



# Pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy: Relationship to academic ability, student teaching placement characteristics, and mentor support



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- TSES scores not correlated with academic measures (GPA and Praxis).
- TSES scores significantly correlated with mentors' support during student teaching.
- TSES scores significantly different based on student achievement scores.
- TSES scores not significantly different based on school demographics.

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs are under pressure to raise standards for admission and increase the quality of field placements. Teachers' sense of efficacy, as measured by the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy short form, is related to teacher effectiveness. This study found no correlation between elementary pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy, grade point average, and Praxis content test scores implying that academic achievement may be necessary, but insufficient for building teacher efficacy. Significant correlations existed between efficacy scores and perceptions of support by mentors during student teaching. Efficacy scores were significantly higher for pre-service teachers in schools with higher student achievement.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on teachers' sense of efficacy has increased dramatically in the last twelve years (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011) as researchers have placed greater focus on its relation to teacher behaviors and student achievement. Duffin, French, and Patrick (2012) report that research on teacher efficacy has been conducted extensively in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Australasia, and South America. In addition, O'Neill and Stephenson (2012) report that pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy has been the focus of research in Australia, Malaysia, Cyprus, the United States, and Greece.

Although the importance of teachers' sense of efficacy for quality teaching has been established, more research is needed to

understand what specifically leads to its development. One important factor may be elements of teacher preparation, an area Klassen et al. (2011) recommended as a focus of future research on teachers' sense of efficacy. Teacher preparation varies widely across traditional and alternative preparation programs; however, field experiences, such as student teaching and practicum are a standard component of most programs worldwide (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012).

New teachers often perceive that field experiences are the most influential part of their preparation; a pre-service teacher's field experiences may have a great impact on the future performance of the teacher (Ronfeldt, 2012). Understanding the impact of student teaching on teachers' sense of efficacy becomes more critical if, as Bandura (1997) and Woolfolk Hoy and Burke-Spero (2005) contend, once self-efficacy beliefs become established they are somewhat resistant to change. This study was designed to examine elements of teacher preparation programs that may be related to pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy. Teacher efficacy has been

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shown to play a role in teacher effectiveness and, therefore, should be promoted by teacher preparation programs. Specifically, this study sought to test potential relationships between pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy and (a) academic measures; (b) perceptions of support during field experiences by mentors; and (c) characteristics of field experience placement schools, including student achievement levels and demographic information.

### 1.1. Construct of teacher efficacy

Teacher efficacy as a construct is related to the theoretical foundation of self-efficacy, a component of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3) and identified teacher efficacy as a distinct type of efficacy. Self-efficacy is specific to a particular task and context rather than being a general sense of self such as self-esteem. Teacher efficacy is a teacher's belief in his or her ability to successfully perform the tasks of teaching. "A teacher's efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783).

Bandura (1977) asserted that the feelings of self-efficacy that people hold play an important role in their behavior; for instance, teachers with a high sense of efficacy tend to employ productive teaching behavior (e.g., Allinder, 1994; Heneman, Kimball, & Milanowski, 2006). Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more enthusiastic, more open to new ideas, and more willing to use complex strategies (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). Importantly, teachers' sense of efficacy is related to student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Guo, Piasta, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005; Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009).

#### 1.1.1. Sources of efficacy

Bandura (1986) identified four sources of self-efficacy: enactive attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological state. With the exception of physiological state, each of these sources is supported during traditional teacher preparation programs. Physiological state is an awareness of the emotional and physical response while attempting the task. Although there is awareness in the literature of physiological state (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012), it seems unlikely that teacher preparation programs would directly address stress, fatigue, and mood except as they pertain to general dispositions of teaching.

Enactive attainment is the actual personal successes or accomplishments of the individual, sometimes referred to as authentic mastery experience (Woolfolk Hoy, 2000), which is the most powerful source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Pre-service field experiences, such as student teaching, are the most likely opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop mastery by practicing the skills and actions of a teacher: the target task. Anita Woolfolk, in an interview with Shaughnessy (2004), identified mastery experiences during student teaching and the induction year as critical to the development of teachers' sense of efficacy.

If an individual has limited previous experience at the target task, vicarious experience has substantial influence on self-efficacy. Vicarious experience occurs when one observes people similar to oneself succeeding at the target task (Bandura, 1986). This reinforces the notion, 'if others, like myself can succeed, so can I.' Pre-service teachers who have limited previous teaching experience have multiple opportunities for vicarious experiences pertaining to

teaching: observing veteran teachers during early field experience; observing peers teaching during in-class simulations; and hearing about the successes and challenges of their peers in weekly student teaching seminars. It is still unclear in the literature what role these vicarious experiences may play in the development of a teacher's sense of efficacy.

A third source of efficacy is verbal persuasion that occurs when one is told by others that he or she possesses the capabilities to succeed at the target task. Bandura (1997) noted that feedback and support fosters self-efficacy. One potential opportunity for verbal persuasion as a source of teachers' sense of efficacy is feedback from cooperating teachers or university supervisors following a candidate's teaching performance. The impact of verbal persuasion is magnified when it closely follows a successful mastery experience (Wise & Trunnell, 2001). Al-Awidi and Alghazo (2012) examined the factors that influenced pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about technology integration in the United Arab Emirates. For the qualitative part of the study, participants reported that mastery experiences with technology, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion were sources of self-efficacy beliefs. In response to questions about vicarious experience and social persuasion, respondents cited the impact of the supervisor more often than that of cooperating teachers or support from colleagues. More research is needed to understand if verbal persuasion by supervisors and cooperating teachers influence pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy.

### 1.2. Academic achievement and teacher effectiveness

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2013) and the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (Greenberg, McKee, & Walsh, 2013) advocate that teacher preparation programs include high academic achievement, as measured by grade point average (GPA) and test scores be part of admission requirements. Both organizations cite numerous studies showing that programs with higher entrance requirements graduate more effective teachers.

Several studies, as reported in a meta-analysis, contend that higher academic achievement of teachers during pre-service preparation result in greater academic gains by their students (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). A longitudinal analysis that controlled for student characteristics, found that measures of academic aptitude of teachers including National Board Certification and licensure tests, were associated with greater student gains particularly in mathematics (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). In both of these studies the measures of aptitude were test scores, either standardized licensing exams or National Board Certification exams.

Rockoff, Jacobs, Kane, and Staiger (2011) found that academic achievement as measured by content knowledge exams and licensing exams were slightly associated with greater student gains. However, when these academic measures were combined with non-academic measures including self-efficacy, stronger effects on student achievement were observed. This implies that teachers' sense of efficacy plays a role in the effectiveness of teachers as measured by student achievement. Academic achievement may represent a source of mastery attainment in which pre-service teachers believe they are prepared to teach based on content knowledge and success in university courses.

Teachers' sense of efficacy and GPA was investigated by Egel (2009) with undergraduate pre-service teachers of English in Turkey and found there was a statistically significant difference in one subscore of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy (TSES) measure (student engagement) between low and high GPA earners but not on the two other subscores (instructional practice and classroom

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