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Relationship between the factors influencing online help-seeking and self-regulated learning among Taiwanese preservice teachers



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ABSTRACT

When the information that preservice teachers require to solve problems is inadequately provided by mentors, preservice teachers should seek help from persons outside the practicum school. Online help-seeking provides preservice teachers with useful information to self-regulate their follow-up behaviors for resolving problems. However, preservice teachers do not necessarily seek help. This study investigated the relationship between the psychological factors influencing the online help-seeking and subsequent self-regulated learning of preservice teachers. Valid questionnaires were collected from 462 Taiwanese preservice teachers during December 2015 and were tested by a second-order structural equation model. The evaluative results exhibited an excellent fit in a second-order factor model on online help-seeking, and established a structural equation model on the relationship between seeking help online and self-regulated learning. The analytical results suggested that perceptions of self-efficacy, epistemological belief, and perceived benefits regarding online help-seeking among preservice teachers were the factors related to the actual pursuit of online help, and affected their subsequent self-regulated learning performances. Thus, preservice teachers should be encouraged to seek external help via online communication when mentoring failed practices, especially for self-regulators with low self-efficacy and weak epistemological beliefs, as well as for those who do not perceive benefits from online help-seeking.

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1. Introduction

Most teacher education institutions offer university-based curricula that target the application of theory in practice with little opportunity to learn as professionals, while field-based school experiences benefit preservice teachers by equipping them with teaching abilities. Ideally, mentor teachers provide their preservice teachers with professional skills training as well as psychological support (Rippon & Martin, 2006); however, studies have indicated that mentors do not necessarily have sufficient consulting competence (Rodgers & Keil, 2007), a passion for consulting (Graham, 2006), or an adequate combination of emotional support and task assistance for preservice teachers (Crasborn & Hennissen, 2010). Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, and Bergen (2011) found insufficient mentoring quality, perhaps resulting from a lack of professionalization of the mentor teachers. Moreover, the conflict of educational views between preservice teachers and mentor teachers has been discussed in several studies (e.g., Castro, Kelly, &

Shih, 2010; Patrick, 2013; Yayli, 2008). In the study by Castro et al., a novice teacher reported that her mentor offered negative advice (e.g., requesting that a special education student be removed from a classroom), and thus, she turned to professionals from other schools. Indeed, when the information that preservice teachers require to solve problems during their practicums is inadequately provided by mentors, preservice teachers should seek help from persons outside the practicum school. Because of the prevalence of Internet technology with various social media (e.g., Facebook, Line, Twitter), requesting help online is a quick way to obtain information to solve a myriad of problems. It is therefore critical to examine the online help-seeking behavior of preservice teachers, and their subsequent learning at the field-based experience stage in teacher education processes.

Help-seeking has been conceptualized from multiple perspectives. This study excluded the facet of help-seeking that has been used in the field of mental health as a mechanism of support for depression and suicide prevention (Leavey, Rothi, & Paul, 2011; Lindsey, Joe, & Nebbitt, 2010). Instead, this study was concerned with help-seeking that is employed in education, specifically in teacher education. Empirically, help-seeking has been identified as

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an effective learning strategy and is related to a capacity for self-regulated learning (SRL) (Lee, 2007; Roll, Aleven, McLaren, & Koedinger, 2011). Notably, preservice teachers in need of emotional support, as well as feasible strategies for solving practicum-based challenges, are actually typical help-seekers and self-regulators; however, a few may lack the ability to seek help, feel embarrassed, or perceive a threat to their esteem, and thus avoid pursuing potential help (Kozanitis, Desbiens, & Chouinard, 2007; Ryan & Shin, 2011). Studies have also indicated that the online environment benefits college students seeking help from formal sources (i.e., instructors), because seekers have more privacy and opportunities to reflect on and refine comments than in face-to-face help-seeking, which creates a less threatening interaction (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Puustinen, Bernicot, & Bert-Erboul, 2011). Thus, the features of help-seeking should be re-examined to consider Internet technology use.

Cheng and Tsai (2011) presented a modified version of Karabenick and Knapp's framework with respect to online academic help seeking, which consisted of information searching (e.g., searching for information on the Internet to solve academic problems), formal queries (e.g., emailing teachers or teaching assistants to request help), and informal queries (e.g., making online requests to peers or unknown experts for academic help). However, Cheng and Tsai determined that information searching did not play a central role in online academic help-seeking query behaviors. An obvious reason is that the information obtained by online searching does not necessarily suit the information required for solving practicum-based problems. Elsewhere, Cheng, Liang, and Tsai (2013) found that college students had a tendency to apply simple strategies to embrace the information they received from peers or unknown experts on the Internet (i.e., informal query). Similarly, preservice teachers who often confront practicum-based problems also desire to efficiently obtain helpful information for problem solving by interacting with knowledgeable people online, rather than searching for the information themselves.

Karabenick and Knapp (1991) proposed an academic help-seeking model that included formal help-seeking, informal help-seeking, instrumental activities, lowered performance aspirations, and altered goals. The latter three elements are behaviors that follow help-seeking, and are involved in the performance of SRL (Hao, Wright, Barnes, & Branch, 2016). SRL refers to the self-regulated thoughts, feelings, and actions of learners that are systematically designed to affect the learning of knowledge and skills (Zimmerman, 2000). Although teacher learning in a school can be planned, most learning opportunities are unintentional and incidental (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). In the usual unstructured context, preservice teachers need to learn regulation skills to prepare themselves for further professional learning. Online help-seeking offers a range of potential advantages compared to help-seeking in traditional classroom contexts, and preservice teachers should use online help-seeking as an SRL strategy when solving practicum-based challenges. However, preservice teachers in need of help do not necessarily seek it, even through online communication (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). Therefore, the psychological factors influencing the help-seeking behaviors of preservice teachers via online communication, and whether the behaviors affect their subsequent SRL performances, remain unknown.

Briefly, this study was conducted for four key reasons. First, preservice teachers often seek external help through Internet technology because their mentors do not necessarily or sufficiently supervise them when encountering situational problems in practicums. Second, preservice teachers can overcome the barrier of embarrassment, as well as limits of space and time during help-seeking, by interacting with helpers online. Third, preservice teachers may self-regulate their follow-up learning behaviors after

obtaining useful suggestions from online helpers; however, they do not necessarily seek help when encountering practicum-related problems. Finally, although help-seeking has been studied extensively in classroom environments (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013), the factors influencing online help-seeking for preservice teachers, and the effects on their subsequent SRL behaviors, have been less examined (i.e., only SRL itself among preservice teachers has been investigated) (e.g., Kremer-Hayon & Tillema, 1999). Therefore, this study investigates the relationships between the factors influencing preservice teachers' online help-seeking and their SRL thereafter.

After determining the factors impacting online help-seeking and their relationships with SRL, this study can provide vital perspectives for teacher educators that increase the willingness of preservice teachers to seek necessary help and further develop their learning strategies in situations with a lack of sufficient support from mentors.

2. Background literature

2.1. Factors influencing online help-seeking

Help-seeking is a process that is highly socially interactive (Mäkitalo-Siegl, Kohnle, & Fischer, 2011), particularly for preservice teachers requiring help during their practicums. However, before the social interaction, psychological factors play a crucial role in help-seeking behaviors (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). Karabenick (2011) indicated that learners in a technology-supported environment were motivated to seek help, because technology-based help is less threatening than in-person assistance. In an online technology environment, the perception of a threat to self-esteem does not seem to be an influential factor in help-seeking.

Other studies have determined that various factors influence the online help-seeking behaviors of students (Cheng & Tsai, 2011; Gonida, Karabenick, Makara, & Hatzikyriakou, 2014; Hao et al., 2016; Li & Belkin, 2010).

Self-efficacy is related to perceptions of information searching for online academic help-seeking (Cheng & Tsai, 2011). Although online interaction is increasing, further investigation into the influence of self-efficacy on learners who seek help online from people, rather than searching academic information, is necessary. Self-efficacy refers to the beliefs and expectations regarding the ability to perform a task required to achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 1997); researchers have found correlations between online help-seeking behavior and self-efficacy in online learning contexts (Cheng & Tsai, 2011). Other studies have also indicated that preservice teachers with high self-efficacy engage in help-seeking when necessary (Bembenutty, 2006; Bembenutty & White, 2013).

Epistemological beliefs, which refers to personal beliefs regarding sources of helpful information acquired, maybe also influence online help-seeking behaviors (Hao et al., 2016). Epistemological beliefs have the function of directing and controlling actions (Paechter et al., 2013), and influence what preservice teachers notice and how they reflect on events (Cho & Huang, 2014). If students overestimate their understanding of specific knowledge, they are less aware of their need for seek help (Aleven, Stahl, Schworm, Fischer, & Wallace, 2003). Cheng and Tsai (2011) noted that students with a perception that knowledge is transmitted from external authorities have a tendency to approach teachers online for help, rather than search online.

Perceived benefits also affect students' decision to seek assistance (Gonida et al., 2014; Rousset, Elliot, & Feltman, 2011). Perceived benefits reflect an understanding that help-seeking is a useful strategy that promotes learning (Rousset et al., 2011). Help-seeking has been conceptualized as a metacognitive skill, and

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