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Review

Self-efficacy as a predictor of commitment to the teaching profession: A meta-analysis



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ABSTRACT

This meta-analysis examined research on the effects of preservice and inservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs on commitment to the teaching profession. Unlike previous studies on self-efficacy and commitment, this review systematically examines the effects found within the literature and highlights important theoretical and methodological issues. A total of 33 qualified studies were included in the final analysis, including 16,122 preservice and inservice teachers. Findings suggest that preservice and inservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence their commitment to the teaching profession ($ES = +0.32$). However, these effects vary based upon the conceptual accuracy of the self-efficacy measure and the origin of data. Conceptually accurate self-efficacy measures resulted in significantly higher effect sizes. Additionally, the specificity of questionnaire items and conceptual accuracy of the self-efficacy measure positively predicted the relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and commitment to teaching. Implications for the measurement of self-efficacy and interpretation of preservice and inservice teacher self-efficacy beliefs are presented.

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1. Introduction

The commitment that preservice and inservice teachers have to enter and remain in the teaching profession has been a construct of great interest among teacher educators (Chesnut & Cullen, 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Schlechty & Vance, 1981). Teacher education programs and professional development training prepare future and current educators to meet the needs of their students through a variety of mastery and vicarious experiences (e.g., Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). While much of this effort on the part of teacher educators and professional development specialists is rewarded with improved teacher performance, over half of those who become teachers end up leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2003; Tait, 2008; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). This attrition is especially prevalent in urban schools, characterized by a high poverty, high minority student population (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011).

Throughout the years, researchers have attempted to quantify (e.g., track, measure) teacher attrition and explore the underlying reasons for teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession. The decisions teachers make regarding entrance into the profession, remaining in the profession, and leaving the profession have been suggested to originate from the direct and indirect influence of occupation-related beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations), interests, and distal and proximal choice goals (Brown & Lent, 2006; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Siwatu & Chesnut, 2014). One of the most controversial factors mentioned has been self-efficacy. While most teacher self-efficacy researchers believe that self-efficacy beliefs can predict, to a large extent, an individual's behaviors and performances (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997, 2006; Klassen, 2010; Klassen & Chiu, 2010, 2011; Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Schunk & Usher, 2011; Usher, 2009; Usher & Pajares, 2006a, 2006b, 2008), some have failed to observe that connection (Chapman, 1984; Friedman, 2003). Bandura (1997, 2006) and Bong (2006) have suggested that this lack of connection is due to weaknesses in the accuracy of the self-efficacy measures, the specificity of the items, and the alignment of the prompted behaviors with the actual outcome measures.

Prior studies that have investigated the psychometric properties of the relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and commitment have suggested that increased variability in the self-efficacy scale provides greater explanatory potential for the variation in commitment responses (e.g., Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante, 2001). Additionally, the level of specificity of the self-efficacy items has also been found to increase the explained variability in certain outcomes. While the field has grown substantially and we as researchers have been able to learn quite a bit about the measurement of self-efficacy beliefs, some of the arguments posed about the characteristics of self-efficacy measures and their problems remain theoretical. These theoretical arguments provide false comfort when attempting to interpret self-efficacy measures aimed at improving teacher education and development.

1.1. Teacher self-efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy has come to be one of the most commonly examined factors believed to influence preservice and inservice teacher commitment, burnout, student achievement, and willingness to adopt and implement reform efforts (Chesnut & Cullen, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, 2007; Wheatley, 2000, 2002; Woolfolk Hoy & Davis, 2006). In his seminal work, Bandura defined self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In essence, self-efficacy is an individual's belief about what he or she can do successfully (e.g., Bong, 2006). In regard to teaching, Dellinger, Bobbett, Olivier, and Ellett defined teacher self-efficacy as "individual's beliefs in their capabilities to perform specific teaching tasks at a specified level of quality in a specified situation" (Dellinger, Bobbett, Olivier, & Ellett, 2008, p. 752). Capturing these beliefs can prove beneficial to researchers and teacher educators because they represent the underlying self-beliefs of teachers regarding what can be successfully done in the classroom.

The perspectives on efficacy and how it has been conceptualized and operationalized has evolved since the earliest recorded studies in the 1960s. While Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) provide a comprehensive history of teacher self-efficacy, our purpose is to highlight the milestones and major events that lead up to our contemporary conundrum. Based upon Rotter's (1966) work in teacher beliefs, the Rand Corporation developed two items that sought to measure teachers' beliefs as they concern their ability to influence student achievement. One of these items focused on the teacher as the influential factor in student achievement, and the second focused on environmental factors as influential in student achievement. Responses to these two items proved to be very powerful predictors of student achievement. More specifically, teachers that believed they could influence student achievement were more likely to have students with higher achievement scores. With this view of teacher efficacy, researchers pressed forward examining the influence of teachers' perceptions of their influence in student learning and student outcomes. Subsequent studies continued to show strong predictive relationships between teachers' efficacy beliefs and student outcomes (Armor et al., 1976; Guskey, 1981, 1982, 1988). The problem with measures that looked teacher efficacy from this perspective is that they focused on the teachers' beliefs that students' changes were based upon things that they can do, in its most general sense, juxtaposed to things that were outside of their control. While subsequent research went on to examine teacher efficacy from the perspective of locus of control, and even receiving distinguishing titles such as personal and general teaching efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990), they ignored a crucial aspect of Bandura's (1977) interpretation: the actual teaching behaviors that lead to changes in student outcomes.

Before continuing, we want to clarify that the line of research focusing on teaching efficacy as locus of control has been beneficial to research on teacher education. It is beneficial to know that teachers who believe that they are responsible for

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