



Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career adaptability and career optimism



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Investigation of pre-service teachers' career adaptability and self-efficacy.
- Career adaptability and self-efficacy predict career optimism.
- Self-efficacy partially mediates the effect of career adaptability.

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' self-efficacy is positively associated with job satisfaction and commitment. What is less clear in the teacher education literature is to what extent pre-service teachers' self-efficacy influences and is influenced by other psychological factors associated with career engagement. The current research contributes to understanding the complex of interrelations by demonstrating that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy directly predicts their career optimism and mediates the effect of career adaptability on career optimism. With regard to pre-service teacher education, these findings are significant because, like self-efficacy, career adaptability and career optimism are amenable to promotion via learning experiences. Thus, professional learning activities may be tailored to focus on the development of self-efficacy to indirectly enhance pre-service teachers' career adaptability and career optimism.

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1. Introduction

A review of 40 years of research affirms the centrality of teachers' self-efficacy to their job satisfaction and commitment to the profession (Zee & Koomen, 2016). It is not surprising, therefore, that teachers' self-efficacy is the focus of international research and public policy that is directed at attracting and retaining teachers in the workforce (e.g., OECD., 2013, 2014). Zee and Koomen (2016) report a preponderance of research about self-efficacy that is focused on factors that hamper teachers' wellbeing and job satisfaction. Notwithstanding the deleterious psychological factors that diminish job satisfaction and predict intention to leave the profession, such as emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011),

Zee and Koomen recommend research into the interrelationships between self-efficacy and factors that promote teachers' job satisfaction, wellbeing, and, ultimately, retention in the profession.

The present research addresses that recommendation by Zee and Koomen (2016) to discern factors that combine with self-efficacy to positively contribute to teachers' careers. We use a conceptual lens drawn from the career self-management literature to provide new evidence about the impact of teachers' self-efficacy on their optimistic beliefs about successful future careers. Recent research demonstrates that employees' career adaptability contributes to their subjective career success (Zacher, 2014a). Other research shows that self-efficacy transmits the effects career adaptability onto career success (Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015). What is not known is whether self-efficacy transmits the positive effects of teachers' career adaptability onto their optimistic beliefs about their future careers. Thus, the present research focuses on the potential links between career adaptability, self-efficacy, and career

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optimism, whereby self-efficacy is studied as the bridge between adaptability and optimism.

2. Conceptual foundations of the research

Theory about career self-management is an appropriate space to conceptualize teachers' satisfaction with their profession. Within the theoretical literature of career self-management, the social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) is the most predominant in the social cognitive tradition (Bandura, 1986) that posits self-efficacy as its core. Elements of the general Social Cognitive Career Theory model are depicted in Fig. 1. For the present research, we focus on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal inputs that feature in the model.

2.1. Self-efficacy

The core tenet of the Social Cognitive Career Theory is that a person's self-efficacy expectations influences beliefs about work interests, goals, and actions that comprise the person's domain of work, such as classroom teaching. Reflecting Bandura's social cognitive paradigm, the theory suggests that affirmative achievements in a work domain are interpreted as positive learning experiences which, in turn, enhance self-efficacy. This virtuous circle of learning is a rationale to focus on the development of teachers' self-efficacy to positively affect their interests, goals, and actions, and consequent performance.

The Social Cognitive Career Theory's approach to self-efficacy is borne out in research that demonstrates the influential effects of self-efficacy on work performance (Brown et al., 2008), job satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2006), and wellbeing (Lent & Brown, 2008; Lent, 2004). In the case of teachers, their self-efficacy is associated with job performance and effectiveness (Bandura, 1993; Klassen & Tze, 2014), job satisfaction (Badri, Mohaidat, Ferrandino, & El Mourad, 2013; Buyukgoze-Kavas, Duffy, Güneri, & Autin, 2014; Duffy & Lent, 2009; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Lent et al., 2011) and retention in the workforce (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Hong, 2010; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015). Given the centrality of self-efficacy to teachers' careers (Zee & Koomen, 2016), it is appropriate to refer to a theory of career development that holds self-efficacy at its core and is supported by research. Indeed, findings of research based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory that focuses on teachers' job satisfaction (Duffy & Lent, 2009; Lent et al., 2011) is consistent with the heuristic model of teacher self-efficacy

(Zee & Koomen, 2016) that indicates the influence of teachers' self-efficacy on positive aspects of their career and well-being.

2.2. Outcome expectations: career optimism

The other construct at the core of Social Cognitive Career Theory is *outcome expectations*. Outcome expectations are beliefs about the likely outcomes of performing a certain behaviour for which one holds beliefs of self-efficacy. As depicted in Fig. 1, outcome expectations are directly influenced by self-efficacy and, together, these beliefs about efficacy and outcomes act to motivate individuals toward their interests, goals, and actions. According to the theory, those with greater optimistic outcome expectations are expected to make relatively greater progress toward goals and satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2006).

Individuals with high levels of career optimism “expect the best possible outcome or to emphasise the most positive aspects of one's future career development, and comfort in performing career planning tasks” (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005). Following the precepts of the Social Cognitive Career Theory, the current research distinguishes between general optimism (Carver & Scheier, 2014), which is a dispositional trait of personality, and domain-specific optimism, which confers motivational benefits for work engagement (Schmitt, Gielnik, Zacher, & Klemann, 2013) associated with state-specific outcome expectations (Bandura, 1986; Lent, 2004) that are amenable to modification (cf. learned optimism; Seligman, 2011). Furthermore, career optimism is distinct from *academic optimism*, which is a general construct composed of a teachers' efficacy, trust in students and parents, and emphasis on academic behaviors (Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010; Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008).

Career optimism is known to influence the relation between conscientiousness and university students' engagement in their field of study (McIlveen, Beccaria, & Burton, 2013). Given that conscientiousness strongly contributes to academic success (Poropat, 2009), the relationship between students' conscientiousness, career optimism, and their engagement in studies signals the potential importance of career optimism to students' future engagement in their respective professions while they are studying (cf. Solberg Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom, 2009). This relation is discerned in a sample of pre-service teachers whose career optimism mediated between conscientiousness and engagement with their professional degree (McIlveen & Perera, 2015).

Whilst taking into account the research literature on self-efficacy that indicates its centrality to teachers' work (Zee & Koomen, 2016), the present research take focus on the

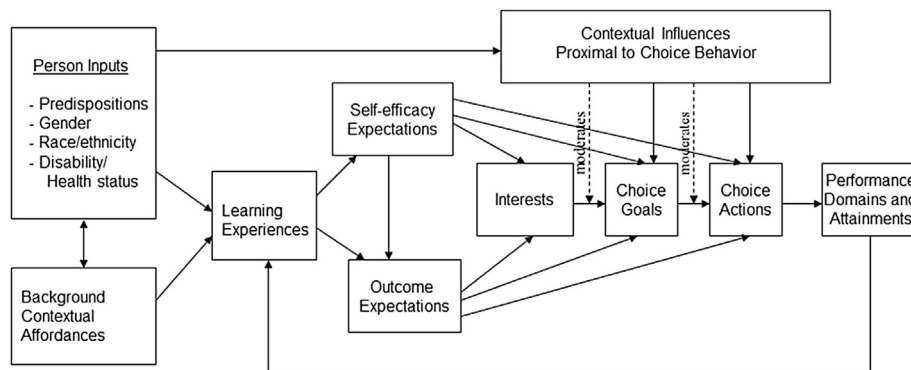


Fig. 1. Model of person, contextual, and experiential factors affecting career-related choice behavior. Note. Direct relations between variables are indicated with solid lines; moderator effects (where a given variable strengthens or weakens the relations between two other variables) are shown with dashed lines. Copyright 1993 by R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, & G. Hackett. Reprinted by permission.

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