

Japanese Teachers' Confidence and Perceived Efficacy in Dealing with School Bullying

都留文科大学 青 山 郁 子
筑波大学 飯 田 順 子
目白大学 杉 本 希 映
埼玉学園大学 遠 藤 寛 子

Japanese Teachers' Confidence and Perceived Efficacy in Dealing with School Bullying

Ikuko Aoyama (都留文科大学)

Junko Iida (筑波大学)

Kie Sugimoto (目白大学)

Hiroko Endo (埼玉学園大学)

School bullying is a serious concern for educators and society internationally; however, research examining teachers' perspectives and confidence are limited in Japan. Therefore, this study examined Japanese teachers' confidence and efficacy in managing school bullying. Participants were 315 school teachers (female = 54.9%) who answered questions regarding their confidence and perceived efficacy managing bullying. Levels of confidence and self-efficacy were compared between gender, age, and school size using t-tests and ANOVAs. The relationships between perceived efficacy and confidence to intervene were also examined. Results shows that teachers who were male or in a small school reported more confidence. Teachers' confidence was lower regarding cyberbullying intervention than regarding other bullying forms. Regarding efficacy, teachers who were over 40s had higher personal efficacy, and teachers in elementary schools and junior high schools had higher efficacy as an organization compared to teachers in special education schools. Personal efficacy predicted confidence to intervene; however, efficacy as an organization did not.

Keywords : bullying, teachers' confidence, teachers' efficacy, bullying prevention, bullying intervention

INTRODUCTION

School bullying has been seriously concerning to educators and society for more than 40 years and is an important research topic worldwide. Factors such as school climate (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010; Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana, Evans, 2010) and peer group dynamic (Gini, 2006; Salmivalli et al., 1996) affect bullying. Individual factors such as

students' self-esteem (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi & Lagerspetz, 1999), empathy (Gini, 2008), and moral disengagement (Wang et al., 2016) are also known to affect bullying.

Teachers observe children's group dynamics in daily basis during school time and play important roles in identifying and intervening with bullying. However, teachers-related factors such as confidence and efficacy are not fully examined in Japan (Iida et

al, 2022). The latest governmental report has revealed that 55.4% of bullying incidents were identified by the bullying survey, 17.6% were reported by the victimized students, 10.1% were reported by the parents of victimized students, and 9.6% were identified by classroom teachers (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; MEXT, 2021). School-wide questionnaires may identify bullying among peers but are typically administered infrequently (i.e., a few times a year); accordingly, some bullying may be overlooked. Additionally, teachers may not be fully aware of the seriousness of bullying incidents.

Teacher-related factors have been studied mainly in western countries. For example, U.S. elementary school teachers were less likely to intervene with social exclusion and considered it less serious than physical and verbal abuse (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Similarly, U.S. pre-service teachers considered relational bullying less serious than physical and verbal bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). Further, teachers often underestimate bullying incidents. For instance, a district-wide survey found that school staff (teachers, school counselors, and guidance counselors) of all levels (elementary, middle, and high) underestimated the number of students involved in bullying (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007). Finally, teachers may ignore bullying. For example, approximately 65% and 85% of bullied students in primary and secondary/junior high school reported that their teachers had not discussed bullying with them, respectively (Olweus, 1993).

In many countries, teachers are legally bound to ensure their student's safety and well-being (Burger et al., 2015). Similarly, the anti-bullying law was enacted in 2013 in Japan, requiring public schools to develop bullying prevention strategies. Teachers who discover bullying incidents must discuss them with teachers and staff throughout the school; the school must then organize a bullying intervention committee. Nonetheless, in elementary schools, classroom teachers managed 84.5% of bullying cases,

whereas bullying intervention committees managed 23.2% (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2014). School counselors collaborate in managing 25.4% of bullying cases. Accordingly, school districts are aware that it is important for classroom teachers not to sustain heavy burdens in solving bullying problems by themselves (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2014).

Despite the anti-bullying law, prevention of and intervention in bullying depends heavily on teachers' confidence and efficacy because, as Bradshaw et al. (2007) argued "staff with greater efficacy for handling bullying situations were more likely to intervene" (p.368). Self-efficacy in responding to bullying is an important variable that influences teachers' proactive intervention when they recognize bullying among children (Iida et al., 2022). Self-efficacy may be relatively stable once established (Bandura, 1997). General teaching efficacy (e.g., instructional strategies and classroom management) is often believed to increase with experience (e.g., Wolters & Daugherty, 2007); however, the evidence is equivocal. For instance, Ghaith and Yaghi (1997) found a negative correlation between years of experience and teacher self-efficacy. Similarly, Klassen and Chiu (2010) found that teachers' self-efficacy increased until around 23 years of experience and then decreased. Regarding confidence, many U.K. pre-service teachers reported feeling reasonably confident about supporting bullying victims but less confident about managing bullying students to prevent further bullying (Nicolaidis et al., 2002). Canadian teachers also reported not knowing how to manage indirect bullying and needing additional training (Mishna et al., 2005). In contrast, other studies have found that teachers may overestimate their ability to detect and intervene with bullying (Bradshaw, 2007).

Although school bullying is a world-wide problem, school systems and teachers' expected roles differ between countries. In Japan, classroom teachers are expected to manage almost everything that happens to their students, including psychosocial and health

problems (Ishikuma, Shinohara, & Nakao, 2007). This expectation and the fact that bullying is one of the most serious educational and societal concerns in Japan make it critical to examine Japanese teachers' confidence and efficacy in managing bullying. Therefore, this study examined teachers' confidence and perceived efficacy in managing school bullying, and these variables' relationship with teachers' gender, age, and school size/type (e.g., elementary). Because effective intervention strategies and challenges will be different depending on children's developmental stages, exploring those group differences will be important to tailor teachers' training as needed.

This study also examined if teachers' perceived efficacy in managing bullying predicted their confidence to intervene. We hypothesized that participants' perceived efficacy would predict their confidence in intervening actions.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 315 school teachers (male = 44.73%; female = 54.9%). Participants were recruited after a teacher workshop session during summer in 2015. The participating schools were located in suburban areas.

Measures

Participants responded to 10 items adapted from Nicolaidis et al.'s study (2002) that examined participants' general confidence in their ability to manage bullying. Eight original items were used; we also added two items regarding cyberbullying [e.g. "Intervene with cyberbullying on social network services (e.g. Line)"]. Responses used a weighted 5-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely not*, 5 = *definitely yes*).

Participants also responded to 15 items examining their efficacy in managing bullying. These items were drawn from Sela-Shayonvits's study (2009) that originally measured teachers' perceived self-efficacy in managing violence at school. Based on Varimax-rotated matrix factor analysis, the original scale

consisted of three factors: "Personal teaching efficacy", "Teachers' efficacy in the school as an organization", and "Teachers' outcome efficacy." In this present study, the word "school violence" was replaced with "bullying" for its purpose. Responses used a weighted 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not applicable at all*, 5 = *Very applicable*).

The scale examining perceived efficacy measured participants' individual belief in their ability to generally intervene in bullying. The scale examining confidence measured participants' belief in their ability to take specific actions in response to bullying. After permission to use the scales was obtained from the original authors, the scales were back-translated into Japanese by two independent Japanese bilingual researchers. Then, all authors examined the contents of the items to see if they were equal to those in the original version.

Data analysis

We used t-tests and ANOVAs to compare scores on each scale between genders, age groups, and school type and size. We also used t-tests to compare mean scores on items in the confidence scale with the theoretical median in order to compare teachers' confidence between the various areas of intervention.

Subsequently, a correlation between confidence and perceived efficacy was examined. Then, regression analysis was performed to determine if perceived efficacy predicted confidence. SPSS ver 26 was used for all analyses.

Ethical Consideration

The survey was conducted after obtaining the consent of those who agreed to participate in the survey. The consent form states that cooperation in the survey was voluntary, that no disadvantage would be incurred if they did not participate, and that the survey results would be statistically processed and published in a form that did not identify any individuals. The survey was conducted without names. The study was reviewed and approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the university to which one of the authors belongs.

RESULTS

Demographics

Demographics were as follows. Male = 44.7%; female = 54.9%; 73.7% aged 30-39; elementary = 61.2%; junior high = 14.9%; high school = 12.3%; special education = 10.8%; classroom teachers = 89.2%. School sizes were as follows: 18.8% small; 45.4% medium; 35.8% large. School size was determined by the following criteria; less than 11 classes in the school =

Table 1 Study Sample

<i>N</i>	315
Gender	
Male	44.7%
Female	54.9%
Age	
20s	1.6%
30s	73.7%
40s	20.3%
Over 50s	3.5%
School Type	
Elementary	61.2%
Junior High	14.9%
High School	12.3%
Special Education	10.8%
Position	
Classroom teachers	89.2%
Student guidance and counseling	19.3%
School Size	
Small	18.8%
Medium	45.4%
Large	35.8%

small size, 12-18 classes in the school= medium size, more than 19 classes in the school= large school. Participants' information was summarized in Table 1.

Confidence

Regarding confidence, confidence in cyberbullying intervention (item 9) was significantly lower than the theoretical median ($t(314) = 2.27, p < .01$) (Table 2). This result supports Eden, Heiman, and Olenik-Shemesh (2013), who found that 62-80% of teachers did not feel confident in identifying and managing cyberbullying.

With regard to group difference¹, teachers who were male, or in small schools were more confident (male: $t(308) = 3.67, p < .001$; small schools: $F(2,307) = 5.14, p < .01$). Confidence did not vary depending on age group and school type (Table 3).

Perceived efficacy

Regarding perceived efficacy, Varimax-rotated matrix factor analysis extracted two factors: "Personal teaching efficacy" and "Teachers' efficacy in the school as an organization." Consequently, 10 items were included in subsequent analysis (Table 4). This factorial structure differed from the originating study, which also extracted a factor named "Teachers' outcome efficacy" (Sela-Shayonvits, 2009). The latter factor may not have been extracted because the revised scale used in this study examined teachers' self-efficacy in managing bullying, whereas the origi-

Table 2 Teachers' confidence regarding actions for managing bullying ($\alpha = .883$)

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Support a bullied student	3.58	0.72
2. Talk with onlookers about their responsibility	3.79	0.70
3. Help onlookers take a more active role to support victims	3.60	0.75
4. Talk with bullied student without attributing cause of the bullying to them	3.57	0.83
5. Work with parents of victim	3.69	0.76
6. Work with parents of bullies	3.32	0.88
7. Talk with bullies without blaming them	3.16	0.87
8. Make bullies stop bullying	3.38	0.82
9. Intervene with cyberbullying on social network services (e.g., LINE)	2.80	0.89
10. Support a cybervictimized student	3.04	0.90

Table 3 Factorial structure of teachers' bullying efficacy to deal with bullying scale

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. The school supports me in dealing with bullying problems.	.97	-.06	3.85	0.84
2. I am afraid that if I will be a victim of student violence, the school will not support me. (R)	.61	.04	3.78	1.06
3. In my school, there is close cooperation between the teaching staff and the administration in dealing with bullying.	.56	.05	3.76	0.90
4. I think I have the ability to understand the causes of bullying events.	-.14	.53	3.38	0.67
5. I feel that I act assertively in dealing with bullying behavior problems.	.03	.55	4.04	0.88
6. Sometimes I ignore violent reactions because I feel that I lack the confidence and knowledge to handle those situations. (R)	.00	.55	4.19	0.86
7. I think teachers play an important role in dealing with bullying.	.11	.45	4.57	0.61
8. I deal effectively with bullying problems in my class.	.03	.44	3.54	0.72
9. Sometimes I avoid punishing violent students so that they will not harm me or damage my property. (R)	.13	.43	4.35	0.81
10. I often feel that I lack professional knowledge in coping with bullying problems. (R)	.04	.33	2.65	0.84

Notes. R is reversed item

Table 4 Level of teachers' confidence and efficacy based on demographic factors.

		Teachers' Confidence						Personal Efficacy					Efficacy as an Organization				
		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>		
gender	male	138	3.52	0.53	3.67	***	0.42	138	3.20	0.29	0.65	0.074	138	4.18	0.49	0.50	0.057
	female	172	3.29	0.58				170	3.18	0.26			171	4.15	0.50		
age group	20-30s	234	3.39	0.55	-	0.040	232	3.17	0.27	-2.03	* 0.270	233	4.15	0.49	-	0.086	
	Over 40s	75	3.41	0.63	0.30		75	3.24	0.28			75	4.19	0.51			
		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2 p$	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2 p$	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2 p$	
school type	elementary	192	3.38	0.55	0.08	0.001	191	3.20	0.25	0.593	0.006	192	4.20	0.46	4.95	** 0.046	
	junior high	47	3.42	0.60			47	3.20	0.26			47	4.27	0.51			
	high	38	3.40	0.55			38	3.14	0.36			38	4.06	0.54			
	special education	34	3.42	0.66			33	3.16	0.26			33	3.90	0.50			
school size	small	58	3.61	0.58	5.14	** 0.032	59	3.24	0.28	1.704	0.011	59	4.16	0.52	1.89	0.012	
	medium	142	3.34	0.57			140	3.19	0.26			142	4.21	0.48			
	large	110	3.35	0.53			110	3.16	0.27			109	4.10	0.49			

Notes. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5 Result of correlation and regression analysis

	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>
Personal Efficacy	.25 **	.25 ***
Efficacy as organization	-.01	-.06

Notes. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

nal scale examined school violence: the factor structures of perceived efficacy in bullying and school violence may be characteristically different. Another possible reason is that this subscale measures teachers' self-efficacy in dealing with actual bullying events. It is probable that our participants did not have past experiences or opportunities to intervene with actual bullying cases.

With regard to group differences, teachers who were over 40s have higher personal efficacy and teachers in elementary schools and junior high schools have higher efficacy as an organization compared to teachers in special education schools (Table 4).

Correlation analysis and regression

Teachers' confidence was significantly correlated with personal efficacy ($r = .25, p < .01$) and efficacy as an organization ($r = -.01, ns.$)(Table 5); Personal and organizational efficacy were significantly correlated ($r = .18, p < .01$). In the regression analysis, the overall model was significant ($F(2, 304) = 9.98, p < .001, R^2 = .06$). Regarding each independent variable, only personal efficacy predicted confidence ($B = .25, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined teachers' confidence and perceived efficacy in managing school bullying, and these variables' relationship with teachers' gender, age, and school size. This study also examined if teachers' perceived efficacy in managing bullying predicted their confidence to intervene.

As for gender difference, there was no significant difference in efficacy. In contrast, male teachers were more confident overall. This result was inconsistent with the finding of Nicolaides et al.(2002) revealing that female pre-service teachers felt more confident

about teaching violence prevention. In contrast, another study from Canada (Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011) has shown that there was no significant sex difference between male and female pre-service teachers with respect to confidence in identifying and managing bullying. A direct comparison is difficult as samples are different (pre-service teachers v.s in-service teachers). More studies are needed to examine if sex differences exist. In Japan, the majority of teachers are female, especially at elementary schools (MEXT, 2015). According to Takashima (2014), there is an imbalance in job assignments between genders. In particular, there is a clear imbalance between the grades taught by male and female elementary school teachers, with male teachers in the upper grades and female teachers in the lower grades. As bullying increases from the upper elementary grades, female elementary teachers may have fewer opportunities to intervene with bullying.

With regard to age difference, confidence and perceived efficacy did not vary significantly. This suggests that confidence and efficacy managing bullying do not necessarily develop with experience. Additionally, many teachers may not have experienced or intervened in actual bullying cases, as classroom teachers and teachers in student guidance and counseling positions exclusively manage bullying cases without sharing information with other teachers. In fact, Okamoto (2005) found that few teachers had experience school-wide bullying intervention. Another possible reason is the component of participants in this study. Because the majority of the participants (73.7%) was 30s, it might be difficult to observe age difference.

Regarding school size, there was no significant difference in terms of efficacy. However, teachers who were in small schools were more confident. It is possible that communication is easier in small schools. Furthermore, fostering a sense of shared responsibility, which is a sustainable goal (Strohmeier et al., 2012), may be more probable.

As for the results that teachers in elementary and

junior high schools have higher efficacy as an organization compared to teachers in special education schools, literatures comparing differences between school types are scant. Systematic review (Fischer, John, & Bilz, 2021) has shown that "in two studies, no differences were found between teachers in special education and teachers in general education (Collier et al. 2015; Doherty 2009). One study found that teachers from schools for children with special needs reported higher self-efficacy than teachers from academic-track general education schools" (p.206). Thus, the authors are unable to locate the consistent rationals. Future research should address the different needs and challenges teachers face in each type of school.

As to the result of factor analysis of efficacy scale, factorial structure differed from the originating study, which also extracted a factor named "Teachers' outcome efficacy" (Sela-Shayonvits, 2009). The latter factor may not have been extracted because the revised scale used in this study examined teachers' self-efficacy in managing bullying, whereas the original scale examined school violence: the factor structures of perceived efficacy in bullying and school violence may be characteristically different. Another possible reason is that this subscale measures teachers' self-efficacy in dealing with actual bullying events. It is probable that our participants did not have past experiences or opportunities to intervene with actual bullying cases.

With respect to the relationship between teachers' confidence and efficacy, personal efficacy predicted confidence, but efficacy as an organization didn't. It is partly because teachers often work in isolation. As stated, classroom teachers managed most of bullying cases (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2014). Previous study pointed out that "schools that provided a low level of support for their teaching staff were associated with low levels of teachers' self-efficacy, and these teachers were less willing to cope with their students' problems" (Goddard & Goddard, 2001, cited in Sela-shayovitz, 2009, p.1062). Therefore, princi-

pals should promote a collaborative school culture in order to help teachers develop successful anti-bullying interventions (Kawasaki, 2021). To foster a sense of shared responsibility, the use of school counselors (SC) and school psychologists (SP) will be important as well. In dealing with bullying, SC try to intervene with the problem in a different position from the homeroom teacher, such as maintaining neutrality, engaging in active listening, and being close to the feelings of victims and bullies (Iida et al, 2022). Therefore, organizing regular times for teachers to consult with SC and SP will be helpful to establish cooperative relationships in schools.

Additionally, the present study has shown that Japanese teachers are least confident in managing cyberbullying, compared with other form of bullying. Many adults (particularly older adults) may have difficulty understanding and keeping up with the information technologies that young people use. As for cyberbullying, technology keeps changing at a rapid speed; thus, it would be beneficial for teachers to learn along with students.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has the following limitations. First, the study's cross-sectional design did not allow us to test causal hypotheses. Second, most of the participants were aged 30-39 years (73.3%) and this may have obscured significant differences between age groups. The participants were also convenient sample. Thus, the present results should be generalized with caution regarding.

Future research should determine if teachers' confidence and efficacy managing school bullying varies between different types of bullying. Teachers' attitudes vary between different types of bullying (e.g., Byers et al., 2011; Yoon & Kerber, 2003); therefore, determining which types of bullying require particular attention will inform the development of effective teacher training programs. It is also significant to use of meta-analytic approach to examine the effect of teacher training programs on confidence and efficacy.

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Notes

- 1) Since most of the respondents were in their 30s, two age groups were selected: those in their 20s and 30s, and those in their 40s. The position was not analyzed because it was difficult to categorize them due to the overlap of several school duties.