

The Impact of Teacher Efficacy on Student Engagement in Ideological Courses: A Study of Higher Vocational Schools in Inner Mongolia

Xu Hong¹ and Nipaporn Sakulwongs²

Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: nipaporn.c@rsu.ac.th

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of teacher efficacy on student engagement in ideological courses within higher vocational schools in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Guided by Bandura's social cognitive theory and Fredericks's engagement model, a mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 189 educators through structured surveys, while qualitative insights were obtained from interviews with 12 course managers. The findings indicated that teacher efficacy is a multidimensional construct shaped by demographic and institutional conditions. Regression analysis showed that instructional design efficacy significantly predicted students' cognitive engagement and classroom management efficacy influenced behavioral engagement. In addition, teacher efficacy was positively correlated with emotional engagement, demonstrating its central role in shaping multiple dimensions of student participation. Qualitative evidence further emphasized how teachers with high efficacy create learning environments that are structured, interactive, and responsive to student needs. These results highlight the importance of supporting teacher development to enhance student engagement in ideological education.

Keywords: Teacher Efficacy; Student Engagement; Ideological Course; Higher Vocational Schools

Introduction

Higher vocational education has emerged as a crucial focus in China's expanding education system, with the goal of developing skilled workers for national progress. In this environment, ideological courses in vocational schools seek not merely to impart Marxist theory but also to shape students' civic

identities. National measures like the "Double High Plan" and the 2022 reform of the Vocational Education Law encourage schools to generate graduates who are both capable and politically aware. Nonetheless, student involvement in these courses remains low, as they are frequently perceived as abstract, unconnected, and irrelevant to career objectives.

Teacher efficacy defined as an educator's belief in their ability to impact student learning is regarded as critical to effective teaching and healthy classroom interactions. High efficacy allows teachers to manage learning settings, design compelling lessons, and establish emotional relationships with their students. While teacher efficacy has been extensively examined in general education contexts, its impact on vocational ideological courses, particularly in varied places such as Inner Mongolia, has not been thoroughly investigated.

This study addresses that gap by investigating the relationship between teacher efficacy and student participation in ideological courses at higher vocational colleges in Inner Mongolia. The research, guided by Bandura's social cognitive theory and engagement theory, and conducted using a mixed-methods approach, aims to give practical data to support policy and classroom practice reforms. The following section examines relevant literature on teacher efficacy, student involvement, and the relationship between the two concepts in vocational settings.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the relationship between teachers' demographic characteristics and perceived teaching efficacy in ideological courses.
2. To evaluate the effect of teaching efficacy on student behavioral engagement.
3. To examine how teaching efficacy influences students' emotional engagement in ideological courses.
4. To determine the extent to which teaching efficacy predicts student cognitive engagement.

Literature Review

1. Teacher Efficacy in Ideological Courses

Bandura (1997) defined teacher efficacy as an educator's belief in their ability to impact student learning. This idea is especially important in ideological and political courses, where abstract principles

must be made clear to students (Tomaszewski et al., 2022). Tschannen–Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) identified three elements of efficacy: classroom management, instructional design, and student involvement. Later research has applied these categories to ideological education, demonstrating that teachers with high efficacy are better at structuring lessons, facilitating dialogue, and addressing politically sensitive content with authority and transparency (Emiru & Gedefaw, 2024; Zhao & Dai, 2022; Duan, Bissaker, & Xu, 2024).

In vocational education, efficacy is especially important because students frequently consider ideological courses as irrelevant to their future employment. According to research, teachers who confidently integrate theoretical knowledge with practical applications are more effective at maintaining student interest and connecting ideological instruction to occupational needs. These findings highlight the central role of teacher efficacy in reconciling abstract ideological goals with the skill-based priorities of vocational schools.

2. Student Engagement in Vocational Ideological Courses

Student engagement includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Behavioral engagement is defined as active participation in classroom activities and adherence to institutional standards, emotional engagement as enthusiasm and a sense of belonging, and cognitive engagement as a readiness to participate in deeper learning and problem solving. Recent research has shown that these aspects of participation differ by school context. In vocational colleges, where practical training sometimes takes precedence, ideological courses have unique obstacles in maintaining attention. Perceived relevance has emerged as a key factor, with students more willing to participate when course content is explicitly linked to personal development or professional goals (Lu & Mustafa, 2021; Ma, Sun & Wei, 2020).

Contextual factors also play an important role in determining engagement. Social identity and cultural proximity have been proven to either increase or decrease involvement, especially in multiethnic locations like Inner Mongolia (Wang, 2021). These findings show that involvement should not be viewed as a generic term, but rather as a phenomenon influenced by institutional structures and cultural contexts.

3. The Link Between Teacher Efficacy and Student Engagement

Empirical research repeatedly shows a substantial link between teacher efficacy and student engagement (Chew and Cerbin, 2021; Sarfo et al., 2015). Teachers with high efficacy use flexible

teaching tactics, create inclusive learning environments, and encourage active participation, all of which promote behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Lin, 2023; Chen et al., 2022). In ideological education, efficacy helps to transform abstract ideas into tangible learning experiences that improve both cognitive comprehension and emotional resonance (Guo et al., 2021).

Despite these findings, much previous research has focused on broad academic contexts, leaving ideological courses in vocational schools understudied. Recent scholarship argues for localized investigations that take into account the distinctive characteristics of vocational learners, the influence of regional and cultural diversity, and the impact of changing policy contexts (Liu, Zhang, & Starkey, 2021). Such studies are critical for determining how teacher efficacy might directly improve student participation in the unique context of vocational ideological education.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the link between teacher efficacy and student involvement in ideological courses at higher vocational colleges. The quantitative phase employed a structured questionnaire based on the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), the College Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (Siwatu et al., 2023), and Emiru and Gedefaw's student involvement instrument (2024), with modifications for Chinese vocational education. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews with 12 selected teachers were performed to gain a better understanding of how efficacy promotes engagement.

2. Population and Sample

The quantitative phase included 189 ideological course professors from Inner Mongolian higher vocational colleges who were chosen using simple random sampling. The sample size was computed using the Qualtrics tool to achieve a 95% confidence level and a 3% margin of error, confirming statistical validity. For the qualitative phase, 12 course directors were selected from six institutions based on their curriculum creation experience and renowned teaching leadership. This mix of chance sampling and deliberate selection gave both wide representativeness and detailed viewpoints.

3. Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected over three weeks using an online questionnaire distributed to ideological course teachers, with items derived from established efficacy and engagement scales for vocational education in China. Semi-structured interviews with 12 course leaders were performed in person or online, recorded with their consent, and transcribed. Cronbach's alpha values more than 0.70, and item-total correlations greater than 0.50, confirmed reliability. Five experts in ideological education rated content validity with I-CVI scores of 0.80–1.00. Construct validity was confirmed with a KMO value of 0.833 and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < .001$), indicating appropriateness for factor analysis.

4. Data Analysis

To investigate the relationship between teacher efficacy and student engagement, quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. Qualitative data were evaluated using thematic coding of interview transcripts, which allowed for the discovery of recurring patterns in teacher perspectives and classroom practices.

5. Conceptual Framework

This study established a conceptual framework based on Bandura's social cognitive theory and Fredricks et al.'s engagement model. As shown in Figure 1, teacher efficacy included three components; each hypothesized to influence student engagement. The framework illustrated how teacher-related factors may directly promote student participation, offering a theoretical basis for the empirical analysis.

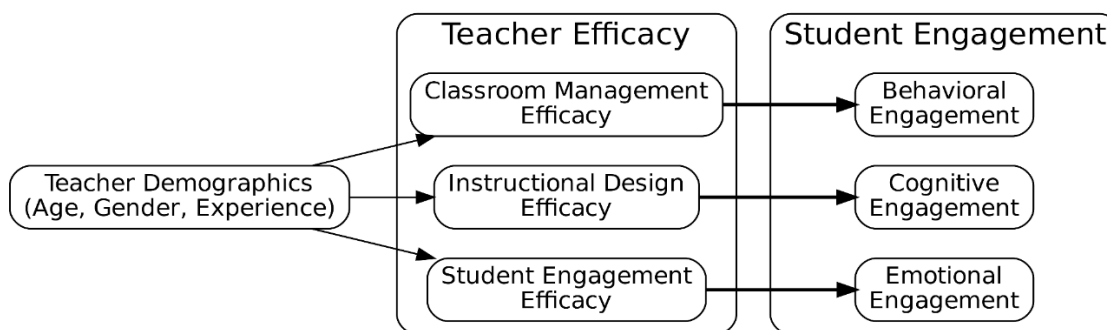


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing the hypothesized relationships between teacher demographics, teacher efficacy, and student engagement

(adapted from Bandura, 2001; Fredricks et al., 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

6. Ethical Considerations

The Ethics Review Board of Rangsit University granted ethical permission for this investigation, as documented in the Certificate of permission (COA No.: RSUERB2025-054). Prior to data collection, all participants were fully informed about the research's goal, process, and voluntary nature, and they provided signed informed consent. The study followed institutional and international criteria for ethical treatment of human volunteers, which included confidentiality, anonymity, and the opportunity to withdraw at any time.

Research Results

The instruments' reliability and validity were established via pilot testing and psychometric analysis. Cronbach's alpha values exceeded .80, corrected item-total correlations were above .50, and both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the measurement structure ($KMO > .80$; Bartlett's test, $p < .001$), showing its applicability for hypothesis testing. Demographic study revealed no significant gender differences in efficacy, with female teachers reporting somewhat better student engagement efficacy. Postgraduate degrees and higher professional titles were linked to improved instructional design and overall efficacy, whereas teachers with 6–10 years of experience reported the best levels of classroom management and student engagement. Advanced degrees and experience increased behavioral and emotional engagement, although cognitive engagement remained generally consistent across groups.

Regression analysis showed that teacher efficacy significantly predicted all three forms of student engagement. For behavioral engagement, efficacy explained 34% of the variance ($R^2 = .342$, $p < .001$). Classroom management efficacy ($\beta = .421$, $p < .001$) was the strongest predictor, followed by instructional design ($\beta = .238$, $p < .01$) and motivational efficacy ($\beta = .153$, $p < .05$).

Efficacy accounted for 34% of the variance in cognitive engagement ($R^2 = .336$, $F = 31.21$, $p < .001$). Significant predictors were classroom management ($\beta = .314$, $p < .001$), student participation ($\beta = .208$, $p = .003$), and instructional design ($\beta = .205$, $p = .004$). These findings were reinforced by interview data, which highlighted the importance of instructor confidence, practical linkages, and guided discussion in encouraging critical thinking.

Table 4 Regression coefficients for the effect of teacher efficacy on cognitive engagement

Dimension	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.	VIF	F	R ²
	Coefficients		Coefficients					
	B	Std. Error	Beta					
(Constant)	0.836	0.266		3.139	0.002			
Student Engagement Efficacy	0.207	0.069	0.208	2.998	0.003	1.342		
Instructional Design Efficacy	0.211	0.072	0.205	2.922	0.004	1.375	31.211***	0.336
Classroom Management Efficacy	0.311	0.070	0.314	4.451	0.000	1.386		

Dependent Variable: Cognitive Engagement; D—W: 1.876
Significance level (p): ≤ 0.05 – significant

Discussion

This study shows that teacher efficacy in ideological courses is context-dependent, shaped more by professional qualifications and teaching experience than by gender, which echoes the findings of Chen et al. (2022). Institutional culture also played a role, as Zhao and Dai (2022) highlighted that alignment between teachers' beliefs and curriculum objectives enhances efficacy, suggesting that organizational support and political context can either strengthen or constrain teaching confidence.

Behavioral and emotional involvement were strongly linked to effectiveness in classroom management, instructional design, and motivating abilities. Teachers who confidently arranged lessons, created routines, and promoted student engagement fostered more focus, involvement, and emotional connection. These findings are consistent with Lin (2023), Guo et al. (2021), and Zee and Koomen (2016), and they back up Han's (2021) conclusion that student enthusiasm and emotional attachment

are essential for maintaining interest in ideological education. In vocational settings, where students may lack self-regulation, effective lesson planning and relationship-building become more vital.

Instructional design efficacy predicted cognitive engagement the most strongly, followed by classroom management and student participation efficacy, respectively. Structured, intellectually interesting classes allowed for deeper reasoning, while instructor confidence and guided conversations promoted critical thinking. These findings are consistent with Tomaszewski et al. (2022) and Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which highlights the significance of self-efficacy in complex learning, and they build on Guo et al. (2021) by establishing that teacher efficacy can promote higher-order thinking in vocational ideological courses.

Conclusion

This study found that instructor efficacy strongly influences student involvement in ideological courses in higher vocational institutions. Demographic and institutional factors such as teaching experience and qualifications influenced efficacy, which in turn affected confidence in classroom management, instructional design, and student interaction. Each facet of efficacy had a varied impact on engagement: classroom management most strongly predicted behavioral outcomes, instructional design enhanced cognitive engagement, and motivational efficacy was directly related to emotional participation. Qualitative studies supported these trends, demonstrating that confident teachers created supportive, well-managed, and intellectually stimulating classes. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of professional development that builds teacher confidence across several domains, providing a path to improving ideological learning outcomes and increasing vocational student participation.

Suggestions

1. This study expands our knowledge of teacher efficacy as a context-sensitive term in ideological education. Future study should look at how efficacy influences behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement via mediators like instructional atmosphere and perceived relevance. Longitudinal and cross-institutional research could shed light on how efficacy evolves over time and in different political or institutional contexts, whilst adding student viewpoints would provide a more complete picture of how teacher activities are seen in ideologically framed classrooms.

2. In practice, vocational schools should concentrate targeted professional development to improve instructors' skills in classroom management, instructional design, and student engagement. Training should be targeted to teachers' career stages and class settings, with a focus on early-career educators and those who manage large or diverse groups. Institutional evaluation and promotion criteria should place an emphasis on teaching efficacy and student engagement outcomes in addition to academic requirements. In culturally and politically diverse places, more chances should be developed for dedicated instructors to improve curricular relevance and instructional confidence.

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