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Wong, Marina Wai Yee ; Chan, Edmund Sze Shing ; Chik, Maria Pik Yuk

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Primary music teachers' efficacy in Hong Kong's inclusive classrooms.

By

Marina Wai-yee Wong, Edmund Sze Shing and Chan Maria Pik-yuk Chik

Affiliated institution: Department of Education Studies,
Hong Kong Baptist University

Corresponding author: Marina Wai-yee Wong
Corresponding address: Hong Kong Baptist University
Dept of Education Studies
Baptist University Road
Kowloon Tong, Kowloon
Hong Kong SAR

Contact of authors:

Marina Wong, marina@hkbu.edu.hk
Edmund Chan, szeschan@yahoo.com.hk
Maria Chik, psychik@hkbu.edu.hk

Brief Biographies of authors:

Marina Wong is associate professor at the Department of Education Studies of the Hong Kong Baptist University. She obtained PhD at the University of British Columbia in Canada. She is currently involved in teacher education courses with special focus on music teacher education. Her research interests include assessment in arts education, curriculum studies, inclusive music education and music teacher education.

Edmund Chan is senior research associate at the Department of Education Studies of the Hong Kong Baptist University, specializing in psychology of teaching. He graduated from the University of Alberta, with Psychology major and Statistics minor. He obtained MA and MPhil degrees of Humanities at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and PhD degree in Education at the Hong Kong Baptist University.

Maria Chik is a retired associate professor at the Department of Education Studies of the Hong Kong Baptist University. She obtained PhD at the Monash University in Australia. Her research interests include humor, play and psychological well-being, counseling and school guidance, special education and teacher education.

Abstract

This study analyses responses (n= 309, across 94 schools) to the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Zhang & Schwarzer, 1995) from Hong Kong primary teachers of inclusive music classes. Results show respondents' perceived self-efficacy is moderate -- characterized as a see-saw relationship between their personal and external domains. A possible behavioral intervention suggests professional-sharing being further enriched were current Education Bureau's in-service SEN courses to be inclusive of all primary school subjects, including music. Specific factors that underpin these respondents 'moderate' self-efficacy are identified as forming two clusters, human resource management and stress, with possible behavioral interventions for these being outlined.

(99 words)

Key words:

Primary Music teachers, Inclusive education, Self-efficacy, Hong Kong.

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Introduction

Music has become the 'Cinderella' in Hong Kong's Primary curriculum – relegated to being a non-core subject taught in 'inclusive classrooms', its teaching does not require subject-specific teaching qualification, its teachers are excluded from in-service support for students with special education needs [SEN]. How this contextual background evolved and its impact on the self-efficacy of Hong Kong's primary school music teachers is considered in the following.

Contextual Background

Hong Kong's education policy reforms were driven by a change of focus from 'teaching' to 'learning' (OECD, 2012). This transition, as common in many other countries, is reported as facing not only 'key obstacles and challenges ... such as teachers' heavy workloads, learning diversity in class, and teachers' inadequate understanding of the reform' (Cheung & Wong, 2012, p. 39), but also 'a discourse which portrayed teachers as empowered and, consequently, as the primary source of problems of (policy) implementation' (Morris & Chan, 2010, p. 248). This system wide reform changed the curriculum approach from teacher-centered curriculum that focuses on the teaching content of examination syllabus to student-centered curriculum that focus on students' learning outcomes. Students' learning has become an essential part in the External School Review which evaluate the accountability and performance of schools, school principals and teachers (EDB, 2019a). Thus, it led to the creation of a curriculum that focused on students' attainment of the three 'core-subjects' of English, Chinese and Mathematics. In contrast, non-core subjects such as Music, receive less teaching-time than core subjects yet still is taken by all school pupils (Curriculum Development Council [CDC], 2003). As music is a non-core subject and the usual practice of

economic human resource management in Hong Kong primary schools, school principals usually expect that teachers will teach at least two subjects – a core subject and a non-core subject. The policy of specialized teaching secures the government funding for schools to hire teachers with specialized teaching qualifications for teaching the core subjects (SCOLAR, 2003; “Singtao”, 2004, title; EDB, 2005).

The reforms also introduced change to the education of students with special education needs [SEN] (Forlin, 2010). The former practice of educational segregation of SEN students is being augmented to become an officially one of constructive 'inclusion':

The main policy objective of special education is to enable children with SEN to fully develop their individual potential. We encourage SEN students to receive education in ordinary schools as far as possible ... (Education Bureau [EDB], 2018a).

Under this policy of constructive 'inclusion', children (aged 6-12 years) with all types of SEN are now allocated to ordinary primary schools either within the school district in which the student resides, or according to the parents' choice of school or randomly allocated via the Primary One Admission System [POAS] (EDB, 2018b). As the majority of primary schools in Hong Kong are funded by the government and admit their Primary One (Age 6) students through the POAS, integrating students with SEN in ordinary primary is realized in all government-funded schools under the policy of inclusion. The number of students with SEN in mainstream primary schools had drastically increased by 37% in 5 years between Academic year 2012/13 and 2016/17, and the percentage of students with SEN in primary schools had reached 7.7% of the total student population (Audit Commission, 2018). Inclusive education is flourishingly realized in Hong Kong primary schools with the inclusion of students with SEN. In fact, the actual number of students with SEN may be as high as one-third of the total student population because only the diagnosed and reported cases of SEN are shown in these

figures (Tsui, 2018)

This inclusion policy reportedly, has raised significant issues including the lack of subject-specific SEN training for both pre- and in-service teachers, a lack exacerbated by insufficient school-based SEN support (Wong & Chik, 2015). Addressing this lack of in-service SEN training, the Education Bureau currently funds in-service teacher development SEN courses (EDB, 2019b). However, these free-of-charge courses are operated during school days and only available for teachers nominated by their school principals. It is also a common practice for schools to send teachers of core subjects to study these courses. The content of these courses are generic and not subject-specific, leaving teachers reporting implementation concerns including how to provide “learning support”, supporting “learning difficulties”, addressing “learning needs”, obtaining adequate “resources”, and not least how to develop an SEN “curriculum and assessment” (Wong, 2016). Even if music teachers have to opportunity to take these courses, there would not be of much help for music teachers in music teaching. Thus, music teachers are facing challenges in teaching music in inclusive classrooms where there are increasing numbers of students with SEN.

Although the literature has consistently reported concerns amongst the teachers who are tasked with the implementation of this 'inclusive' policy (Morris & Chan, 2010; Cheung & Wong, 2012; Wong & Chik, 2015), there has been no research on the self-efficacy of primary music teachers' under Hong Kong's policy of inclusion – a gap this study seeks to address.

Why focus on teacher efficacy?

Focusing on teacher's self-efficacy is held useful not merely to predict who is (or is not) motivated, but to explain why. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy forms an early link in a causal chain of factors that determine behaviours. It is this early

positioning in a causal behaviours chain that invests understanding music teachers' self-efficacy with the potency of behavioral prediction. Bandura (1997) further identified that self-efficacy has four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states at the time of the behaviours. Given these sources, the concept of self-efficacy's potency grew, moving from not merely predicting behaviours but now empowering behavioral intervention.

Self-efficacy was originally understood as task or domain specific (e.g. career self-efficacy, see Batz & Klein, 1996; computer self-efficacy, see Paraskeva, Bouta, & Papagianni, 2008; and writing self-efficacy, see Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007) (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). The potent promise of self-efficacy, however, has been questioned when this theory is put into practice (Williams & Rhodes, 2016). For example, when the literature reports a respondent's saying "I can do ...", does this reflect or define that person's motivation? Reflecting this dilemma in the literature raises questions about just how meaningful are reports (e.g. by Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990) that teachers displaying a high sense of instructional efficacy spend more time helping students to study, while those with low sense of instructional efficacy spend more time on nonacademic activities? Similar tautology can be found in reports (e.g. by Guskey, 1984; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982) that teachers who display higher self-efficacy are found to be more devoted and stay longer in the teaching profession; that teachers with higher self-efficacy for using computers had less computer anxiety (Wagoner, 2015). Common to such self-efficacy findings is a high degree of predictability with a low understanding that informs behavioral change. Contemporary researchers coined the term Generalized self-efficacy (GSE) to describe rather a stable and broader expectation of one's abilities across various situations. This is a "situation-independent competence belief" (Scherbaum, Cohen-Charash, & Kern,

2006, p. 1048). GSE was found to be moderately positively to Social Cognitive variables (Luszczynska et al., 2005) and task specific efficacy mentioned above. Therefore, GSE could be adopted to measure teacher's efficacy generally since "self-efficacy influenced all the components of teachers' efficacy" (Khan, Fleva, & Qazi, 2015, p. 117).

In the field of music education, some self-efficacy studies convey the potential of an understanding that informs behavioral change. Among the quantitative studies, Vannatta-Hall (2010) shows how pre-service music teachers' self-efficacy influences their choice of music teaching activities which then has a causal effect on their students' music learning. Within the field of music pre-service training, Battersby and Cave (2014) advocate that music method courses address the beliefs and confidence (and hence self-efficacy) of student music-teachers; a causal intervention initially found to be positive (Han & Culp, 2016), with later findings proving negative (Lowe, Lummis & Morris, 2017), reflecting that successful behavioral interventions are not necessarily permanent. The impermanent nature of behavioral interventions is further illustrated by de Vries (2013) who shows that comments from parents, teachers and principals quickly supersede professional training in the shaping of in-service music teachers' self-efficacy. In the field of teaching students with SEN, there is little relevant research, though Chao and associates (2016, 2017) reported an increased self-efficacy of participants after completing an in-service course on teaching students with SEN. Given the absence of studies of the self-efficacy of primary music teachers' under Hong Kong's policy of inclusion, the following seeks to address this research gap.

Research Questions

Two research questions frame this study:

- (1) What is the perceived self-efficacy of Hong Kong primary music teachers in

inclusive music classrooms?

(2) Is self-efficacy impacted by age, teaching experience, training and workload?

Method

Sample size and data collection

Among the 455 government-funded primary schools (AY 2013-2014), 200 schools (43.4%) across all school districts, were randomly contacted by phone or email messages. A total of 94 schools, (i.e. 47% among those contacted schools) agreed to participate in initially enrolling 453 in-service music teachers. The number of music teachers in each school varies, ranging from 1 to 12. A total of 453 questionnaires were sent to these 94 schools. There were 309 valid questionnaires returned, making a response rate of 0.68. Notably, all respondents were teaching in schools that implement inclusive education – including the music classrooms. All respondents are native Chinese-language speakers. The lingua-franca of their classrooms and this research is accordingly Chinese-language.

Instrument, validity and reliability

The instrument selected for this study was the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale [GSE] (Jerusalem & Schwarze, 1992). This instrument assesses an individual's perceived self-efficacy. The GSE (Jerusalem & Schwarze, 1992) has successfully been employed to study the self-efficacy of subject-specific teachers, in the Sciences (Sorgo et al., 2017) and Music (e.g. Royston, 2013). The instrument selected for this study is the Chinese-language version (created by Zhang and Schwarzer, 1995) of the GSE. This Chinese-language version has both been used to measure the self-efficacy of Hong Kong teachers (Chan, 2004, 2008) and more recently, to display good reliability (Li & Kuang, 2010; Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai, & Yang, 2015). The selection of the Chinese-language version reflects the research context's lingua franca. Given that all respondents

are native Chinese language speakers, the use of alternative efficacy tests such as the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) by Sharma, Loreman, & Folin (2012) is not pertinent being unavailable in a tested Chinese-language format.

The degree of perceived self-efficacy is indicated by the summative score. The GSE Scale comprises a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from “not at all true” to “exactly true”. It revealed satisfactory internal consistency (α from .75 to .90) in Schwarzer (1993)’s psychometric study. Its Chinese-language version was created by Zhang and Schwarzer (1995), and used for measuring self-efficacy of Hong Kong teachers (Chan, 2004, 2008). The internal consistency reliability, Cronbach’s Alpha, based on the current sample was .91.

Data analysis

The data collected were entered into SPSS. Descriptive statistics report teachers’ responses for their perceived degree of each item of the GSE Scale. Normality and homogeneity of the data were assessed by skewness and kurtosis (Kim, 2013), and Levene Test (Carlson & Winqvist, 2013). No violation was found. Then, a series of one-way ANOVAs and Independent Sample *t*-tests were conducted to explore the impact of age, teaching experience, training and workload on the degree of perceived self-efficacy.

Results

Table 1 reports the general level of perceived self-efficacy of these primary music teachers teaching inclusive education in Hong Kong. Descriptive statistics of the GSE Scale are presented in percentage. It was found that a majority of participants rated “Moderately true” on half of the items, and “Hardly true” on the other half of the items. The mean scores of the level of general self-efficacy as measured by the GSE Scale range from 2.20 to 2.91, and the average mean is 2.55. This implies that respondents’ efficacy level is moderate.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

As shown in Table 2, no significant differences were found on the self-efficacy level with respect age ($F_{3, 305} = 1.494, p = .216$) and years of teaching experiences ($F_{3, 305} = .057, p = .98s$). In addition, the self-efficacy scores of the group regarding number of different trainings (from 1 to 4) did not differ significantly ($F_{3, 305} = 1.786, p = .150$). It implies that respondents' age, training and teaching experiences did not have a significant impact on their self-efficacy.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The results of independent t -tests are shown in Table 3. No significant differences of efficacy level was found regardless of whether music teachers had music as their major discipline ($M = 25.49, SD = 4.86; t(307) = -.002; p = 1.00$). It was found that teachers who received special education training have a higher level of efficacy ($M = 26.23, SE = 4.80; t(307) = 2.51; p = .013$) than those who did not have any training in special education ($M = 24.82, SD = 5.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.41; 95% CI: .30 to 2.52) was small (eta squared = .02).

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Table 4 shows the results of a series of independent t -tests for investigating teachers' workload on their efficacy level. No significant difference was found on the impact of workload on the efficacy level for teachers teaching music only ($M = 26.25; SD = 5.33$) compared with those teaching music plus other subjects ($M = 25.46; SD = 4.97; t(307) = .54; p = .59$ [two-tailed]). In addition, there was no significant difference found between the level of self-efficacy of teachers who were responsible for non-teaching activities ($M = 2.78; SD = 5.05$) and those who were not ($M = 24.71; SD = 4.73; t(307) = 1.68; p = .09$ [two tailed]).

There was a significant difference in stress level between those who were class

teachers ($t(307) = -2.15$; $p = .03$), and those who taught extra-curricular activities ($t(307) = -2.66$; $p = .008$). Those teachers who were not class teachers had a higher level of self-efficacy than their counterparts. The magnitude of differences in the means (mean difference = 1.33, 95% CI: -2.54 to .11) was small (eta squared = .01). Those teachers who were not responsible for extra-curricular activities had higher level of self-efficacy. The magnitude of difference in the means (mean difference = 3.28; 95% CI: -5.70 to -.80) was small (eta squared = .02).

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare the impact on respondents' efficacy levels of their teaching and non-teaching work-loads. Table 5 shows the difference between non-teaching ($F_{4, 304} = 1.587$, $p = .178$) and subject teaching ($F_{4, 304} = 1.412$, $p = .230$) on efficacy levels is not significant. Furthermore, comparing teachers' efficacy levels across various types of non-teaching duties, whether related to music or unrelated to music ($F_{3, 305} = 1.415$, $p = .238$) again shows no significant difference.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

Discussion

The following discussion considers respondents' general efficacy results, offers a categorization which then informs possible behavioral interventions.

Respondents' general efficacy

Providing an overview, results from this study's first research question -- *What is the perceived self-efficacy of Hong Kong primary music teachers in inclusive music classrooms?* – show that the respondents' general level of perceived self-efficacy is moderate.

Among the 10 items of the GSE instrument, a majority of the participants rated

“Moderately true” on five items and “Hardly true” on the other five items. The five items that the participants rated “Moderately true” are:

- I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough,
- I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort,
- I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities,
- When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions, and
- If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.

The above five items fall into the category of the participants’ personal domain – a domain which includes the participants’ beliefs, attitudes and self-knowledge of solving problems and coping with difficulties. In other words, the participants were quite confident about solving problems and coping with difficulties where the process and outcome only involve personal effort.

On the other hand, the remaining five items that the participants rated “Hardly true” are:

- If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want,
- It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals,
- I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events,
- Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations, and
- I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

These five items belong to the category of participants’ interaction with their external domain. This external domain includes “someone” along with the uncertainty of “unexpected events”, “unforeseen situations” and “whatever comes” that create feelings of insecurity and problems for the participants; such external factors challenge the participants’ ability to stick to their “aims” and “goals”, as well as undermining their sense of being “resourceful” enough to solve problems.

Drawing the above results together, these primary schools music teachers’ general level of perceived self-efficacy is moderate. Characterizing this efficacy-level is the

relationship between their personal and external domains. This relationship suggests a see-saw effect between their belief that through personal effort, they can solve problems and, in contrast, their struggle to come to grips with the uncertain contexts of their inclusive music classroom.

Respondents' general efficacy: behavioral interventions

Informed by the above categorization it is possible to suggest behavioral interventions for these respondents' moderate level of efficacy – characterized as a 'see-saw' between competing personal and external domains. Addressing this 'see-saw' between domains one possible behavioral intervention could involve respondents engaging with professional-sharing, where the positive efficacy of respondents' individual personal domains could be nurtured, while the negative impact of their external domain is mitigated by this access to peer-support. To enrich this 'personal-sharing', current Education Bureau in-service professional development courses for inclusive teaching could be expanded – from supporting exclusively core-subjects to be inclusive of all primary school subjects, including music.

Impact of specific factors

Having discussed, above, these respondents' general efficacy results, the following now considers the impact on these results of specific factors and how the context defines this impact and informs possible appropriate behavioral interventions. For clarity, these factors are clustered under three headings: (1) the impact of specific factors compared with others' findings, (2) the impact of primary schools' human resource management, and (3) the impact of stress.

Impact of specific factors: comparison with others' findings. Results from this study's second research question -- *Is self-efficacy impacted by age, teaching experience, training and workload?* – show no significant difference neither in terms of age,

teaching experience nor teacher education training. This echoes the findings of Fisher and Rose (2011) that age, teaching experience and workload do not have any effect on primary music teachers' self-efficacy level, but counter to the findings of Chan (2008) that teaching experience impacts on the self-efficacy of non-music teachers. This counter finding (Chan, 2008) may reflect a difference between music and non-music teachers, a phenomenon beyond the scope of this study but one which merits further investigation.

In the literature on music teachers, previous studies report a causal effect between music education courses and music teachers' self-efficacy (Vannatta-Hall, 2010; Han & Culp, 2016; Fisher & Rose, 2011; Lowe et al., 2017; Garvis, 2013). In contrast, this study has a counter-finding – that respondents' training in music does not have a significant impact on their efficacy levels of teaching in inclusive music classrooms (Table 2). To explain why, requires an understanding of the Hong Kong context, specifically here of primary schools' human resource management.

Human resource management

As mentioned previously, in addition to the economic human resource management in Hong Kong primary schools where school principals usually expect teachers to teach at least two subjects, the quality assurance system for judging the accountability of schools under the current education reform may have caused the school principals to place more emphasis on the learning outcomes of core subjects which indirectly becomes a measurement vital to school principals' tenure (Hallinger & Ko, 2015). Accordingly, school principals would prefer to hire teachers qualified to teach a core-subject along with some training in musical instruments. It is this human resource management practice, under which music-teacher employment requires no mandatory music teacher training, that explains why these respondents' report that

training in music does not have a significant impact on their efficacy levels of teaching in inclusive music classroom.

The finding that music teachers' efficacy is not significantly affected by teaching duties (Table 4) is similarly to be understood within the context of Hong Kong's primary school human resource management. To illustrate: where a school principal hires a music teacher solely to teach music, the preference is for a music-major; where the requirement is to teach music in addition to other subjects, the preference is for a specialized teacher of a core subject combined with training in music instruments, or for a music-major who also holds a qualification to teach a core subject. Whichever permutation is adopted, the incumbent teacher will be proficient in music. Thus, the duty of teaching only music or teaching music plus other subjects does not significantly impact on respondents' efficacy levels.

Human resource management: behavioral interventions. Having explicated above about the role of primary-school human resource management, what behavioral interventions can here be suggested? The target of such interventions could be to change current perceptions of primary school 'music'.

Interventions to change school principals' and the Education Bureau's perception involve them seeing added value in music classrooms having a fully trained music teachers. In this external domain several interventions may help: prestige multi-school competitions may be re-framed to reward not only individual excellence but also qualitative evidence of a broadening school-based musical participation and enhancement of music learning outcomes according to the objectives of the Music Curriculum Guide, which could be achieved through the application of effective music pedagogy; pre-service teacher training programs may be permitted to include a combined teaching qualification in Music and a core subject (English, Chinese or

Mathematics); in-service music pedagogy training could refresh and broaden existing music-teachers current expertise. Interventions to change these music-teachers' perceptions may involve enhancement of their personal domain through peer-sharing, co-operative networks, etc., to dilute classroom-isolation and enhance a sense of shared growth and music's potential central role in the development of school ethos.

The impact of stress

This study's findings show that neither non-teaching duties nor workload (Tables 4 & 5) significantly impact on the efficacy level of these music teachers. Initially this is to be explained within the context of primary schools' human resource management. To explain: school principals usually assign duties according to the individual teacher's professional strengths. Where these duties involve non-teaching activities, e.g. student affairs or school administration, they are sought after as a pathway to promotion. Similarly, long working hours has been an on-going Hong Kong issue that has come to be regarded as a professional norm (Ip, 2016). Accordingly neither non-teaching duties, whether related or not to music, nor long working hours fail to impact significantly on respondents' efficacy. In this context, these non-teaching duties and workload are perceived as positive stressors.

Given this positive perception, it may seem irrelevant to suggest behavioral interventions. Stress as a short-term stimulus can be good, addictive or long-term stress however may not be. A cautionary behavioral intervention would have the individual objectify their stress-condition in terms of its outcome.

In contrast , two duties that do significantly impact on respondents' efficacy levels are 'taking up the duty of a class teacher' and 'coaching extra-curricular activities' (Table 4), both perceived here as a negative stressors. The negative stress for a class teacher lies in carrying responsibility for a group (n= 30) of students in terms of their academic

and personal development. Contacting and responding to their parents is reported as being burdensome incurring both loss of a private life and increased work stress (Zhao, 2018). Similarly extra-curricular activities, e.g. preparing students for music competitions and performances, are reported to be a major role stress for school music teachers (Scheib, 2003). This latter stress-level is induced not only by the increased professional responsibility for ones students, but also from the expectations of the students' parents and family and increasingly from the prestige ambitions of school principals. An extra-curricular success in one academic year readily becomes the next year's minimal benchmark – in this context, success can readily breed stress and negatively impact efficacy.

The impact of stress: behavioral interventions. Having argued that underpinning the two duties that significantly impact on respondents' efficacy levels is induced stress, behavioral interventions may target stress-reduction – for class-teachers by exchanging the burden of self-responsibility for a shared responsibility; for music teachers involved in 'coaching' to exchange their focus on outcomes for a celebration of participation.

Conclusion

This study seeks to shed light on the impact of the relegation of music as a non-core subject in the primary curriculum on practice. Hong Kong primary music teachers in inclusive classrooms first by understanding their perceived self-efficacy level and then, by investigating this level's underpinnings, to formulate possible behavioral interventions.

The study's findings, from Hong Kong primary music teachers in inclusive music classrooms, show their perceived self-efficacy is moderate. This 'moderate' level characterized as a see-saw relationship between their personal and external domains.

Addressing this finding, a suggested behavioral intervention comprises music-teachers' professional-sharing being further enriched if current Education Bureau in-service SEN courses became inclusive of all primary school subjects, including music.

Specific factors that underpin these respondents 'moderate' self-efficacy are then identified as forming two clusters: human resource management and stress, with possible behavioral interventions for these being outlined.

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