



Korean early childhood educators' multi-dimensional teacher self-efficacy and ECE center climate and depression severity in teachers as contributing factors

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 September 2008

Received in revised form

28 March 2009

Accepted 9 June 2009

Keywords:

Teacher self-efficacy

School climate

Depression severity in teachers

Early childhood education

Teacher characteristics

Classroom characteristics

South Korea

ABSTRACT

This study investigated profiles of South Korean early childhood educators' teacher self-efficacy and contributing factors to teacher self-efficacy. The contributing factors were examined with a focus on early childhood education (ECE) center climate and depression severity in teachers as well as teacher and classroom characteristics. The results suggested that Korean early childhood educators' teacher self-efficacy was multi-dimensional, and each dimension had unique predictors. ECE center climate emerged as the most significant contributor to all teacher self-efficacy domains. Depression severity in teachers was associated with teacher self-efficacy but the facets of association were different according to the attributes of the efficacy domains. Instructional efficacy, which directly pertains to teaching professions, was not associated with depression in teachers. On the other hand, teacher self-efficacy domains containing affective aspects, such as creating positive social contexts and parental involvement and decision-making, were vulnerable to depression severity.

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, compelling evidence has suggested that teacher self-efficacy is associated with teachers' behaviours in school settings. Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy tend to communicate more with parents and implement more individualized differentiated instruction (Leyser, 2002). Efficacious teachers spend more time planning their classes (Allinder, 1994), and teaching difficult students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Hence, teacher self-efficacy has been assumed to be a powerful factor in creating disparities in students' achievements (Hoy & Davis, 2006).

Teacher self-efficacy has been conceptualized in several ways (Armor et al., 1976; Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and the definition and measurement of teacher self-efficacy can be controversial (Dellinger, Bobbett, Olivier, & Ellett, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The debate began with the claim that some concepts that have been frequently employed to assess teacher self-efficacy (i.e., locus of control and outcome expectancies) should not be interpreted as perceived self-efficacy and that the scopes of existing teacher self-efficacy measures are too narrow (for details see Bandura, 2006; Friedman & Kass, 2002; Henson, Kogan, & Vacha-Haase, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Recently, a new

research framework illuminating task- and context-specific attributes of teacher self-efficacy has been proposed and instruments reflecting this new perspective have been developed. Bandura, whose work provided a significant foundation for self-efficacy research, has explained self-efficacy to be one's judgment of his or her capabilities to produce certain attainments (Bandura, 1997); this judgment is not a global trait but a differentiated set of self-beliefs linked to one's functioning in particular domains (Bandura, 2006). From this perspective, teacher self-efficacy is regarded as teachers' beliefs in their abilities to produce certain achievements when performing particular tasks in specific teaching contexts (Dellinger et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Thus, the teacher self-efficacy measures that reflect this perspective involve specific teaching tasks in multi-dimensional teaching situations (Dellinger et al., 2008; Hoy & Davis, 2006).

Focusing on domain-specific aspects of self-efficacy, Bandura (2006) introduced his *Teacher Self-efficacy Scale* with seven constructs (or six constructs, see Section 2.2.1 for details): efficacy to influence decision-making, efficacy to influence school resources, instructional self-efficacy, disciplinary self-efficacy, efficacy to enlist parental involvement, efficacy to enlist community involvement, and *efficacy to create a positive school climate*. Influenced by Bandura's scale, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) developed the *Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale* with three factors: *efficacy for instructional strategies*, *efficacy for classroom management*, and *efficacy for student engagement*. Emphasizing teachers as

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individuals functioning in schools, [Friedman and Kass \(2002\)](#) developed the *Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* with two separated dimensions: *teacher self-efficacy in school context*, and *teacher self-efficacy in classroom context*. [Chan \(2008\)](#) proposed the *Domain-specific Teacher Self-efficacy Scale* with seven domains: teaching highly able learners, classroom management, guidance and counselling, student engagement, teaching to accommodate diversity, teaching for enriched learning, and *working with colleagues and parents*.

Though a great deal of research has been conducted in this area, most teacher self-efficacy studies have excluded early childhood educators and focused on kindergarten through fifth grade teachers or on secondary-level teachers. Consequently, relatively little is known about early childhood educators' teacher self-efficacy. Early childhood education (ECE) settings are very different from educational settings for school-aged children. Thus, it is reasonable to study ECE settings separately when addressing situational-specific concepts. ECE settings are populated by young children rapidly developing in all areas, and are characterized by constant communication and collaboration between families and educators. Early childhood educators are challenged to provide both education and home-like care as well as to establish secure attachments with their young students ([Chang, Muckelroy, & Pulido-Tobiassen, 1996](#)). These characteristics create diverse situations for early childhood educators to cope with and create unique school climates. Information exclusively regarding ECE teacher self-efficacy needs to be produced to better understand ECE teachers and to help them provide better teaching and care for young children.

1.1. ECE center climate and teacher self-efficacy

Given the evidence that a high sense of teacher self-efficacy is positively associated with teachers' behaviours and performances ([Allinder, 1994](#); [Gibson & Dembo, 1984](#)), researchers have focused on determining which factors help teachers build healthy judgments of their own abilities. Years of teaching experience, education levels, and in-service training experiences have been reported frequently as positively influencing teacher self-efficacy in diverse cultures ([Kim & Kim, 2008](#); [Chan, 2008](#); [Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993](#); [Leyser, 2002](#); [de la Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias, 2007](#)). However, these are all demographic factors; considering the recent interest in situation-specific frameworks in teacher self-efficacy research, there is a need to study the reciprocal relationships between contextual factors such as school climate and specific domains of teacher self-efficacy.

Exploring the link between school climate and teacher self-efficacy is not entirely novel ([Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993](#); [Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008](#)). For example, [Hoy and Woolfolk \(1993\)](#) investigated elementary teachers' personal and general teaching efficacy and the relationships between efficacy and the teachers' perceptions of the organizational health of their schools. They found that a strong academic emphasis and supportive and competent principals were conducive to the development of teachers' beliefs that they could influence student learning. In [Knoblauch and Hoy's study \(2008\)](#), student teachers' efficacy beliefs developed differently according to their placement (i.e., in rural, suburban or urban schools). Student teachers in the more supportive contexts of suburban and rural schools had more enhanced efficacy beliefs after their student teaching internships. [Tschannen-Moran and Hoy \(2007\)](#) investigated four aspects of school climate (support by administrators, by colleagues, by parents, and by communities) and the relationships between school climate and self-efficacy of novice and experienced teachers. They found that school climate played a more important role in novice teachers' self-efficacy than in experienced teachers' self-efficacy. These studies contributed to our understanding of

teacher self-efficacy, but did not fully reflect the multi-dimensional aspects of teacher self-efficacy, nor were they conducted in ECE settings. However, the results do suggest that school climate in ECE settings could be a meaningful contextual factor affecting early childhood educators' teacher self-efficacy domains.

1.2. Teacher depression and teacher self-efficacy

Another emerging research field is the mental health of early childhood educators. Especially in ECE settings, teachers' mental health should be thoroughly studied in light of the strong evidence that caregivers' mental health conditions, particularly their depressive symptoms, profoundly affect young children's development ([Maughan, Cicchetti, Toth, & Rogosch, 2007](#)). Links between maternal depressive symptoms and poor parenting behaviours in homes have been consistently reported. Parents with depressive symptoms, particularly mothers, are more likely to have poor parenting behaviours such as decreased sensitivity and engagement and are more likely to have insecure attachments with their children ([Campbell et al., 2004](#)), which can result in poor social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes for their children ([Campbell et al., 2004](#); [Hay et al., 2001](#); [Maughan et al., 2007](#)).

Less is known about the relationship between non-familial caregivers' depressive symptoms and their behaviours in ECE settings. Very few studies have explored this relationship, and the results of these studies are equivocal. [Hamre and Pianta \(2004\)](#) found that early childhood educators with more depressive symptoms were observed as less sensitive and more withdrawn than those with fewer depressive symptoms. On the other hand, [Gerber, Whitebook, and Weinstein \(2007\)](#) reported no direct associations between teacher sensitivity and depression severity. [de Schipper, Riksen-Walraven, and Geurts \(2007\)](#) found that early childhood educators' general moods, including depressive symptoms, had little association with the observed overall quality of caregiver behaviours. It is not clear whether the equivocal results were due to differences in methodology, samples or unknown mediators. [Gerber et al. \(2007\)](#) stated that depressive symptoms in early childhood teachers appeared to be influential only in some contexts. [de Schipper et al. \(2007\)](#) tentatively concluded that caregivers in ECE settings are less socio-emotional and more professional than parents in home settings, so professional caregivers' mental health played a different role than parents' in determining the quality of their care-giving.

If early childhood educators' professionalism mediates the effects of depressive symptoms on the quality of their care-giving, then what is the relationship between depressive symptoms in early childhood educators and their teacher self-efficacy beliefs? [Bandura \(1993\)](#) has proposed a reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy and depression. People with high senses of efficacy may seek out social relationships to manage difficult situations and overcome chronic stressors more readily than people with low senses of efficacy; thus, a low sense of self-efficacy may be a potent source of depression ([Bandura, 1993](#)). The relationships between self-efficacy and depression severity have been empirically studied in other research areas such as mental health, and a dynamic interplay between self-efficacy and symptoms of depression has been postulated. Generally, greater self-efficacy predicts less serious depressive symptoms, and more serious depressive symptoms predict lower self-efficacy ([Maciejewski, Prigerson, & Mazure, 2000](#)).

Considering the fact that ECE settings have both home- and school-like characteristics, this research is innovative because it explores relationships between two contributing factors of adult behaviours: depression severity, which is a powerful predictor of the quality of caregiver behaviours in home settings; and teacher self-efficacy, which is a factor influencing teaching behaviours in

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