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EDUCATOR SELF-EFFICACY, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A NARRATIVE REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN CHINA AND SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract
Educator self-efficacy, which refers to educator's confidence in their ability to plan and implement strategies that lead to desired educational results, has been recognized as a key psychological tool in the modern education system. This narrative review aims to bring together recent studies on educator self-efficacy in the context of professional development, educational leadership and organisational conditions, focusing on studies from China and South Asia. The review builds on a selected collection of empirical studies, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and focuses on conceptual and theoretical underpinnings, the importance of training, mentoring, collaboration and institutional support, and the impact of transformational, instructional, distributed and entrepreneurial leadership. The evidence suggests that self-efficacy develops as a result of mastery experiences, collegial interaction, supportive school climates, and leadership practices and that self-efficacy is related to well-being, motivation, instructional practice, innovation, and student outcomes. The research from China is significant and growing in sophistication, with multilevel, longitudinal and mediation models, while the research from South Asia is limited and mostly focused on professional development experiences and resilience interventions. The strength of the effects of leadership seems to be conditioned by cultural values, hierarchical school structures and policy environments. The review highlights unexploited research gaps, such as the use of longitudinal designs, experimental designs, digital era challenges, culturally-validated measurement, and implications for theory, institutional management, and policy. Building educator self-efficacy involves a coordinated investment in ongoing professional learning, supportive leadership and collaborative school cultures.

Keywords: *Educator Self-Efficacy; Professional Development; Educational Leadership; Organizational Support; China; South Asia*

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
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Introduction

1.1. Background of Educator Self-Efficacy in Contemporary Education

Educator self-efficacy is the belief that educators can plan, teach and manage learning in ways that lead to learning. It is one of the most studied constructs in educational psychology as it is associated with instructional quality, persistence, and well-being. A recent meta-analysis of the relationship between educator self-efficacy and student achievement also indicates the relevance of educator self-efficacy for students (Ma et al., 2025). Systematic evidence from the past few years also shows that the research on self-efficacy has grown in every country, in every level of education, and in every method (Zhang et al., 2026). Meanwhile, the construct is viewed as a dynamic one that is influenced by classroom experiences, relationships, and the broader organizational context (Duan et al., 2024). Knowing what helps educators maintain their efficacy beliefs is more important than ever in an age of curriculum change, digitalization, and increased workload. Efficacy beliefs have been proposed as a basis for enduring professional commitment and effective practice because they shape the effort and effort that ducators put into their role, the goals they set, and the persistence they show in the face of hardship.

1.2. Importance of Professional Development and Educational Leadership

Professional development and educational leadership are among the most common levers that are explored to build these beliefs. A systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions to foster Educator self-efficacy have been conducted, revealing potential and diversity in such interventions (Täschner et al., 2025). Online learning has increased opportunities for learning, but questions about the effectiveness and evaluation of online learning exist (Stavermann, 2025). Leadership, in turn, influences the circumstances in which Educators work and are learning. The literature on Educator leadership and principal instructional leadership indicates that there is a close relationship between leadership practices and efficacy beliefs (Hallinger et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2024). These two domains constitute a workable agenda: professional development provides competence and confidence, and leadership gives direction, resources, and recognition for the new learning to be applied and maintained in schools and universities.

1.3. Educator Self-Efficacy in China and South Asian Educational Contexts

China has produced a significant amount of empirical research such as studies of pre-service Educators, school Educators and university faculty. A comprehensive measure has been developed and validated for Chinese pre-service Educators (Ma et al., 2023) and the role of self-efficacy in the relationship between learning engagement and teaching skills has been studied (Huang et al., 2026b). There is less research in South Asian contexts. Research from India has examined the experiences of professional development of higher education Educators (Mishra et al., 2025), and research from Pakistan has evaluated an educational intervention to improve the resilience and self-efficacy of school Educators (Nadeem et al., 2024). The differences in these contexts include governance, resources, and cultural expectations that can influence the development and support of efficacy beliefs. The studies in China also cover a wide range of school levels and disciplines, such as the study of the combination of enthusiasm, grit, and efficacy in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Shao, 2023).

1.4. Research Gaps and Rationale for the Review

In spite of this growth, literature is still scattered. Research frequently looks at self-efficacy as a mediator or moderator in limited models, like the effects of job satisfaction on professional learning communities (Li, 2022), but lacks the inclusion of professional development, leadership, and organizational support. Few studies make comparisons across regions and less evidence exists for the South than for the China. Therefore, a narrative review is appropriate to integrate the findings, and to provide clarity on the conceptual linkages and implications for research and practice. Furthermore, with the rapid development of digital technology, the needs and challenges of inclusive education and innovation have led to new research questions on efficacy under pressure (Wang et al., 2024; Yang & Du, 2024).

1.5. Objectives and Scope of the Review

The review is narrative in nature and is based on a subset of recent empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses related to educator self-efficacy, professional development, leadership and organizational support in China and South Asia. It is not meant to be a comprehensive systematic search. There are two objectives of the review: The scope of the review is restricted to the references synthesized, and the results are to be considered as an interpretive overview instead of a quantitative aggregation.

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69023/g5ttxn75

- To synthesize existing evidence on how professional development, educational leadership, and organizational conditions relate to educator self-efficacy in Chinese and South Asian contexts.
- To identify similarities, differences, research gaps, and implications for theory, institutional management, and policy.

2. Understanding Educator Self-Efficacy: Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives

2.1. Concept and Evolution of Educator Self-Efficacy

Educator self-efficacy has gone from a global concept of Educators' ability to impact student learning to a multi-faceted concept related to teaching tasks. While earlier conceptions of efficacy were more holistic, recent research has focused on domain-specific aspects of efficacy, including instructional approaches, student involvement, and classroom management. Meta-analytic findings regarding self-efficacy in classroom management indicate that there are personal, contextual, and professional correlates to this aspect of self-efficacy (Duan et al., 2024). A cross-cultural study also reveals the potential for differences between China and Australia in the factors associated with pre-service Educators' classroom management self-efficacy, implying that sources of efficacy are not culturally consistent (Duan & Bissaker, 2026). Along with this, measurement has also developed, with the comprehensive scale being newly validated to reflect the scale of teaching competence of Chinese pre-service Educators. This evolution mirrors a shift in the more general understanding of efficacy from a fixed attribute to a judgment that is made in relation to specific students, curricula, and institutional contexts, thereby being subject to changes as Educators engage new students, new curricula, new institutional expectations.

2.2. Social Cognitive Theory and the Development of Self-Efficacy

The theoretical basis of the construct is based on social cognitive theory which states that beliefs about personal ability are acquired as part of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physiological and affective states. In this context, Educators who are successful in instructional activities, watch highly effective Educators, receive credible encouragement, and who cope with stress effectively, are more likely to enhance their efficacy beliefs. This rationale is in line with intervention research. A meta-analysis of programs that aimed to boost Educator self-efficacy suggests that programs that aim to improve efficacy beliefs can help but also highlights the characteristics that distinguish programs that are more effective (Täschner et al., 2025). Furthermore, longitudinal evidence highlights the significance of personal resources, revealing the link between psychological capital and emotion regulation and Educator self-efficacy over time (Zhang & Zhang, 2025c). The framework also provides an account of why the same training can have different consequences for different Educators, because it is the interpretation of experience, not experience itself that either increases or decreases efficacy beliefs. This in practice translates to supportive feedback and chances to succeed being as significant as the actual training.

2.3. Dimensions and Determinants of Educator Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy determinants include personal, interpersonal, and organizational. Emotion regulation and psychological capital have been found to be associated with efficacy at the individual level (Zhang & Zhang, 2025c); and in the context of the digital era, studies have revealed that self-efficacy, online pedagogical and content knowledge and emotion regulation are all related to Educator digital burnout (Yang & Du, 2024). Similarly, enthusiasm and grit have also been modeled as additional factors for English language Educators (ELTs) to consider in their work with self-efficacy and well-being. Interpersonal collaboration is a frequent resource at the interpersonal level. School Climate in Shanghai is related to efficacy at the organizational level (Zhang et al., 2025a) as shown in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018. Table 1 provides an overview of the most important dimensions and determinants that have been found in the literature. It is unlikely that determinants will be independent; personal resources, collegial support and school climate are likely to interrelate in such a way that Educators in supportive school contexts are better positioned to transform experience into confidence.

Table 1. Dimensions and Determinants of Educator Self-Efficacy

Level or Dimension	Illustrative Factors	Focus of Evidence	Reference Citation
Instructional facets	Classroom management, student	Correlates and measurement of efficacy	Duan et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2023

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69023/g5ttxn75

	engagement, instruction		
Cross-cultural	Cultural and training context	Predictors differ between China and Australia	Duan & Bissaker, 2026
Personal resources	Psychological capital, emotion regulation	Longitudinal links to efficacy	Zhang & Zhang, 2025c
Digital competence	Online pedagogical knowledge, digital burnout	Mediation model	Yang & Du, 2024
School climate	Climate, collaboration, motivation	Structural and mediating pathways	Wu et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2025a

2.4. Relationship Between Self-Efficacy, Teaching Motivation, and Professional Performance

Self-efficacy is highly related to motivation and performance. Studies have demonstrated that Educators' motivation to become Educators functions as a mediator between the school climate and self-efficacy (Wu et al., 2026). The relationship between resilience and engagement and well-being is mediated by self-efficacy among Chinese Educators (Yang, 2026). Regarding performance, the meta-analysis of Ma et al. (2025) suggests that Educator self-efficacy is associated with student academic performance, and evidence with Chinese Educators suggests that Educator self-efficacy is a component of the chain of effects between Educator autonomy and organizational commitment and career well-being (Wang et al., 2026). Combined, these results suggest that self-efficacy is a product of positive experiences and a means by which motivation, commitment and performance are maintained. These connections can be understood as reciprocal: confident Educators want to become better and improvement provides new mastery experiences. For educational institutions, this indicates that efficacy is a potentially valuable outcome of development initiatives, with the possibility that increases in efficacy can lead to increases in engagement, commitment, and instructional quality.

3. Educator Self-Efficacy and Professional Development

3.1. Professional Learning and Continuous Educator Development

Professional learning is a process of ongoing professional growth that enables Educators to keep learning, improve practice, and build confidence. In the Chinese context, the research on PLCs suggests that there exists an interaction effect between Educator self-efficacy and job satisfaction on Educator participation in PLCs (Li, 2022), suggesting that how Educators experience collective learning is mediated by their self-efficacy. In the context of higher education, a study of Indian Educators offers insight into Educators' perceptions and experiences of professional development (Mishra et al., 2025). The findings of the studies on instructional leadership and Educator professional learning also demonstrate that self-efficacy can serve as a mediator, and there is a linear and nonlinear relationship (Thien & Liu, 2024). Based on the findings, it can be inferred that professional learning and efficacy beliefs are mutually reinforcing. Continuous development is important as it permits Educators to try out new methods, to reflect on the outcomes, and to make changes over longer periods, which is conducive to building up mastery experiences, not episodic ones. Self-efficacy also influences the level of Educator engagement in development activities and how they transfer the knowledge they gain.

3.2. Influence of Training, Mentoring, and Collaborative Learning

One of the most important ways of developing efficacy is through training programs. Täschner et al. (2025) conduct a meta-analysis of intervention studies and evidence exists that purposeful programs can foster Educators' self-efficacy. An example of an educational intervention for schoolEducators in Karachi, Pakistan tested the ability of a structured training to improve resilience and self-efficacy (Nadeem et al., 2024). Professional development through online means has grown significantly and a synthesis of research has investigated efficacy of online PD and how it is assessed (Stavermann, 2025). Another important mechanism is to collaborate. Based on multilevel evidence from China, it is suggested that the effects of principals' leadership on Educator self-efficacy depend on the pathway of Educator collaboration, which vary by teaching experience (Xie et al., 2022). Similarly, collegiality also plays a moderating role between instructional leadership and Educator self-efficacy (Chen & Rong, 2023). In most of the sources reviewed, mentoring is not discussed directly, but is implicit in collaborative structures in which experienced colleagues can provide

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
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vicarious experience and persuasion. Formal training, in conjunction with opportunities for peer exchange thus seems more in line with social cognitive theory than stand-alone instruction.

3.3. Role of Institutional Support in Strengthening Educator Self-Efficacy

Institutional support offers the context and structures into which professional development can be translated into increased efficacy. School climate is linked to Educators' self-efficacy, teaching practices, and Educator professional development needs in Shanghai (Zhang et al., 2025a). Moreover, self-efficacy is partly influenced by Educators' motivation to become Educators and collaboration (Wu et al., 2026) which are both affected by the school climate. Educator autonomy is also seen to be important, as Educator autonomy is linked to organisational commitment through self-efficacy and career well-being (Wang et al., 2026). In digital environments, this institutional support of providing online pedagogical training could be relevant to the digital burnout investigated in connection with self-efficacy, online pedagogical knowledge, online content knowledge, and emotion regulation (Yang & Du, 2024). Institutional support can come in many forms and includes: time, resources, recognition and clear expectations, all of which are ways that barriers to applying what's learned are reduced. Even well-designed programs will not be successful in altering Educator self-perceptions, if such conditions do not exist.

3.4. Professional Development and Teaching Effectiveness

An evaluation of professional development is based on its impact on teaching effectiveness. A mediating role of self-efficacy is found between learning engagement and teaching skills among Chinese pre-service Educators (Huang et al., 2026b), suggesting that self-efficacy is a way to bridge the gap between learning and doing. Innovative work behavior and self-efficacy have been examined as joint contributors to educational innovation (Huang et al., 2026a), and distributed leadership in Shanghai is related to teaching innovation in terms of autonomy, collaboration and self-efficacy (Gong, 2025). The meta-analysis correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement (Ma et al., 2025) provides implications for students. Table 2 outlines the main professional development approaches and their reported links with efficacy. All of these findings indicate that effectiveness gains do not only rely on the content of development programs, but also on the beliefs Educators have about their capacities to apply new approaches.

Table 2. Professional Development Approaches and Their Links With Educator Self-Efficacy

Approach	Context	Main Finding or Focus	Reference Citation
Intervention programs	Multiple settings	Interventions can promote efficacy	Täschner et al., 2025
Resilience training	Karachi schoolEducators	Tested to enhance resilience and efficacy	Nadeem et al., 2024
Online professional development	Research synthesis	Effectiveness and evaluation	Stavermann, 2025
Faculty development	Indian higher education	Educators' experiences of development	Mishra et al., 2025
Learning communities	Chinese Educators	Efficacy moderates satisfaction link	Li, 2022
Collaborative learning	Chinese schools	Collaboration and collegiality conditions	Chen & Rong, 2023; Xie et al., 2022

4. Educational Leadership and Organizational Influences on Educator Self-Efficacy

4.1. Educational Leadership Styles and Educator Self-Efficacy

Expectations, resources, and recognition are shaped by leadership styles, which subsequently impact Educators' self-efficacy. A systematic review of Educator leadership and self-efficacy from 2013 to 2024 identifies the trajectory of the evidence on the relationship between Educator leadership and self-efficacy beliefs (Luo et al., 2024). A meta-analytic review of principal instructional leadership and Educator efficacy explores the role cultural context plays in the strength of this relationship (Hallinger et al., 2025). Principal instructional leadership is linked to Educator self-efficacy in student engagement and classroom management in Chinese schools (Zhang et al., 2025b). To expand the spectrum of styles, the relationship between principals' and Educators' entrepreneurial leadership and Educator efficacy and organizational effectiveness has been explored

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69023/g5ttxn75

(Jinke et al., 2025). Distributed leadership has also been associated with Educator innovation, autonomy, collaboration and self-efficacy (Gong, 2025). Leadership is thus more important as a way of behaving than as a label and it is important that Educators see it as a way of behaving which communicates trust, expertise and shared purpose. Style comparisons also show that the influence of the principals is frequently indirect, through the way Educators work together and have autonomy in their daily tasks.

4.2. Transformational and Instructional Leadership Practices

Transformational leadership has always been correlated with Educators' psychological resources. It has been studied as a means to mitigate Educator burnout, and self-efficacy and emotional intelligence have been studied as explanatory variables (Tian & Guo, 2024). To improve Educators' work performance, a framework of transformational leadership has been proposed (Yu & Jang, 2024). Principal transformational leadership and inclusive role identity and efficacy have been investigated as a whole in the context of inclusive teaching in China (Wang et al., 2024), and transformational classroom leadership and Educator self-efficacy of English as a medium of instruction have been studied in terms of psychological self-empowerment (Wang, 2024). Instructional leadership, however, focuses on the three aspects of curriculum, supervision and learning climate. Instructional leadership is related to Educator professional learning through self-efficacy, both linearly and nonlinearly (Thien & Liu, 2024), and collegiality acts as a moderator in the relationship between instructional leadership and self-efficacy (Chen & Rong, 2023). While conceptually different, good principals can sometimes do both – inspire vision and be very attentive to teaching and learning, and the research examined in this review indicates that both can be effective if Educators perceive them as credible and supportive.

4.3. Organizational Climate, Institutional Culture, and Educator Empowerment

Leadership intentions are either lived or not, depending on the organisational climate and culture. In Shanghai, Educator self-efficacy, instructional practice, and perceived professional development needs are all related to school climate (Zhang et al., 2025a). The relationship between school climate and Educator self-efficacy is mediated by Educator collaboration and motivation to become a Educator (Wu et al., 2026). Empowerment is expressed in autonomy; teaching autonomy is related to organizational commitment in terms of self-efficacy and career well-being (Wang et al., 2026); and the concept of psychological self-empowerment (Wang, 2024) is core to the notion of transformational classroom leadership. These studies taken as a whole indicate that empowerment of cultures expand Educators' discretion and can enhance the mastery experiences that underlie efficacy. Leaders build trust and foster open communication, which encourages Educators to try, get feedback, and persevere when innovations are challenging. Climate and culture therefore are the context in which leadership behaviours are amplified or diminished.

4.4. Leadership Support, Professional Motivation, and Institutional Effectiveness

Leadership is also a factor of motivation and effectiveness of the institution. Jinke et al. (2025) explore the relationships between principal and Educator entrepreneurial leadership and Educator efficacy and organizational effectiveness in China. Transformational leadership has been associated with lower levels of burnout and higher job performance (Tian & Guo, 2024; Yu & Jang, 2024), and distributed leadership with teaching innovation (Gong, 2025). Job conditions are also a factor as college teaching self-efficacy is a mediator between job stress and job satisfaction in Chinese university Educators (Liu et al., 2023). Supportive leadership which alleviates stress and promotes satisfaction can thus be partly functional in terms of efficacy. The leadership styles and outcomes they have been associated with are shown in Table 3. These associations indicate that leadership support is not just administrative but leadership support can be a motivational resource and can influence institutional outcomes. The patterns are particularly pertinent for school systems interested in improving the quality of teaching and learning and not just external accountability.

Table 3. Leadership Approaches and Associated Self-Efficacy Outcomes

Leadership Approach	Context	Outcome or Mechanism	Reference Citation
Instructional	China and cross-cultural	Cultural context; efficacy in engagement and management	Hallinger et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025b
Instructional	Mediation and moderation	Professional learning via efficacy; collegiality	Chen & Rong, 2023; Thien & Liu, 2024

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69023/g5ttxn75

Transformational	Educator burnout	Self-efficacy and emotional intelligence	Tian & Guo, 2024
Transformational	Work performance	Conceptual framework	Yu & Jang, 2024
Transformational	Inclusive teaching	Inclusive role identity and efficacy	Wang et al., 2024
Transformational classroom	English-medium teaching	Psychological self-empowerment	Wang, 2024
Distributed	Shanghai	Teaching innovation	Gong, 2025
Entrepreneurial	China	Educator efficacy and effectiveness	Jinke et al., 2025

5. Educator Self-Efficacy Research in China and South Asia

5.1. Development and Major Themes of Educator Self-Efficacy Research in China

The study of educators' self-efficacy in China has progressed from instrument translations to complex explanatory models. Some of the initial priorities were in the field of measurement, while the validation of a scale for pre-service Educators is a recent one (Ma et al., 2023). Today, well-being/burnout, leadership, school climate and innovation are key themes. Self-efficacy has been used as a mediator when examining Chinese Educators' resilience, engagement and well-being (Yang, 2026), and efficacy has been modeled with enthusiasm and grit when examining well-being of Educators of English as a foreign language (Shao, 2023). Teaching self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2023) is a mediator between the job stress and job satisfaction of university Educators. Pre-service Educators are studied in terms of pre-service learning engagement and pre-service teaching skills (Huang et al., 2026b) and the study of pre-service Educators has incorporated the concepts of psychological capital and emotion regulation in the longitudinal study (Zhang & Zhang, 2025c). In terms of methodology, more and more Chinese studies use multilevel structural equation modeling and large-scale datasets (Xie et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025a). As a whole, the themes suggest that Chinese research is no longer focused on the question of efficacy but rather on how and under what circumstances efficacy exists. This trend is similar to the development of the field at the global level, in the light of recent global syntheses (Zhang et al., 2026).

5.2. Educator Self-Efficacy and Professional Development in South Asian Countries

The literature reviewed provides less but telling evidence from South Asia. The experiences of Educators in professional development in the context of higher education in India have been investigated, and the perceptions of the faculty members regarding the training opportunities have been highlighted (Mishra et al., 2025). An educational intervention to boost resilience and self-efficacy was piloted in Pakistan with school Educators in Karachi (Nadeem et al., 2024). These studies suggest that South Asian research primarily focuses on capacity development and support for well-being, which is often at the intervention/experiential level, and not on tests of complex leadership models. The small number of studies also makes it necessary to be cautious in drawing conclusions and to be wary of extrapolating to the various education systems in the region. However,, these studies are a useful starting point as they demonstrate efficacy and resilience can be directly targeted in structured training within school settings. These numbers will need to be increased with larger samples, validated instruments and longitudinal follow-up in South Asian schools and universities.

5.3. Educational Leadership and Institutional Support Across Regional Contexts

Leadership and institutional support is most well-described in a Chinese context. There has been research on distributed and entrepreneurial leadership and their connection to efficacy or related outcomes (Gong, 2025; Jinke et al., 2025). The relationship between principal instructional leadership and Educator efficacy is considered in light of cultural context in the cross-national synthesis (Hallinger et al., 2025), which warns against the direct transfer of findings from China to other parts of the world. There are broader frames of reference provided by systematic reviews on Educator leadership and on evidence of self-efficacy around the world (Luo et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2026). In South Asia, institutional support can be seen primarily at the program level, for example the school based intervention in Karachi (Nadeem et al., 2024) and the professional development experiences in India (Mishra et al., 2025). These differences indicate varying degrees of maturity in the infrastructure to support the study and support of efficacy across the various regional contexts.

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69023/g5ttxn75

5.4. Cultural, Social, and Organizational Influences on Educator Self-Efficacy

Efficacy beliefs are formed and manifested in a context of culture and social norms. A cross-cultural study of China and Australia reveals that the factors that predict pre-service Educators' classroom management self-efficacy vary between the two countries (Duan & Bissaker, 2026). This might be due to the hierarchical nature of the school, and the collectivist orientation might increase the need for collegiality and principal support, given that collaboration and collegiality mediate leadership impacts (Chen & Rong, 2023; Xie et al., 2022). Digital burnout is also studied in relation to self-efficacy and emotion regulation (Yang & Du, 2024), as part of the organizational influences Educator working conditions in the digital world. The regional research themes were summarized in Table 4 as a result of the studies reviewed. These influences highlight the socially situated nature of efficacy, and the need to interpret findings in light of the cultural values and meanings surrounding authority, collaboration and professional status.

Table 4. Regional Research Themes in Educator Self-Efficacy

Region or Context	Population	Major Theme	Reference Citation
China	Pre-service Educators	Measurement; learning engagement and skills	Huang et al., 2026b; Ma et al., 2023
China	School Educators	Leadership and collaboration	Xie et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025b
China	University Educators	Job stress and satisfaction	Liu et al., 2023
India	Higher education Educators	Experiences of professional development	Mishra et al., 2025
Pakistan	SchoolEducators	Resilience and efficacy intervention	Nadeem et al., 2024
China and Australia	Pre-service Educators	Cross-cultural predictors	Duan & Bissaker, 2026

6. Comparative Perspectives and Emerging Research Trends

6.1. Similarities and Differences Between China and South Asian Educational Contexts

China and South Asia share an attention to the role of Educator quality in improving education, and in both areas efficacy beliefs are related to professional development opportunities. Some similarities are in the care for Educator well-being and resilience (Nadeem et al., 2024; Yang, 2026). But there are some differences. Many of the studies reviewed are from South Asia and are descriptively small, intervention-based, or fail to use large datasets, validated instruments, or advanced statistical models as used in Chinese research. Cultural nuances of leadership and school hierarchy may be important, as cross-national meta-analysis studies on instructional leadership highlight the importance of cultural context (Hallinger et al., 2025). Variations in systems resources, Educator pathways for preparation, and policy focus are also likely to shape the delivery and experience of professional development (Mishra et al., 2025). Such differences suggest greater than true disagreement rather than less, and the potential for more uneven development of the evidence base makes it harder to compare. Awareness of these differences will help avoid the uncritical assumption that models which are valid in one region will perform the same in another region.

6.2. Relationships Among Self-Efficacy, Leadership, and Professional Development Across Regions

A uniform conceptual pattern is evident regionally. Leadership and organizational support enables conditions for professional learning and collaboration which in turn is linked with self-efficacy, and this is linked to well-being, innovation, and performance. Instructional leadership is linked to self-efficacy (Thien & Liu, 2024) and principal leadership impacts efficacy through collaboration (Xie et al., 2022). Self-efficacy and emotional intelligence (Tian & Guo, 2024) are related to transformational leadership and burnout. There is evidence that links professional development with efficacy gains at the intervention level (Täschner et al., 2025) and the South Asian intervention study shows the same logic at the school level (Nadeem et al., 2024). While there are no direct cross-regional comparisons of these relationships, this mediating role of efficacy shows up across the reviewed studies. This trend can be helpful as a heuristic for comparative endeavors, but should not be taken for granted in every context. The conclusions of such comparisons are to be drawn with care as there are differences in the context, sample, and measurement used in the studies reviewed.

Vol. 12 Issue 7s (November, 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages- 1-12
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69023/g5ttxn75

6.3. Emerging Challenges in Educator Self-Efficacy Development

Several challenges complicate efforts to develop educator self-efficacy. Digitalization offers opportunities, but also strain, and digital burnout has been explored in terms of self-efficacy, online pedagogical and content knowledge and emotion regulation (Yang & Du, 2024). The implementation of online professional development poses questions of quality, engagement, and evaluation (Stavermann, 2025). Job stress is a longstanding issue concerning job satisfaction of university Educators (Liu et al., 2023). Inclusive education puts new demands on Educators, and the role of principals' transformational leadership and inclusive role identity in inclusive teaching efficacy have been discussed. (Wang et al., 2024). Lastly, in the context of sustaining innovation, it is necessary to focus on innovative work behavior and efficacy (Huang et al., 2026a). These challenges are interdependent – stress, technology requirements, and individual student needs can all decrease efficacy at the same time, if institutions are not able to keep pace through a coordinated response.

6.4. Contemporary Research Trends and Underexplored Areas

Current research focuses on moving away from mediation and moderation research, multi-level and longitudinal research, and integration through meta-analysis (Duan et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2025c). Educator well-being, innovation and digital competence is a growing area of interest. Future research directions are the study of leadership in South Asia, experimental studies of leadership development, culturally responsive measurement outside of a Chinese sample of pre-service Educators, and the longer-term effects of online professional development. Newer leadership styles, like the entrepreneurial leadership and Educator leadership, are also worthy of additional testing (Jinke et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2024). Table 5 provides a comparison between the two regions on relevant aspects. Filling these gaps would enable the field to progress from the descriptive regional accounts to true comparative and cumulative knowledge.

Table 5. Comparison of Research on Educator Self-Efficacy in China and South Asia

Dimension	China	South Asia	Reference Citation
Research volume	Extensive, varied designs	Limited, emerging	Nadeem et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2022
Dominant focus	Leadership, climate, well-being	Professional development experiences, resilience	Mishra et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025a
Methods	Multilevel, longitudinal, scale validation	Intervention and experiential	Nadeem et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2025c
Leadership evidence	Distributed, entrepreneurial, transformational	Largely absent in reviewed set	Gong, 2025; Jinke et al., 2025
Cultural lens	Cross-cultural and contextual comparison	Little comparative work	Duan & Bissaker, 2026; Hallinger et al., 2025

7. Discussion and Implications

7.1. Critical Synthesis of Major Findings From Existing Literature

The literature as a whole suggests a number of conclusions. First, educator self-efficacy is a dynamic belief system, which is responsive to training, collegial interaction, climate and leadership (Täschner et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2026). Second, self-efficacy is often a mediator or moderator between organizational conditions and outcomes including burnout and job satisfaction, professional learning and innovation (Liu et al., 2023; Thien & Liu, 2024). Thirdly, it is linked to student performance, highlighting its practical implications (Ma et al., 2025). But there are some significant caveats. Most studies are cross-sectional, self-reported and are conducted in China, making it difficult to draw causal conclusions and transfer to other countries. Additionally, there are inconsistencies in constructs, measures, and contexts in the global evidence base, which further hinders comparison (Zhang et al., 2026). Overall, the most compelling evidence is related to mediating or moderating relationships and evidence of long-term change is limited. A balanced reading of the findings will therefore view these as consistent, plausible but not definitive, especially with regards to causal claims relating to leadership and development.

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7.2. Theoretical Implications for Educator Self-Efficacy and Educational Leadership

Social cognitive theory is supported and extended by the reviewed evidence, in theory. Mastery experiences, vicarious learning through collaboration, and persuasion from leaders are similar to efficacy formation, while organizational factors like climate and collegiality seem to serve as contextual amplifiers (Zhang et al., 2025a; Chen & Rong, 2023). The evidence adds to the theoretical understanding of the mechanisms that link leadership to Educator outcomes, for example, the importance of leader efficacy (Luo et al., 2024). Based on the cultural findings, frameworks from other contexts require calibration before they can be applied to Asian contexts (Hallinger et al., 2025) while integrated models that combine psychological resources, leadership and climate would increase the explanatory power of the models (Gong, 2025). This would further develop leadership studies from a descriptive conceptualization of leadership styles to an explanation of how and why leadership impacts Educators' beliefs.

7.3. Implications for Educational Management and Institutional Development

The findings indicate that efficacy should be considered a strategic resource for institutional development for educational managers. To promote efficacy, principals can engage in instructional and transformational practices, create a collegial environment, and empower autonomy (Wang et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2025b). Professional learning communities and structured collaboration are other areas in which schools can invest in (Li, 2022). There is a need to pay attention to workload, stress, and digital demands to protect well-being (Liu et al., 2023; Yang & Du, 2024). Leaders need to foster Educators' role identity and innovative practices for inclusive and innovative practice (Huang et al., 2026a; Wang et al., 2024). For this reason, efficacy-sensitive indicators, like Educator confidence, collaboration, and perceived support, might be included in institutional development plans, in addition to standard performance measures. These measures are feasible and not very expensive, compared to big structural changes.

7.4. Policy Implications and Recommendations for Professional Development

Policymakers must invest in ongoing, evidence-based professional learning, and not in one-off professional learning, based on the characteristics of effective professional learning (Täschner et al., 2025). Quality assurance and evaluation (QA&E) should be a part of online provision (Stavermann, 2025). Scaling up school-based resilience and efficacy interventions and responding to the needs of Educators in higher education would be valuable in South Asia (Mishra et al., 2025; Nadeem et al., 2024). Instructional and transformational practices are suggested to be included in leadership development programs for principals (Hallinger et al., 2025; Yu & Jang, 2024). In addition, there are validated methods for measuring the development of efficacy, which should be taken into account in pre-service education policy (Duan & Bissaker, 2026; Ma et al., 2023). Funding mechanisms should also guarantee equitable access to opportunities for Educators in various geographic areas, school settings and stages of their careers. These policies should be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation to enable adjustments to be made on the basis of evidence from local contexts.

7.5. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Future research needs to include more evidence from South Asia (such as leadership and organisational studies) and to include comparative research between regions. Since there are few longitudinal studies (Zhang & Zhang, 2025c) and causality is required, both longitudinal and experimental designs are needed. Studies should distinguish the efficacy aspects (classroom management, engagement, and instruction) (Duan et al., 2024) and explore the relationship between efficacy and well-being and resilience at various career stages (Shao, 2023; Yang, 2026). The issues of digital era professional development and educators' emotions should also be studied. Lastly, mixed methods research with a focus on Educators' voices might help to explain quantitative relationships. These directions, in combination, would create a more cumulative and globally balanced evidence base on educator self-efficacy, PD and educator leadership. Joint research efforts by Chinese and South Asian scientists may also help to enable common instruments and similar designs. The priority funding should be accorded to such efforts.

8. Conclusion

This narrative review was designed to integrate the relationship between educator self-efficacy and professional development, educational leadership and organizational conditions in China and South Asia. The literature reviewed suggests that self-efficacy is a dynamic and context-specific construct, which is developed through a combination of mastery experiences, collaboration, significant professional learning and supportive institutional settings. It is not only a consequence of these conditions but also a way to link the practices of a

leader to the organizational climate, Educator well-being, Educator motivation, Educator commitment, Educator innovation, and student learning. Each of these types of leadership, transformational, instructional, distributed, and entrepreneurial, seem to play a role, especially in providing collegiality, autonomy, and psychological empowerment. Professional development is most effective when it is ongoing, collective, and responsive to Educators' needs and can occur in either a face-to-face or online format. The research from China is methodologically sophisticated and extensive, with validated instruments, multilevel models, and longitudinal designs, while the research from South Asia is limited and has a focus on professional development experiences and interventions on resilience. This imbalance limits the ability to make strong cross-regional comparisons and indicates a definite need for more investigation in the systems of South Asia. The formation of efficacy beliefs and the reception of leadership can be mediated by cultural expectations, hierarchical school structures and policy priorities and should be transferred between regions with caution. The review recommends that school leaders and policy makers use Educator self-efficacy as a lever for practice, focusing on leadership development, collaborative cultures, stress reduction, and ongoing learning opportunities. In the future, longitudinal and experimental designs should be used, culturally appropriate measures should be utilized, and mixed methods approaches should be considered, and attention should be paid to the digital challenges as well as the relationship between leadership, development, and efficacy between regions. In the end, it is all about building Educator confidence in their ability, and that's the responsibility of Educators, leaders and policy makers. Continuous focus on this co-responsibility can help schools and universities establish effective, resilient and confident teaching communities in various regional contexts.

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