry out actions needed to reach specific goals. In educational psychology, this concept has been employed to describe teachers' beliefs about their ability to plan and implement instructional strategies, manage classroom behavior, and connect with students effectively (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

The conceptual foundation of TSE is based on Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights the mutual influence of personal thoughts, behavior, and the environment. This framework stresses that teachers' efficacy beliefs are shaped not only by internal traits but also by external factors and results. Prior influences include Rotter's (1954) locus of control theory, which focused on individuals' perceptions of control over life events. Building on this, Bandura noted that self-efficacy acts as a mediator in human agency, affecting persistence, resilience, and the willingness to take on challenges.

In addition, later models have expanded Bandura's framework to education. For example, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) suggested that teachers assess both the demands of instructional tasks and their own ability to handle them. This dual process, i.e., task analysis and self-assessment, is the foundation for efficacy judgments. In practice, teachers who believe they can successfully manage complex teaching challenges are more likely to innovate, persist under pressure, and adapt to students' needs (Pajares, 1996). Moreover, research has shown that collective teacher efficacy, or the shared belief among teachers in their combined ability to influence student outcomes, is a predictor of school improvement (Donohoo, 2018; Goddard et al., 2015). Although the current study emphasizes individual efficacy, it recognizes that teachers' beliefs are also socially constructed within professional communities.

Bandura (1977) identified four primary sources of self-efficacy. These are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. These sources have guided research on TSE development and provide the framework for the present study. Mastery experiences are the most influential factor in developing self-efficacy (Lazarides & Warner, 2020). For example, successful teaching experiences strengthen teachers' confidence, while repeated failures without proper support can weaken beliefs and increase anxiety. For PSETs, the practicum provides their first opportunity to apply theory to practice. Mastery experiences are key to developing their professional skills. Thus, supportive practicum environments, where challenges with constructive feedback can turn problems into growth opportunities. Vicarious experiences also play an important role. By observing skilled teachers or peers, PSETs can develop strategies and envision themselves as capable practitioners. Effective modeling reinforces confidence, especially when the observer perceives similarities between the model and themselves (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). However, vicarious learning requires critical reflection. Observing ineffective practices without guidance may reinforce misconceptions rather than build efficacy.

Verbal persuasion refers to encouragement and feedback from mentors, supervisors, and peers. Specific, constructive comments can inspire persistence and foster a growth mindset (Barni et al., 2019). However, feedback must be authentic and actionable; superficial or exaggerated praise may lead to skepticism or hinder genuine learning (Lazarides & Warner, 2020). Physiological and emotional states, such as anxiety, stress, or fatigue, also influence judgments of efficacy. High stress

may reduce confidence, whereas positive emotions can enhance motivation and persistence (Zee & Koomen, 2016). For PSETs, the practicum can be emotionally demanding, making resilience and supportive environments essential for sustaining efficacy. These four sources illustrate that TSE is shaped not only by internal cognition but also by contextual and relational factors. They are especially relevant to practicum experiences, where novice teachers encounter authentic classroom challenges for the first time.

Teacher self-efficacy in teaching practicum

Teaching practicum is regarded as one of the most critical components of teacher education, providing opportunities for PSETs to apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom settings (Allen & Wright, 2014). PSETs typically enter the practicum with pre-existing beliefs about teaching efficacy, shaped by their experiences as students, teacher observations, and coursework (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). However, these beliefs are often idealized and untested. The confrontation between expectations and classroom realities frequently results in "reality shock," where the complexities of teaching challenge initial assumptions (Veenman, 1984; Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Research consistently shows that TSE is not static during the practicum but dynamic and evolving. Hoang and Wyatt (2021) emphasized its flexible and adaptive nature, shaped by immediate experiences and contextual conditions. Empirical studies show that TSE can both increase and decrease depending on how PSETs interpret and respond to challenges. For example, Nugroho (2017) found that preparation courses increased the confidence of PSETs, yet participants still felt anxious during classroom teaching. Similarly, Megawati and Astutik (2018) observed that reflections during practicum experiences determined whether efficacy beliefs strengthened or diminished. Karakaş and Erten (2021) reported steady growth in classroom management and teaching delivery, while Eğinli and Solhi (2021) emphasized the critical role of reflective practice and constructive feedback in supporting efficacy.

These findings demonstrate that practicum experiences have a significant impact on TSE. However, the results depend on the quality of mentorship, the school's supportive environment, and the PSETs' ability to reflect. Therefore, effective feedback and structured reflection can help reduce drops in efficacy and build lasting professional confidence. Although many studies focus on practicum experiences in urban or well-resourced areas, rural placements present unique challenges for PSETs. Rural schools face shortages of qualified teachers, limited instructional resources, outdated facilities, and fewer opportunities for professional development (Mudra, 2024; Qin & Villarreal, 2018). As a result, multigrade classrooms, professional isolation, and extra responsibilities increase the difficulties for PSETs. These conditions raise the risk of "reality shock" and may weaken TSE.

Several studies have explored how efficacy develops in rural settings. Cheung et al. (2023) found that the efficacy of PSETs decreased during the early stages of rural practicums but improved over time through reflective practice and supportive mentorship. Altarawneh et al. (2023) similarly highlighted that the quality of mentorship is crucial in determining whether PSETs maintain or lose confidence in difficult placements. In Indonesia, Tutyandari (2023) showed that language anxiety

especially impacts non-native English speakers, lowering efficacy in rural classrooms. In Thailand, Pandee et al. (2020) highlighted the role of emotional, behavioral, and contextual factors in shaping the efficacy of PSETs. Their findings reveal a gap between university training and the realities of teaching practice, underscoring the need for programs that prepare candidates for the challenges of real classrooms. However, these studies did not focus specifically on rural schools, leaving a limited understanding of how rural contexts, with their unique constraints and opportunities, influence the development of PSETs' efficacy.

In summary, previous studies confirm that TSE is central to teachers' professional development and that practicum experiences are a critical period for constructing and testing efficacy beliefs. The literature also highlights that efficacy is dynamic, evolving in response to mastery experiences, modeling, feedback, and emotional resilience. However, most studies have examined practicum in urban or relatively well-resourced contexts. Rural schools, which are characterized by resource scarcity, multigrade teaching, and limited mentorship, remain underexplored. In Thailand, nearly half of schools are classified as small-sized and located in rural areas (Durongkaveroj, 2023). These schools face structural inequities that complicate the practicum experiences of PSETs. Despite this, few empirical studies have examined how the efficacy of PSETs develops in such contexts. This represents a critical gap, as early practicum experiences in rural schools may shape teachers' long-term professional confidence, resilience, and career choices.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating how PSETs in Thai rural schools develop TSE during their practicum. Drawing on Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy, it explores how mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional states interact within rural practicum environments. In doing so, the study contributes to both theory and practice by extending understanding of efficacy development in under-researched contexts and by offering insights for designing teacher education programs that better prepare candidates for rural teaching.

Method

Research design

This study used a qualitative case study design. Merriam (1998) describes a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon" (p. 13). The bounded system focused on the lived experiences of PSETs during their teaching practicum in rural Thai schools. This approach explored the complex, context-dependent nature of TSE development within specific sociocultural and institutional environments. While TSE is a complex construct often measured through quantitative methods, such as Likert-scale surveys, these tools primarily assess cognitive elements and overlook the affective and socially mediated processes that shape self-efficacy formation (Bandura, 1997; Marschall, 2022). On the other hand, qualitative methods provide greater flexibility for investigating the evolving beliefs of teachers and the processes of meaning-making. Thus, the researchers found this approach suitable for understanding the rich, contextualized experiences of PSETs facing challenges and opportunities during their rural teaching practicums.

Following Merriam's (1998) framework, this study was guided by three defining characteristics of qualitative case studies: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. It was particularistic in that it focused on a specific group of PSETs undertaking their teaching practicum in rural Thai schools, with attention to how the rural context shaped their professional growth and perceived teaching competencies. The study was also descriptive, aiming to provide rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of participants' instructional practices, emotional experiences, and reflections. These descriptions were drawn from multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and self-reflections. Finally, the study was heuristic, seeking to illuminate how PSETs made sense of their practicum experiences and how these experiences informed their evolving TSE beliefs. In doing so, the research aimed to contribute to both theory-building and the practical enhancement of teacher education programs, particularly those preparing teachers for under-resourced and rural educational contexts.

Research participants

This study utilized purposive sampling to select participants. As Creswell et al. (2007) explain, this non-random, criterion-based method targets information-rich cases that align with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Participants were drawn from a group of forty-eight final-year PSETs enrolled in the Internship IV course at Sueksa University (pseudonym) during the 2024 academic year. Of these, seventeen PSETs decided to complete their practicum in rural schools. The researchers followed three steps to recruit participants from this subgroup.

The preliminary meeting took place from July to August 2024. First, the researchers conducted initial classroom visits and informal interactions with the seventeen PSETs. They built rapport, observed teaching environments, and gathered background information on participants' motivations for choosing a rural practicum. Furthermore, in September 2024, the researchers conducted a self-efficacy survey by distributing the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) to the seventeen PSETs. The participants completed and returned the survey on the same day. This survey measured efficacy beliefs regarding student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The results were used to select the cases. Finally, based on the results, the researchers selected six participants who represented a range of self-efficacy, with two participants for each level: low, moderate, and high TSE. These varied samples supported the use of a case study approach. It enabled the researchers to investigate how self-efficacy develops across various personal and contextual experiences.

The six participants were 22 years old and had completed previous practicum placements. Furthermore, they were assigned to teach in rural schools across four districts. Their teaching assignments spanned different grade levels (Grades 1-9). Additionally, their responsibilities differed in terms of addressing teaching difficulties, student engagement, and classroom management. Table 1 summarizes their demographic information, school placements, and initial self-efficacy beliefs.

Table 1. Demographics and placement details

Name	Age	Gender	Teaching Grades	School	Initial Self-efficacy Levels	Teaching Experiences
Chanon	22	Male	2,3,5	F	Low	Yes
Ariya	22	Female	7,8,9	D	Low	Yes
Jinda	22	Female	1,2,3	C	Medium	Yes
Kuzan	22	Male	4,5,6	B	Medium	Yes
Khana	22	Female	4,5,6	E	High	Yes
Maysa	22	Female	7,8	A	High	Yes

Data collection instruments and procedures

This study combined multiple qualitative data sources, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and participants' self-reflections, to explore different perspectives on the development of TSE. The semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. This approach enabled researchers to explore the lived experiences of PSETs while uncovering unexpected and emerging themes. The interview protocol was developed through expert reviews using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method to verify content validity. Interviews were conducted in three phases. First, before the practicum phase, the focus was on participants' motivations for becoming teachers, expectations about rural teaching, and relevant prior experiences. Second, during the practicum phase, the researchers documented the realities of classroom teaching, including challenges, emotional responses, sources of support, and perceived changes in teaching abilities. Third, after the practicum, participants took time to reflect on their personal growth, what they had learned, and how their practicum experiences had influenced their future career goals. All interviews were conducted in Thai, audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis and interpretation.

Classroom observations were conducted in two phases to validate and contextualize the interview data. Initial observations made before the practicum examined how PSETs interacted with their assigned schools and local communities. During the practicum, observations focused on instructional techniques, classroom management, student interactions, and emotional expressions related to teaching and learning. The researchers employed an observation protocol to guide and record visible signs of self-efficacy and moments that indicated struggle, uncertainty, or adaptive behavior. Participants also submitted written reflections in two phases, i.e., during and after the practicum. These reflections recorded their internal learning experiences, including emotional reactions, interpretations of success and failure, and critical learning moments.

Data analysis

Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously. This allowed the emerging insights to guide subsequent data gathering (Merriam, 1998). All interview data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Then, a bilingual translation expert reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. Data analysis proceeded through three stages of the coding process (Saldaña, 2016). The analysis began with initial, open coding, where the raw data were segmented and labeled with descriptive or in vivo codes to represent the participants' voices. Subsequently,

these codes were organized into thematic categories such as "adaptive teaching strategies," "mentor support," and "emotional resilience." Finally, the main themes were synthesized to address the study's research question and provide a cohesive understanding of the data. In addition, this study conducted both within-case and cross-case analyses. It began by analyzing each participant's data separately to maintain context. Then, the data were compared to identify similarities and differences. To ensure the reliability of the results, triangulation and member checks were employed.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The findings revealed that PSETs' self-efficacy was a dynamic process. It involves anticipating, confronting, adapting, and growing. PSETs started their practicum with optimism, uncertainty, and anxiety. Then they encountered the reality shock of rural classrooms. However, over time, PSETs achieved small successes, learned from mentors and peers, and improved TSE. The following sections provide a detailed description of these stages.

Entering the unknown: Optimism, uncertainty, and anxiety

Results from the TSES and the initial interviews revealed that the six PSETs held differing views on their TSE. These views were influenced by their past experiences, family expectations, academic background, and early teaching experiences.

Chanon and Ariya began the practicum with relatively low TSE. First, Chanon was greatly influenced by his family's educational background. When he was young, his grandfather was a principal, and his mother tutored him to improve his English skills. While studying to become a teacher, Chanon enjoyed taking phonetics classes, which really helped him improve his English skills. However, as he progressed, he felt discouraged by the curriculum, which focused on theoretical concepts instead of practical language skills. This gap between expectations and reality made Chanon doubtful of his abilities. Also, he mentioned that his previous practicum at an urban school worsened these feelings. He stated that students showed little interest in trainee teachers, which made him feel unnoticed and isolated.

On the other hand, Ariya's TSE was affected by uncertainties from her family's expectations and internal hesitation. Before the practicum began, she felt enthusiastic about meeting her students and developing engaging lessons to enhance their English skills. However, she confessed she dreamed of becoming a flight attendant or running her own business. Becoming a teacher was never a decision she made herself.

> *Honestly, I never wanted to become a teacher…My parents recommended that I study to be an English teacher because English is important in daily life.* (Ariya, Interview 1, November 5, 2024)

This confession revealed that she lacked intrinsic motivation. This led Ariya to doubt her teaching abilities and suitability for the profession. Besides, although

she was confident in managing classroom interactions, she was uncertain about lesson planning and research tasks. She reflected:

> *I am still a student teacher and new to teaching, so I am uncertain if my teaching methods are the best yet.* (Ariya, Interview 1, November 5, 2024)

Additionally, not all participants entered the practicum feeling intense anxiety. For example, Jinda and Kuzan described themselves as having moderate TSE. Jinda was born and raised in the village where she took her teaching practicum. She noted that familiarity with her teaching community offered both support and pressure. In other words, she had a good understanding of her students' cultural and social backgrounds. This insight helped her better understand her students' needs. However, she was under pressure as well, knowing that she was being monitored by her parents and the community, which expected her to be a role model. Jinda was confident in teaching basic lessons with a textbook, but she was fully aware that she needed to improve her grammar and communication skills for advanced classes.

Interestingly, Kuzan revealed a complex perception of moderate self-efficacy. Kuzan grew up with high expectations from his father, who was an English teacher, a role model, and also a source of pressure. Initially, he was interested in social studies, but his father insisted that he pursue English instead. Thus, Kuzan had to negotiate his inner conflicts. His moderate TSE was influenced by these early opposing experiences and the burden to fulfill a role he had not thoroughly chosen. Additionally, Kuzan was anxious about meeting his mentor teacher's expectations and managing the new teaching environment. Reflecting on his first day, he shared:

> *We had an online class… I could understand what the teacher was saying, but I was nervous when it was my turn to speak. I was scared of making grammatical mistakes and mispronouncing words. That was my biggest fear.* (Kuzan, Interview 1, November 4, 2024)

On the other hand, Khana and Maysa had comparatively higher TSE when they started the practicum. Nevertheless, Khana had a negative experience with English during her primary school years. She shared that her English teachers mainly relied on the Distance Learning Television (DLTV) and tedious writing assignments. Eventually, these methods disengaged her, causing difficulties with speaking and spelling English. However, Khana gradually improved her English during the teacher education program and became a more capable teacher. Entering the practicum, Khana felt optimistic because she was equipped with academic preparation and a clear goal to avoid repeating the same teaching methods she had experienced.

By contrast, Maysa demonstrated how early passion could influence her high TSE. Unlike others, she had loved English from a young age and consistently received support and positive experiences. For example, she was impressed by an English intern's personality and engaging teaching style in the middle school. As a result, these early positive memories shaped her career goals and inspired the type of teacher she wanted to become. Furthermore, as she studied in a similar rural

school, she was fully aware that rural schools face unique challenges, such as limited resources, complex activity schedules, and the need for adaptable teaching strategies. Maysa reflected on her feelings before entering the practicum:

> *I knew that whatever happened, I would have to face it and get through it. I believed that having my friends here would help. I assumed that resources might be lacking since it is a small school. However, things have improved since then.* (Maysa, Interview 1, October 28, 2024)

As a result, Maysa's TSE was influenced by earlier exposure to English, strong academic preparation, and a flexible attitude. Her story thus demonstrated how passion, relevant experiences, and reflective practice could support a strong TSE. In short, this section revealed that PSETs' self-efficacy was individualized, context-dependent, and dynamic. The participants' TSE was developed through their personal histories, external expectations, and lived experiences in the field. These varying beliefs in TSE were shaped by prior educational experiences, family influence, and intrinsic motivation.

From expectation to reality shock

After a few weeks, PSETs faced the realities of teaching in rural schools. Many PSETs felt unprepared for unexpected challenges, despite having received prior training. This study found that the shift from theory to practice was not gradual. Instead, it was a sudden and often overwhelming encounter. As a result, this "reality shock" forced PSETs to quickly adapt, build resilience, and redefine their roles as teachers.

Chanon was assigned to a small rural school with no principal and only four female teachers for 35 students. As a result, he quickly became an essential part of the team. On his first day, he was surprised to learn he would teach English to all grades (Grades 1 through 6). The classes were often in multi-grade classrooms. Additionally, Distance Learning Television (DLTV) was also utilized because of the shortage of teachers. However, he found that the DLTV lessons exceeded the students' proficiency levels; therefore, he needed to modify the materials to better accommodate the students. Moreover, his responsibilities extended beyond English, and he was also tasked with leading physical education classes. Reflecting on his role, Chanon said:

> *I feel like I do almost everything here. In a small school like this, students do not have the same learning opportunities as those in bigger schools.* (Chanon, Interview 2, December 18, 2024)

Similarly, Ariya faced immediate challenges that affected her TSE. The school was visibly damaged by a recent flood, with mud-stained walls, broken furniture, and scattered materials. On the first day, she revealed that the flood had disrupted the previous semester's exams, and she had to start the new semester in confusion. Additionally, Ariya's mentor teacher was hospitalized shortly after. As a result, she had to teach all classes on her own. She admitted:

> *There were many things I had never done before, such as grading students and calculating their averages.* (Ariya, Interview 2, January 21, 2025)

Besides teaching, Ariya was overwhelmed with event planning and administrative tasks. These responsibilities were often assigned without support. Additionally, 'unfriendly' relationships among the teachers increased the emotional burden. She revealed that she cried every day during her first two weeks because of long hours and lack of rest. She also admitted she often stayed up until 1 a.m. to prepare lessons.

Jinda taught at a rural school that raised pigs and chickens to support student meals and activities. She was among the few from her village who entered teacher training. In the first meeting, Jinda was surprised that sixth graders struggled to write their names in English. She also felt discouraged because of poor academic results and discipline problems in the classroom. As the only practicum student, Jinda quickly took on responsibilities for administrative tasks, school events, and extracurricular activities. Similar to other PSETs, she realized that teaching in rural schools required more than just content knowledge. She reflected:

> *You cannot just say, 'I studied English, so I will only teach English.'* (Jinda, Interview 2, January 24, 2025)

Teaching practicum experiences challenged many assumptions Kuzan had developed during his teacher education. His assigned school was promoted under the "One District, One Quality School" movement, also known as a "dream school." However, the reality was more complicated. Kuzan found it challenging to manage classrooms with 30 to 40 energetic students. For example, many students had behavioral issues, such as ADHD. As a novice teacher, he felt overwhelmed by these daily challenges. Oftentimes, his TSE was weakened by his students. He admitted he was worried about his pronunciation even when teaching simple content. When students mocked his English, these experiences made him question his ability to teach English.

For Khana, teaching English was demanding, especially with students from ethnic minority backgrounds who spoke languages other than Thai at home. Many students struggled to speak in complete sentences. Accordingly, Khana adjusted her expectations by focusing on simpler goals, such as vocabulary acquisition. Her biggest challenge was interpersonal issues with colleagues. She used the word 'toxic' in describing her school's environment. "People are the only problem," she stated (Khana, Interview 2, January 14, 2025). She also advised future interns to avoid standing out too much to avoid being burdened with extra responsibilities. Khana's experience highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence and political awareness in schools, which the teacher education program had not fully prepared her for.

Maysa's school was facing severe resource shortages. For example, the school lacked proper toilets, paved walkways, and a quality lunch for students. As a result, it often relied on community donations. Parents were asked to pay a small fee each semester. Furthermore, a shortage of qualified teachers resulted in one English teacher being responsible for all nine grades. Maysa faced many challenges

in her teaching. Although she aimed to use English as much as possible, her students hesitated to participate. There were moments of discouragement when students showed little interest in the learning process. Maysa realized that teaching in a rural school requires flexibility and adaptability. She explained, "You need multiple skills, not just teaching." (Maysa, Interview 2, January 13, 2025)

PSETs' self-efficacy in this study was significantly challenged. In other words, the harsh reality of teaching in rural schools in Thailand replaced their initial expectations. For example, they frequently took on roles that extended beyond teaching English, such as handling administrative tasks, organizing events, and providing emotional support. These challenging realities could undermine their self-efficacy. However, the experience also became a powerful turning point. They needed to adapt, solve problems, and address classroom issues. Notably, while the reality shock challenged their TSE, it also required PSETs to reflect on what it means to be an English teacher in these contexts.

Constructing teacher self-efficacy through lived experience

Appreciating a little success

Amid challenges of teaching practicum in rural schools, PSETs gradually developed TSE through repeated successful experiences. These mastery experiences built the foundation for their teaching self-efficacy, which they internalized over time. For Ariya, early successes came from simply understanding her students' needs. She gradually adapted to the classroom learning pace and encouraged hesitant students to join in the conversation. Chanon, on the other hand, searched for additional materials on online platforms and gradually designed spontaneous games. His fluency and teaching abilities slowly improved. Each activity was filled with laughter as he stated:

> *Initially, I was nervous and unsure, but now teaching has become a regular part of my routine.* (Chanon, Interview 3, March 11, 2025)

Jinda used a "less is more" approach. She taught her students patiently, making sure that no one would be left behind. Moreover, she provided individual follow-ups for those who were struggling. A small achievement was when all her Grade 3 students submitted their first independent writing assignments. She proudly wrote, "Seeing their success made me feel like I was truly teaching" (Jinda, Reflection 2). Each successful pronunciation or vocabulary quiz made Khana more confident in her English. On the other hand, Kuzan integrated humor and visual aids, such as cartoons, mock scenarios, and recycled crafts, into textbook exercises. Meanwhile, Maysa discovered that interactive games and activities led by peers could engage students to participate in her lessons. She noted:

> *At first, I thought it would be too difficult, but finally, I succeeded. I am proud of myself.* (Maysa, Interview 3, March 3, 2025)

Over time, teaching English had become part of their personal lives. Some jokingly shared they dreamed of lesson ideas in their sleep. Some followed teaching strategies and gathered resources on social media. Some celebrated surprising

classroom successes with peers. These small moments, repeated over time, strengthened their growing TSE.

Learning from significant others

It was revealed that PSETs built TSE through vicarious learning, such as observing, engaging with, and reflecting on others' practices. These significant others, including mentor teachers, family members, and peers, played a crucial role in developing the PSETs' self-efficacy in managing the challenges of teaching in rural schools and connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application.

For many participants, their mentor teachers served as role models. Kuzan, for example, described his mentor, Teacher Pui (a pseudonym), as someone who created a creative classroom environment. She encouraged students to participate in developing their learning resources, such as vocabulary boxes made from recycled materials. This student-centered and creative teaching style challenged Kuzan's previous ideas about language teaching.

Family was also influential in shaping teaching perceptions. Kuzan explained how watching his father at home unknowingly prepared him for teaching. When his father was called away for administrative duties, Kuzan had to take over his teaching responsibilities. He simply relied on classroom management techniques he had learned through observation. Additionally, peer relationships also became an essential source of support and growth for TSE. Maysa discussed that she exchanged teaching ideas with her peers from different fields. These collective challenges and strategies encouraged her to experiment and improve her methods.

Indeed, these vicarious experiences were crucial in helping PSETs see themselves as capable teachers. Through observing and internalizing the practices of those around them, they gained professional skills, instructional strategies, and an increasing TSE that might have been hard to achieve through direct experience.

"You are doing a great job!": The importance of verbal supports

Social or verbal persuasion, such as affirming feedback, encouragement, and guidance from mentors, colleagues, students, and parents, played a role in TSE development. In other words, these interactions validated their efforts and inspired ongoing reflection and growth. For example, Ariya's TSE grew through small peer acknowledgments when she offered help, especially when she replaced her mentor's classes during medical leave. These supportive comments from other teachers and reports of positive student feedback strengthened her TSE.

> *Some students told me they found my lessons easy to understand… they enjoyed learning with me. Their words truly warmed my heart.* (Ariya, Self-reflection 2)

Jinda also received positive feedback from outside the classroom. Parents praised Jinda for their children having fun learning English lessons at school. Her mentor also commended her lesson planning, pronunciation, and student-centered activities.

For Khana, mentorships provided strategies and emotional reassurance during stressful moments. Her mentor advised, "Do not stress too much, just keep teaching," which helped her focus on persistence instead of perfection. Moreover,

collaborative projects, such as a school film competition, renewed her motivation. Maysa's TSE was also strengthened through continuous support from mentors and colleagues. For Maysa, daily peer interactions cultivated mutual support and resilience. She observed, "We help each other with problems… we support each other daily" (Maysa, Interview 3, March 3, 2025). These shared moments of encouragement and constructive feedback emphasized how social influence can strengthen PSETs' self-efficacy.

"I can do it, and wow, I did it all": The value of emotional resilience

Finally, the emotional aspect of the teaching practicum was crucial in shaping PSETs' self-efficacy. As they transitioned from theoretical preparation to full-time classroom work in rural schools, the PSETs experienced a range of emotional reactions, including stress, fatigue, and demotivation, as well as adaptation and resilience.

Ariya experienced a profound internal conflict during her practicum. Although she carefully finished her tasks, she felt a persistent stagnation and emotional exhaustion that reduced her motivation. Her way of coping was based more on perseverance than on passion: "Do whatever it takes to survive in the work environment" (Ariya, Interview 3, March 6, 2025). Although she appeared calm and cheerful outside, she sometimes experienced emotional outbursts. She recalled:

> *Some days, I even cried… everything had built up inside, and it all came out.* (Ariya, Interview 3, March 6, 2025)

However, during these challenging moments, she developed emotional self-regulation by reminding herself daily, "It is okay. Start again… Yesterday was yesterday. Let it go" (Ariya, Interview 3, March 6, 2025). Ariya's ability to reset emotionally daily became essential for rebuilding her TSE. In contrast, Chanon approached the practicum with a sense of calm. He believed that thorough preparation would protect him from anxiety. However, teaching basic English to young students with limited retention was a challenge. He reflected, "It felt like I had to start over every morning" (Chanon, Interview 2, December 18, 2024). This repetition caused growing emotional exhaustion and frustration.

Furthermore, the familiarity of the setting did not bring comfort to Jinda; instead, it increased her self-awareness and vulnerability. Community gossip and perceived judgment led to her internal doubts. She shared, "I kept wondering if I could teach well enough" (Jinda, Interview 2, January 24, 2025). Maysa encountered a frustrating classroom environment. She described her eighth-grade students as problematic: "They do not do anything at all, not even submitting assignments" (Maysa, Interview 3, March 3, 2025). Outside class, she managed multiple tasks, including lesson planning, grading, and administrative duties, often without support. "It felt overwhelming, like I had to carry everything alone," she said (Maysa, Interview 3, March 3, 2025). Nevertheless, she kept a growth mindset, seeking ways to improve her teaching. Additionally, her efforts to try new strategies and consult her mentor on new ideas demonstrated early signs of agency and an increase in TSE. Near the end of her practicum, Maysa reflected deeply:

> *Looking back… I think, 'Wow, I did all that?' It was such a lot, and I am unsure how I managed it. However, I did not do it alone.* (Maysa, Interview 3, March 3, 2025)

This reflected a growing realization that resilience is not developed in isolation but through shared experiences and support from mentors, peers, and school staff. PSETs' self-efficacy was not just a result of their instructional skills but was also deeply connected to their emotional resilience. Their journey as teachers has been deeply influenced by times of challenge and healing, discouragement and adaptation, as well as periods of working alone and coming together with others. Thus, the ability to confront and manage emotional turbulence has become a crucial aspect of professional growth.

Discussion

This study explored how PSETs' self-efficacy developed during their teaching practicums in Thai rural schools. The findings revealed that PSETs' self-efficacy developed through a complex, context-dependent, and emotionally intense process. This process was shaped by the tension between their expectations and actual experiences, theory and practice, and hope versus the challenges encountered. These results align with Bandura's (1997) work, particularly his idea that self-efficacy is built through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement, and emotional or physiological states. Furthermore, the practicum in rural schools provided a unique environment. Factors such as institutional constraints, interpersonal dynamics, and personal backgrounds influenced how PSETs perceived and developed their teaching skills. At first, many PSETs began the practicum with mixed feelings, from confidence based on their academic background or personal passion to anxiety caused by perceived language limitations or external pressures.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), many PSETs begin teaching with existing efficacy beliefs formed through academic learning or role models. However, these beliefs have not yet been tested in the unpredictable realities of actual teaching. In rural Thailand, these realities often include multi-grade classrooms, scarce teaching resources, low student motivation, and administrative burdens. These challenges contribute to what Veenman (1984, p. 143, cited in Yuan & Lee, 2016) terms "reality shock," a difficult transition that initially undermines rather than enhances TSE. This gap between university-based teacher education and the practical needs of rural teaching supports critiques from Kline et al. (2013) and Azano and Stewart (2015), who highlighted the urgent need for more contextually grounded teacher preparation programs. Despite early challenges, the PSETs gradually enhanced their TSE through repeated successful teaching experiences. Known as "mastery experiences," and considered the most influential factor for self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Lazarides & Warner, 2020), these experiences helped the PSETs reassess their self-efficacy through both practical success and personal testimony. For instance, Chanon refined his lesson plans to better engage young students, while Jinda observed that her students became more capable of completing writing tasks independently. These small yet significant successes consistently strengthened their TSE. Previous studies (e.g., Karakaş & Erten, 2021; Nugroho, 2017; Tutyandari et al., 2022) have supported the crucial role of mastery

experiences, demonstrating that well-supported teaching practices enhance TSE and resilience in instruction. This study found that even small, localized successes achieved under challenging conditions were significant in helping PSETs rebuild their professional identity and self-efficacy.

In addition to personal experiences, the practicum offered vicarious learning opportunities. The PSETs learned by teaching and observing mentor teachers, family members, and peers. For example, when Kuzan worked with a mentor who created a student-centered, resourceful classroom using recycled materials, it transformed his view of what it means to teach English effectively. This supports Bandura's (1997) notion that observing credible, relatable role models can increase TSE, especially for beginners. Additionally, as Maysa and others have mentioned, peer interactions are an informal yet meaningful source of pedagogical innovation and emotional support. These findings align with Megawati and Astutik (2018), who suggest that efficacy is socially shaped and developed through modeling within professional learning communities. Moreover, both social and verbal encouragement played a crucial role in building TSE. For example, praise from mentors, colleagues, students, and parents confirmed participants' efforts and motivated them to persist through challenges. After getting compliments from students, Ariya's TSE improved. Meanwhile, Khana's motivation got a boost from her mentor's practical advice. This showed how meaningful verbal affirmation can increase self-efficacy in one's abilities (Ardi et al., 2025; Barni et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Though less powerful than mastery experiences, these affirmations offered psychological support, especially in emotionally stressful and isolated environments.

The emotional aspect of TSE, overlooked in quantitative studies, was clear in the PSETs' stories. Emotional exhaustion, stress, and self-doubt were common, especially during the first weeks of the practicum. Ariya's daily tears, Jinda's self-awareness during her hometown placement, and Maysa's feeling of carrying the burden alone show how emotional states can significantly affect self-efficacy beliefs (Dmitrenko et al., 2025; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Still, emotional resilience, built through self-regulation, social support, and reflection, is a powerful tool for professional growth. As the PSETs gradually learned to "start again" each day, as Ariya described, or to see fatigue as a sign of meaningful effort, they began to rebuild their TSE and strengthen their professional commitment. This supports Hoang and Wyatt's (2021) idea that self-efficacy is not a fixed trait but a dynamic, context-dependent concept, and is constantly shaped by emotional effort and personal adaptation.

To this end, these findings have several implications for teacher education in Thailand and similar contexts. First, curriculum designers must bridge the ongoing gap between theory and practice by adding more authentic, context-based preparation into coursework. It might involve case studies of rural schools, role-playing exercises simulating multigrade instruction, and critical reflections. Second, practicum structures should offer mentorship that is both supportive and nurturing, not only instructional but also emotionally encouraging. Therefore, mentor selection should prioritize relational skills and a willingness to support PSETs' social-emotional development, rather than just focusing on lesson planning. Third, resilience training should be included in teacher education programs. To elaborate, instead of viewing stress and burnout as personal shortcomings, institutions should

make a point to teach coping strategies, such as emotional regulation, self-reflection, and peer support, to help PSETs manage these challenges more effectively. Finally, policymakers and teacher educators must acknowledge that rural practicum placements present both challenges and opportunities for teacher growth. Despite notable barriers, the PSETs in this study developed stronger identities and became more flexible, innovative, and committed teachers.

Conclusion

This study explored how PSETs developed TSE during teaching practicums in rural schools in Thailand. Results indicated that PSETs' self-efficacy varied and was influenced by complex relations among contextual, social, and emotional factors. The PSETs began the practicum with different beliefs about TSE, but all faced a reality shock when confronted with multi-grade teaching, resource shortages, and diverse student needs. However, despite stress and doubts, they gradually built their TSE through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and emotional regulation. Their growth was evident in improved teaching skills, increased resilience, and a stronger professional identity. As nurturing TSE at the early stage is crucial, the researchers argue for the need for teacher education programs to prepare PSETs for rural teaching, support mentor teachers in guiding them effectively, and promote emotional resilience through reflective practice and peer support. This study provided insights into how TSE can serve as a tool for development and shape identity formation. Finally, this study also called for more longitudinal and comparative studies to better support PSETs in maintaining self-efficacy and effectiveness after practicums.

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