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Investigating Factors Affecting the Completion of EFL Teachers' Graduate Studies from Social Cognitive Perspectives

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Abstract
Graduate studies have been proven to be a significant teacher's professional learning. Pursuing graduate studies helps teachers strengthen their professional growth, develop teaching practices, and improve students' learning experiences. Previous studies have shed light on internal and external factors encouraging teachers to embark on their graduate studies, leaving a knowledge gap in comprehending critical factors impacting the completion of such studies. Drawing upon the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989), this multiple case study aims to address this gap by examining factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in an English language teaching master's program. Data were qualitatively collected through semi-structured interviews with ten purposefully selected teachers graduating from this program. Subsequently, data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed two categories of influences, personal and contextual factors. On a personal level, intrinsic motivation, a positive attitude, and self-efficacy enabled participants to persist through academic challenges. Contextual factors included professional, institutional, and familial assistance that ignited their inner resilience and sustained their commitment to learning. Notably, most participants identified the former as more decisive in their graduate study completion than the latter. Critically, these findings align well with Bandura's theory, emphasizing the dynamic interconnection among personal attributes, environmental conditions, and academic behaviors. Understanding these influencing factors is essential for minimizing drop-out rates and maximizing support to these teachers. This research ended with pedagogical implications for university program managers, teacher educators, and EFL teachers pursuing graduate studies.
Keywords: Affecting factors, case study, EFL teachers, graduate studies, graduate study completion, social cognitive perspectives, teacher professional learning, professional development
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Introduction

Teachers' professional learning (TPL) is widely acknowledged as a prominent element for their continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers partake in many TPL-related activities to gain needed academic knowledge and boost instructional effectiveness (Akiba, 2012). In this view, teachers strengthen their professional growth and contribute greatly to students' learning progress (Mostafa, 2021). Among different TPL forms, teachers choose to pursue graduate studies (Korucu-Kis & Demir, 2019). Graduate studies are seen as a formal form of TPL and a process of continuous studying and reflecting. Furthermore, it facilitates teachers to continuously undergo various teaching-related activities, such as collaborating with other academics and critically analyzing their teaching practices in an intensive professional environment (Sevim & Akın, 2021). Graduate studies also require them to be involved in educational research engagement. Conducting educational research helps teachers come up with goal-driven strategies for their current classroom challenges and informs pedagogical implications to other stakeholders (Ngo et al., 2023). Therefore, graduate studies are viewed as a critical form of professional needs for TPL, which strengthens their professional development. This endeavor, in turn, fosters high-quality professional practices and enhances the quality of teaching and learning.

In recent decades, since the official participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), Vietnam invested significant effort in ensuring the continuous development of Vietnamese education in every field, particularly education (Nguyen, 2015). In education, especially teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), Vietnam aims to enhance its citizens' English proficiency as a foreign language. The National Foreign Languages Project was accepted to facilitate this long-term goal. Moreover, in 2018, a general reform in education was introduced, through which English language teaching transferred from knowledge-based to learners' communicative competence-based teaching (Trinh et al., 2024). The quality and sustainable development of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers is a critical prerequisite to achieving these goals. As a result of the reforms, EFL teachers' CPD-related activities prioritize developing teachers' English language proficiency, TELT-related pedagogy, and educational research competencies. Besides providing EFL teachers with necessary CPD-related activities, institutional leaders actively encourage EFL teachers to pursue their graduate studies in TEFL (Le & Trinh, 2021). More significantly, EFL teachers who recognize the importance of personal and professional development through TPL also independently embark on graduate studies.

Lately, much research has shed light on factors motivating EFL teachers to pursue their graduate studies and their fear of failure in these studies (Le & Trinh, 2021). Little research aims to comprehend what factors affect the completion of graduate studies among this teacher population. This multiple case study, grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), aimed to address this research gap. The research aim was to examine factors affecting the completion of a master's program in TEFL of EFL teachers. Moreover, it is expected to identify the factors most affecting their completion. It is crucial to consider these factors because there is a close connection between EFL teachers' performance while pursuing a master's program in TEFL programs and the caliber of English language instruction they will deliver as master's teachers. A thorough grasp of these factors can guide the adjustment and modification of this program and, ultimately, the advancement in language instruction of EFL teachers in the local region.

Literature Review

Significance of Graduate Studies

Teachers actively participate in different professional development forms to catch up with educational trends, improve pedagogical knowledge, and address classroom challenges more effectively (Viáfara & Largo, 2018). Among these forms, graduate studies are regarded as a formal form that aims to improve teachers' professional practices through doing educational research. The first critical element in graduate studies is the emphasis on teachers' beliefs in their professional practices (Warren et al., 2010). Graduate studies allow teachers to reflect on teaching practices and contribute to meaningful changes. These changes further allow them to integrate their reflective practices in graduate courses to draw out professional trajectories and foster a community of practice in their institution (Vaughan & Burnaford, 2016). Secondly, graduate studies aim to improve teachers' professional practices through research (Nana & Jing, 2017). Research competence is regarded as one of the most crucial teacher qualities. Improved research competence supports teachers in comprehending the underlying causes of their classroom challenges (Heng et al., 2020). Ultimately, research gives them evidence-based findings to address these challenges best. Moreover, research in graduate studies aims to transform teachers into competent, critical, analytical, and innovative teacher-researchers.

Graduate Studies in Vietnam

Graduate studies in Vietnam are regarded as a formal form of Vietnamese teachers' professional learning. They are based on that of the former Soviet Union patterns (Kelly, 2000). Vietnamese graduate studies are available some majors (Tran, 2013). With emergent interests in Western economic methods along with the context of internationalization, Vietnamese graduate education has become more flexible in some disciplines (Le & Trinh, 2021). In education, graduate studies emphasize the interconnection between teachers' teaching and academic research. In TEFL, since the open-door policy in 1986, graduate studies have experienced a period of strong development with an expansion in the number of programs (Nguyen et al., 2020). Especially, teachers embarking on master's pursuit reflect the increasing demand for high-quality EFL teachers. As Phan et al. (2025) argued, "among many CPD-related activities, EFL teachers pursue a master's degree through which they can improve their professional practices through research engagement" (p. 1782). These master's programs focus on not only training teachers' teaching methodology but also educational research competencies. Upon the completion of these programs, EFL teachers are expected to become critical thinkers and global citizens. Critically, they "transform themselves into teacher-researchers and change agents" (Phan et al., 2025, p. 1782).

Factors Affecting the Completion of EFL Teachers' Graduate Studies in TEFL

The completion of teachers' graduate studies is affected by various factors. These factors can be classified into personal and environmental influences (Le & Trinh, 2021; Rungduin & Miranda, 2018; Pinar et al., 2021).

Regarding personal influences, intrinsic motivation significantly contributes to teachers' completion of graduate studies (Kudaibergenov & Lee, 2024). Amoah and Yeboah (2021) conceptualized motivation as personal motives alongside their attitude, direction, persistence, and the quality of goal-directed behaviors to "to seek out intellectual and experiential novelty" (p. 59). Furthermore, motivation explains why people set life goals and how well they act to achieve these goals (Lin et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2024). This internal force sustains teachers' commitment via

the learning challenges of graduate programs. Embarking on graduate studies helps them map a clear career advancement and expertise development path. Alongside motivation, self-efficacy is regarded as a stand-out contributor to teachers' success in professional development training (Pinar et al., 2021). Bandura (1989) considered self-efficacy as people's belief in their abilities to perform a particular task successfully. Together with motivation, self-efficacy is one of the most prominent predictors of how effectively people perform in their endeavors. Teachers with high levels of personal motivation might exhibit greater self-efficacy in their learning endeavors. These factors critically influence teachers' efforts to complete graduate studies.

In addition to personal factors, environmental factors critically shape teachers' completion of their graduate studies (Pinar et al., 2021). Firstly, crucial assistance from teacher educators and classmates provides teachers with professional academic guidance. Additionally, these stakeholders instill in teachers a sense of collaborative community and offer individualized strategies for teachers to deal with their academic challenges (König et al., 2024). Secondly, institutional support includes access to research resources, flexible curricula, and learning advising systems (Le & Trinh, 2021). These provisions help teachers mitigate academic barriers and promote an inclusive culture with teachers' academic satisfaction. Finally, familial support offers emotional encouragement and ignites teachers' emotional resilience (Krulatz et al., 2024). Collectively, these environmental factors create a supportive ecosystem that boosts teachers' motivation and self-efficacy, enabling them to persist through the high demands of graduate programs and achieve their professional goals.

Little research has been conducted concerning the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in Vietnamese contexts. Le and Trinh (2021) regarded the fear of failure as a contributor to teachers' participation in TPL-related activities. They concluded that participants' fear encompassed the feeling that their TEFL qualifications were inadequate. Participants were worried about job loss, lack of opportunities to advance their education, and loss of CPD opportunities due to repetitive teaching tasks. Additionally, a mid-career crisis, negative impacts of lacking role models, insufficient support from colleagues, and low self-confidence were seen as fear-driven motivations promoting participants to pursue graduate studies.

Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989)

The social cognitive theory (henceforth called SCT) (Bandura, 1989) was implemented as the theoretical framework for this research. Bandura (1989) assumes that people's competence can be physically and psychologically different from one another because of the environment and social practices influencing their development. Notably, the SCT values the inter-directional influence among three elements: people, the environment, and their behaviors. Afterward, Bandura (1989) introduced a triadic reciprocal causation to explain how people, the environment, and their behaviors continuously influence people's development (see Figure 1). Interconnected relationships between people and people's behaviors reflect their beliefs and actions, which affect each other. In contrast, perceptual systems are changed because of their behavioral experiences. Therefore, they also react differently to the contextual environment, with the impact of their physiological characteristics. Likewise, people's social reactions depend heavily on their social status and surroundings. The environment's impact on individuals must be transformed into actual impacts, which rely on their behaviors (Bandura, 1989).

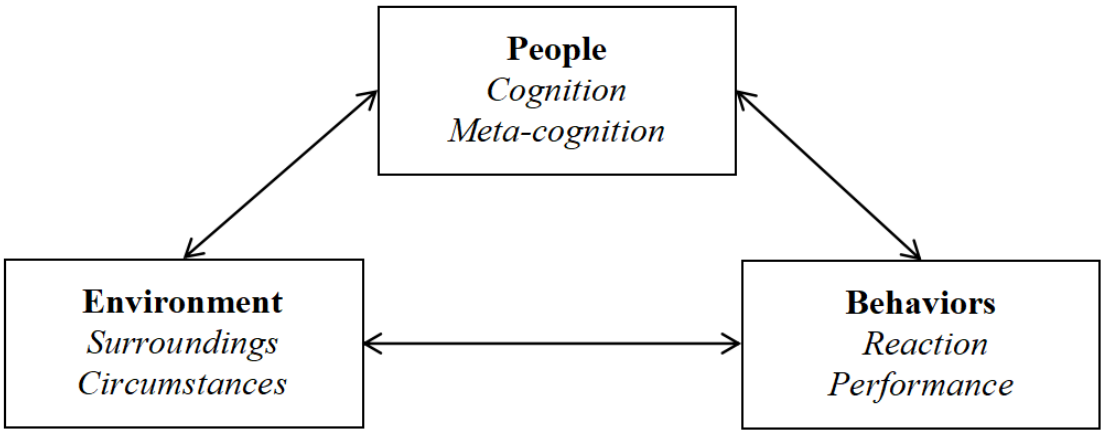


Figure 1. A triadic reciprocal causation in the SCT (Bandura, 1989)

Alongside these aspects, self-efficacy is another critical part in the SCT. It is conceptualized as the degree to which people can perform their behaviors based on prior experiences, self-assessment, and reflection. Their self-efficacy originates from their performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological or emotional states. As a result, people's self-efficacy also plays a crucial role in altering their behavioral choices. In this research, utilizing the SCT aligned well with the research aim. It served to shed light on how personal and contextual factors affected their academia and completion of graduate studies, specifically a master's program in TEFL. To fulfill this gap, this research sought to answer the following research questions.

What factors affect the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in a TEFL master's program?

Methods

Research design

The qualitative approach is best suited to this research's aim to shed light on factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in TEFL. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) mentioned that the qualitative approach "involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). This approach allows this research to explore the participants' experiences and perspectives in-depth. In particular, a multiple case study was carried out to achieve this research's aim. According to Yin (2014), multiple case studies involve the in-depth analysis of multiple cases in a specific circumstance to comprehend insights into a phenomenon of interest. Researchers can capture various participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights by examining multiple cases.

Research Context and Participants

The current research explored factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies, particularly a master's program in TEFL. This program is offered at a prominent public university located in Mekong Delta, Vietnam. This program usually lasts two years and is comprised of 60 credits. Each credit is defined by fifteen 50-minute sessions of teacher educators' theoretical instruction and forty-five 50-minute master's learners' self-regulated learning and self-

organized activities. Furthermore, it is characterized as research-oriented and requires learners to be involved in varied research-related activities to complete it. To enroll in this program, learners have to sit an entrance exam through which they show their competitive English language proficiency and TEFL-related knowledge. After master's learners finish all coursework, they must complete and defend their graduation thesis before a professional evaluation committee. Those graduating from this master's program wish to enhance their pedagogical knowledge, better competence in resolving TEFL-related problems, educational research competence, and 21st century skills of global citizens.

The purposive sampling technique was implemented to recruit participants for this research. This technique provided a more comprehensive understanding of a group of individuals (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Teachers who had graduated with a master's degree in TEFL were selected as research participants. They originated from different academic backgrounds and achieved specific personal and professional development successes during their master's pursuit. Details of the participant teachers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Research participants' demographic information*

Participant	Gender	Master's completion year	Undergraduate degree	Workplace
1	Male	2023	TEFL	English center
2	Male	2023	TEFL	High school
3	Female	2023	TEFL	High school
4	Female	2023	EFL-majored studies	English center
5	Female	2024	TEFL	High school
6	Male	2023	TEFL	High school
7	Female	2023	EFL-majored studies	English center
8	Female	2023	TEFL	High school
9	Female	2024	EFL-majored studies	High school
10	Male	2024	EFL-majored studies	High school

Instruments and Procedures

Data was qualitatively collected via semi-structured interviews with all participants. This interview format was employed as it facilitates natural interviewer-interviewee conversations and their adaptability during the interview process (Creswell, 2013). The interviewer and interviewees used Vietnamese to exchange ideas during the interview process. In the interviews, each interviewee was asked a set of open-ended questions. This question type allows for an in-depth discussion to clear misunderstandings and encourages collaboration between interviewers and interviewees. Interview questions focused on exploring interviewees' perceptions regarding factors influencing their completion on a master's program in TEFL.

Before the interviews, interviewees were provided with a short explanation of the aim of this research. They were informed that their responses were recorded and assured that the recorded files would be kept confidential and used only for this research's analysis. After the interviews, the recorded files were transcribed into textual forms. These forms were subsequently translated into English. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. This analysis process involved coding the data, organizing codes into themes, and interpreting the findings. Initial codes were generated based on the interview questions, and additional codes emerged from the data through an iterative process of reading and re-reading interview transcripts. Codes were grouped into themes that represented factors influencing the master's completion of graduate studies in TEFL. The next step involved interpreting the findings concerning the research questions. The

results were finally reported descriptively and thematically, supported by direct quotations from the transcripts to illustrate key findings.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Participants who participated in this research had the right to withdraw without subsequent consequences. Before the interviews, they were informed about the research's aim, procedures, risks, and benefits. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. Two critical strategies were used to ensure this research's trustworthiness. First and foremost, after each interview, interview transcripts were returned to each participant for their comments and feedback. Secondly, participants from various professional and academic backgrounds were recruited to triangulate the collected data.

Results

This research investigated factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in TEFL. Two themes emerged in the thematic analysis: personal factors and contextual factors.

Personal factors

Individual motivation

All participants emphasized the significance of their personal motivation to complete their master's degree in TEFL. The motivation sources stemmed from the desire to enhance their teaching expertise and research competencies.

> Personal motivation stems from my passion for teaching and desire to enhance my research competencies as an ELT teacher-researcher. This passion has inspired me to embrace every learning opportunity, whether exploring innovative teaching methodologies, conducting in-depth academic research, or engaging in professional development activities. Motivation has also given me the resilience to persevere during moments of difficulty, such as managing tight deadlines or navigating complex academic concepts. (Participant 2)

> The first factor is my motivation. Before taking the course, I desired to widen my knowledge in teaching so that I could teach well and be paid a higher salary. Moreover, this intrinsic motivation has kept me committed to the theoretical and practical aspects of English Language Teaching. It facilitated my exploration of innovative teaching methods and strategies and the ways to write and conduct my thesis. (Participant 3)

Positive attitude

Alongside their motivation, participants showed a consistent positive attitude towards their master's learning. Even though they faced different obstacles in their master's pursuit, they were resilient enough to figure out suitable strategies to overcome them.

> The first factor to graduating from my master's program on time was maintaining a clear understanding and positive attitude towards my learning goals and staying committed throughout the course. During moments of being overwhelmed with class assignments and personal work, reflecting on my initial objectives helped me regain focus and calmly tackle each challenge. (Participant 1)

> First and foremost, personal patience and resilience have been essential to my master's journey. Completing a master's degree entails handling complex topics and projects, frequently requiring endurance and a calm, steady approach to overcome obstacles and disappointments. I have always tried to maintain a positive attitude towards my learning so that I could overcome these difficulties. (Participant 5)

Self-efficacy

Participants evaluated their self-efficacy as one of the most critical factors contributing to their master's program completion. Self-efficacy stemmed from themselves and the knowledge they gained from stakeholders.

> Upon completing my master's program, I had to thank myself immensely. While I enrolled in this program, with my academic background, I could learn better and quickly and collaborate effectively with my teammates. I felt confident about my ability and problem-solving skills. Moreover, when I was conducting my thesis for graduation, I felt confident and strong enough to finish it because of the research knowledge I learned from my lecturers and supervisor. (Participant 6)
>
> I would have dropped out of the program if I had not been confident in my learning ability. Self-confidence was very critical to me during this journey. My beloved father has taught me that I had better do 100% of my efforts whenever I do things. Moreover, despite facing many personal problems and learning challenges, I always believed in myself and held my true confidence in myself. I think that was one of the reasons motivating me to complete this master's program. (Participant 7)

Environmental factors

Professional support

Participants acknowledged the influence of teacher educators on their academic progress. They stated that the quality and research competences of teacher educators shaped their learning outcomes and nurtured their emotional maturity.

> I must thank the lecturers I have had the privilege to learn from during the master's program. As a EFL teacher pursuing graduate studies, I deepened my professional knowledge through their expertise. I gained valuable insights into teaching methods, effective communication, and how to connect with students. Their dedication reignited my passion for teaching and made it more potent than ever. (Participant 8)
>
> I appreciate all the well-qualified lecturers at this university. They have considerably influenced my success in my master's course. They have been good models for me to learn. They brought me positive energy in learning and applied what I had learned in my public high school. Although I sometimes was under pressure in studying with the deadline, I never lost my heart thanks to the teaching methods of my teachers during the master's coursework. (Participant 9)

Participant cherished the opportunities to collaborate with their classmates in their learning and research activities. Working with groups of EFL teachers with different academic backgrounds helped participants become more knowledgeable in the field.

> My classmates' support subsequently plays a very critical role. Their feedback and insights provided valuable perspectives that guide my improvement. Working with different types of people during our research or learning projects changed my perceptions of collaborative learning. I must acknowledge the necessity of working together during a master's journey to achieve the ultimate learning outcomes. (Participant 3)
>
> Furthermore, peer collaboration has been significant and has enriched my learning experience. I engaged in discussions and group work with my fellows in the master's class, who contributed to my coursework and thesis with constant proofreading, generous sharing

> of knowledge, and invaluable feedback. Their support encouraged me to complete my final assignments and thesis on time. (Participant 8)

Institutional support

Learning settings, facilities, curriculum, and research materials granted by the university greatly affected how participants experienced their master's journey and established their completion on the program.

> The university's access to quality resources, including academic journals and teaching materials, has been crucial. The file containing links to access reputable article sites for graduate students is updated and sent regularly to students' emails at the learning resource center. These resources have supported my coursework and thesis writing. (Participant 2)
>
> Following my teachers' support, there are a huge amount of learning and research activities (how to learn, what to learn, whom to learn with, where to find the learning resource…) in the syllabus of my program built the road to my successful academic performance. Thanks to my active participation in these activities, I recognized my weaknesses and how to cope with them effectively. (Participant 5)

Familial support

In addition to professional collaboration, participants mentioned the crucial roles of their families in reigniting their emotional resilience. Although participants faced many life obstacles, their families' mental and financial assistance encouraged them to move forward.

> My family also contributed greatly to my success during my master's journey. Their endless love, unconditional support, positive encouragement, loving care, and sympathy made me try harder in my journey. Although I had to move to this city to learn and work alone, their timely encouragement ignited my motivation even when I felt disappointed about my learning results. (Participant 1)
>
> Last, my family greatly supported me in finance and spirit during the course. I would not have concentrated on my studies if I had had problems with finance. My family also encouraged me a lot when I faced problems, which made me feel better and stronger again after difficulties. (Participant 10)

Between personal and environmental factors: Which are more influential?

When asked about the most significant factor affecting their success in master's learning, participants indicated the learner-related factor. They themselves were the most significant contributors to the completion on their master's pursuit.

> My personal factor is the most significant, as having a strong sense of purpose and commitment was the foundation that allowed me to benefit from the other factors fully. With a clear direction, I could stay focused even during challenging times. When faced with overwhelming assignments or personal struggles, my goals reminded me why I started and motivated me to keep moving forward. They helped me stay on track so that I could make the most of the support I received from stakeholders. (Participant 7)
>
> Among these factors, overcoming adversity is the most significant contributor to my success. It is through facing and overcoming difficulties that I could develop a strong character and a strong work ethic. Adversity pushes me to discover my strengths, refine my goals, and grow a clear mindset focused on growth and learning. This ability to rise above challenges not only aids my academic pursuits but also prepares me for the future beyond my master's course. (Participant 10)

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Discussion

This research investigated the factors influencing the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in a master's program in TEFL. Findings indicated that two significant factors affected their completion: personal and environmental. Participants, their surroundings, and their academic endeavors were interconnected, contributing to their successful completion of the master's program in TEFL. These findings reflected Bandura's (1989) triadic reciprocal causation. In the research, this causation explained how participants' self-efficacy is formed by themselves, their environment, and their academic endeavors. These elements collectively contributed to their completion of a master's degree in TEFL (see Figure 2).

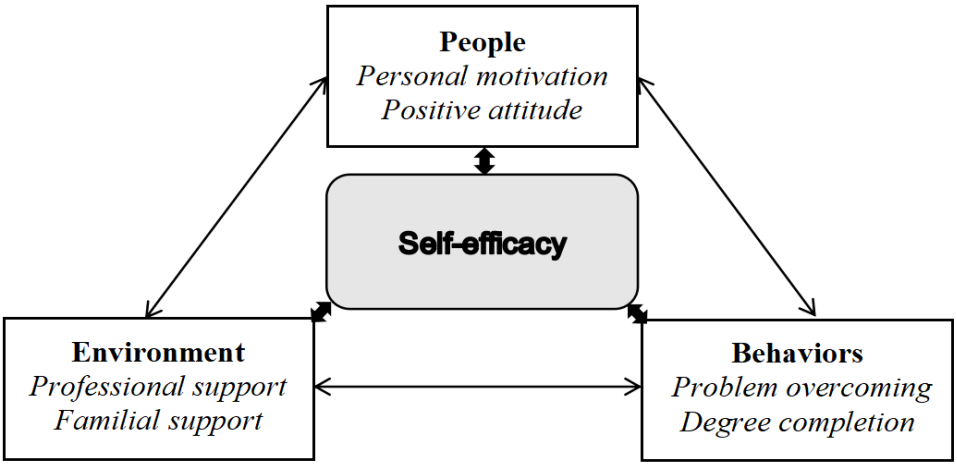


Figure 2. Factors affecting EFL teachers' completion of a master's pursuit in TEFL

As Bandura (1989) assumed, people's attributes, such as intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes, are perceived to be the foundation for self-efficacy. As self-efficacy strengthens, it influences people's motivation and attitudes toward their learning. This finding aligns with Rungduin & Miranda (2018), who emphasized that their motivation and highly positive attitudes help participants overcome their learning difficulties and complete their master's pursuit. Additionally, it overlaps with the findings of Pinar et al. (2021), who affirmed that the more motivated and self-efficient teachers are, the harder they strive for academic excellence. In the context of the Mekong Delta, teachers' personal motivation is driven by the desire to escape poverty and develop their professional careers. They regard a master's degree as an opportunity to improve their expertise and professional development. Bandura (1989) subsequently argued that the environment interacts with people and creates favorable conditions for forming their self-efficacy. As Pinar et al. (2021) and Le and Trinh (2021) confirmed, professional support from teacher educators and colleagues is valued as core in helping teachers overcome academic barriers. Moreover, participants received significant support from their families, which enhanced their emotional resilience and maintained their perseverance in learning. Unlike in Western countries, where personal independence is prioritized, Vietnamese people often receive financial and spiritual support from their families. Parents care about material needs and motivate children to study peacefully. This kind of support establishes an advantage for participants whenever they face academic obstacles and professional pressures. The eventual critical element is people's behavior. It refers to a direct result of the interaction between people and the environment (Bandura, 1989). Participants live in the Mekong Delta and grow up in challenging economic conditions. These living conditions force them to persevere and be creative and analytical in overcoming academic

challenges such as lack of time, finances, or academic resources and facilities. Participating in collaborative academic groups and seeking professional assistance exemplify how self-efficacy motivates them to act. Bandura (1989) mentioned that each small successful behavior strengthens people's self-efficacy. In a Vietnamese context, Le and Trinh (2021) also evaluated that teachers often act based on fear of failure, such as losing career opportunities and feeling that their current level is insufficient to meet the requirements of teaching as a profession. This fear, combined with motivation and environment, motivates them to act more persistently to complete their master's pursuit. Interestingly, participants reported that their personal factors were the ultimate determinants of their success in completing their master's pursuit. While external assistance provided essential resources, participants' intrinsic motivation, positive attitude, and self-efficacy helped them achieve their academic goals. The emphasis on individual self-efficacy embodies that although a supportive environment plays a critical role, it is the strength of personal motivation and self-resilience that authentically propels them towards completing their graduate studies.

Conclusions and Implications

This research sought to examine factors that affected the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in TEFL within a Vietnamese context. External and contextual factors significantly led to their successful completion. Among these factors, participants reported that their personal factors played the most significant role in this endeavor. In line with SCT's assumption, participants' personal factors, such as their self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and positive attitude, were crucial to their persistence and success in completing graduate studies.

Based on the results of this research, several pedagogical implications emerged for university program managers, teacher educators, and master's learners. First, the university program managers should organize more teaching-research training activities, webinars, and conferences to satisfy master's learners' professional needs. Moreover, they offer more supportive systems to improve learners' motivation and resilience to complete their program. It is also essential to inform teacher educators of learners' needs so that they are better able to gain an in-depth comprehension of their learners. Consequently, teacher educators can adjust their teaching approaches and the program's curriculum and syllabus to establish constructive alignment and quality of teaching and learning. Lastly, EFL teachers should reconsider the roles of individual and contextual contributors affecting their graduate study completion. Furthermore, they can attend professional development activities more actively to continuously update their pedagogical knowledge and research competence in order to achieve the output standard of their master's program.

Some methodological implications are subsequently drawn out for other researchers. Future research should collect quantitative data from a larger sample of participants and combine it with qualitative data to provide a more in-depth comprehension of factors affecting EFL teachers' completion of graduate studies. Moreover, those interested in teachers' CPD can investigate how EFL teachers map out their future professional trajectories alongside their agency and identity. Exploring how the completion of a master's degree benefits EFL teachers upon coming back to their workplace would be a worthy area for future research.

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