Review of Teacher Efficacy Research

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Abstract. This review investigates the teacher efficacy research during the past two decades. Results from the review show that despite huge increase in teacher efficacy research and variety in methodology, few studies of teacher efficacy are conducted in a Chinese educational setting; also, there are lack of empirical studies investigating how teacher efficacy is related to other constructs, such as teachers’ professional development and teacher stress. Recommendations for future teacher efficacy research are also provided.

Introduction

In educational settings, teacher efficacy research dates back to the mid-1970s and the last several decades have witnessed an increase in teacher efficacy research, diversity in methodologies employed, specificity in domain and internationalization in context [1], noted as being “on the verge of maturity” by Tschannen-Moran et al. [2]. The purpose of this review is to examine research concerning teacher efficacy in the time span from 1997-2016, discuss the state of research, categorize and summarize research, and propose key recommendations for future research investigating teacher efficacy.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy is defined as a teacher’s “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” [3]. According to Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), teacher self-efficacy connotes significant implications. Highly efficacious teachers tend to believe they can overcome obstacles with enough time and persistent efforts, display more willingness to implement innovation in teaching, encourage students’ autonomy, rarely resort to custodial control and try to foster an interactive, student-centered learning environment where students are responsible for their own learning. In contrast, teachers suffering from low self-efficacy believe that teachers’ influence on unmotivated students is restricted by environmental factors, which is beyond their control. Thus, they are frustrated by students’ behavior issue and tend to employ negative approaches of classroom management [4].

Previous literature corroborates the crucial effect of teacher efficacy on various constructs, such as teaching performance and motivation, collaboration with colleagues, teacher commitment to the profession and job satisfaction [5].

Method

Search strategy and analysis procedure go as follows: to begin with, title search was employed as the major inclusion criterion to spot target studies. The EBSCO, ERIC and PsycINFO databases were searched for peer-reviewed articles written in English with “teacher or teachers” and “efficacy or self-efficacy” in titles of journal articles published in the 20-year span from 1997–2016. In this way, results can be narrowed down to the articles whose focus was on teacher efficacy. Next, to broaden the search and expand the number of hits, search of keywords of teacher and efficacy as keywords was
adopted, thus including articles with certain relevance though their focus was not necessarily identical. Analysis was designed to categorize and summarize studies based on their research characteristics such as sample attributes, geographical context, methodology and research focus before gaps in literature were revealed for future investigation.

**Findings and Implications**

Overall, the majority of research concerning teacher efficacy primarily falls into four categories: a) research that investigates the relationship between teacher efficacy and multiple variables, either job-related constructs or internal characteristics; b) research that aims to identify sources of teacher efficacy; c) research that focuses on cross-sectional comparative studies of teacher efficacy in different contexts; and d) longitudinal studies that explore the development and stability of teacher efficacy.

A multitude of studies in this field adopt correlational data from self-reported surveys and focus on the relationship between teacher efficacy and a diversity of job-related within-teacher variables, ranging from teaching belief and instructional innovation [6], to job satisfaction, stress and burnout [7], occupational commitment and intention to leave the profession [8]. For example, Wu and Short (1996) found that teacher self-efficacy significantly predicts both job satisfaction and job commitment [9]; Darling-Hammond (2003) claimed that teacher efficacy is positively associated with teacher retention rates among general educators [10]; Friedman (2003) also noted that teacher self-efficacy is inversely correlated with teachers’ burnout [11].

Additionally, the relationship of teacher efficacy with psychological constructs was conducted in different contexts. Chan (2008) explored the relationship between teacher efficacy and successful intelligence in a sample of Hong Kong secondary school teachers and found that teacher efficacy was related to three triarchic dimensions of successful intelligence [12]. Penrose, Perry and Ball (2007) carried out a study and found a connection between emotional intelligence and teacher efficacy [13]. Similarly, Koçoğlu (2011) confirmed a significant, positive relationship between emotional intelligence and teacher efficacy in Turkey [14]. Jamil, Downer and Pianta (2012) collected data in an American university to investigate the relationship between teacher efficacy and personality and results revealed that outgoing teachers boasted high self-efficacy while those who tend to be negative and anxious presented lack of confidence in their future role of teachers [15].

Some empirical studies lend support to the theoretical assumption of Bandura’s four sources of self-efficacy. Ross and Bruce (2007) found that teachers who receive professional development based on the four sources of self-efficacy displayed considerably higher efficacy in classroom management than teachers in the control group. Memories of a successful mastery experience can be transformed into a powerful influence on the teacher’s self-efficacy [16]. One striking study by Bruce and Ross (2008) gathered data from multiple sources (observation, self-report, and peer coaching summaries) to examine how sources of teacher self-efficacy function in elementary school teachers. The results provided evidence for the influence of mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and physiological and emotional states on teacher self-efficacy and summarized that the four sources of teacher efficacy consolidate each other and contribute to a virtuous circle of application of innovative and challenging teaching strategies [17].

**Recommendations for Future Research**

A meta-analysis of teacher efficacy research from 1998-2009 reported, “Over half of the articles reported samples exclusively from the USA, along with representation from Asia (15%)...Within Asia, researchers and samples from Hong Kong and Singapore dominated the studies, likely due to historical and current emphasis on English as a language of instruction in many schools and universities and the resulting research and publication in English language journals”. Few studies of teacher efficacy are conducted in primary school teachers in a Chinese educational setting. Research
focusing on teacher efficacy in Chinese context will test the theoretical framework, provide empirical
evidence for validity and universality of the theory and lead to a more cultured and globalized
understanding of teacher efficacy.

In summary, most studies carried out are conducted outside the Chinese context; few empirical
studies are available that investigate how different constructs such as professional development and
teacher stress are related to teacher efficacy in the Chinese primary school setting [18]. What appears
missing in the literature is the connection between professional development initiatives and teachers’
efficacy in a Chinese educational setting. Whether the previously established relation between
professional development, teacher efficacy and teacher stress also applies in the Chinese context is
still unknown and requires investigation.

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