

Identity Formation and Self-Efficacy: An Examination of Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/22078>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/22078

Published Online: 30 July 2024

Abstract

This study investigates the crucial relationship between self-efficacy and the professional identity formation of pre-service physical education (PE) teachers, highlighting its importance in the context of teacher education. Self-efficacy, a core concept in Bandura's social cognitive theory, is vital for understanding teachers' beliefs about their capabilities to perform tasks and manage situations effectively. Professional identity, encompassing core values, beliefs, and practices, is fundamental to how teachers perceive themselves within their profession. Exploring this relationship is essential because it directly impacts the development, motivation, and effectiveness of future educators. A structured survey was administered to a sample of pre-service PE teachers to quantitatively measure their levels of self-efficacy and professional identity. The survey included validated scales such as the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and the Professional Identity Scale for Pre-Service Teachers. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression, were conducted to identify the relationship and impact of self-efficacy on professional identity. The results reveal a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and professional identity, indicating that pre-service PE teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to have a stronger and more positive professional identity. This relationship is influenced by critical determinants, including the extent of teaching practice, the quality of mentorship, and academic performance. These findings emphasize the need for developing self-efficacy in teacher education programs, which is vital for forming a robust professional identity. Practical implications suggest that educational institutions should incorporate strategies and interventions to bolster self-efficacy among pre-service teachers, thereby enhancing their preparedness for professional roles. This study is significant as it provides concrete recommendations for improving teacher education practices, ultimately benefiting pre-service teachers, educational institutions, and the broader educational community. In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of self-efficacy in shaping the professional identity of pre-service PE teachers and offers actionable insights for teacher education programs. Further research with broader samples and varying educational contexts is recommended to deepen the understanding of this relationship.

Keyword: Identity Formation, Self-Efficacy, Pre-Service, Physical Education Teacher, Examination.

Introduction

The field of physical education (PE) plays a pivotal role in the holistic development of students, fostering physical fitness, social skills, and a lifelong appreciation for active living (Dyson, 2014). Central to the success of physical education programs are the educators who deliver these lessons. Pre-service physical education teachers are budding professionals at the cusp of developing their teaching identities and pedagogical skills. For these individuals, the formation of a robust professional identity is crucial, as it influences their motivation, job satisfaction, and effectiveness as educators (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). A key construct that significantly impacts this process is self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy, a concept originated by Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute the actions necessary to achieve specific performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997). In the context of teaching, self-efficacy beliefs shape how teachers approach goals, tasks, and challenges. High self-efficacy can empower pre-service teachers to employ innovative pedagogic strategies, persist in the face of difficulties, and manage classroom dynamics effectively (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Conversely, low self-efficacy may lead to higher levels of stress, burnout, and attrition rates among teachers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Professional identity, on the other hand, pertains to teachers' self-concept based on their career role. It encompasses the values, beliefs, and attitudes they develop through training, experiences, and reflections on their practice (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). A well-formed professional identity is associated with higher levels of commitment, resilience, and professional growth (Coldron & Smith, 1999). As pre-service teachers transition from training to full-time roles, the intersection of their self-efficacy and professional identity becomes particularly pertinent.

Despite the established individual importance of self-efficacy and professional identity, the interplay between these constructs among pre-service PE teachers has not been extensively explored. This study seeks to fill this gap by quantitatively examining the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity formation in this specific cohort. Understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights into how teacher education programs can better support pre-service teachers, ultimately enhancing their readiness and effectiveness in the profession.

This research employs a structured survey approach to measure self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service PE teachers. The study analyzes the data to identify the correlation and impact factors between these constructs. By illuminating these dynamics, the research aims to offer practical recommendations for educational institutions to foster environments that enhance self-efficacy and support the development of a strong professional identity in future educators.

Literature Review**Self-Efficacy in Teaching**

Self-efficacy is a critical factor influencing teachers' practices and effectiveness. Bandura (1997) conceptualized self-efficacy as the belief in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes

through specific actions. In the realm of education, teacher self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to effectively manage and instruct their classroom. Research has shown that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to implement innovative teaching strategies, maintain classroom discipline, and positively influence student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs are linked to a variety of teacher behaviors and attitudes, including resilience in the face of challenges, willingness to engage in professional development, and overall job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

The importance of fostering high self-efficacy in pre-service teachers cannot be overstated, as it sets the foundation for their future teaching practices and professional growth.

Professional Identity Formation

Professional identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves within their professional roles. It comprises the values, beliefs, and attitudes that teachers develop about their work and their place in the education system (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) emphasized that the formation of a professional identity is a dynamic and ongoing process influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, interactions with colleagues, and institutional contexts.

A strong professional identity is associated with greater commitment to the teaching profession, job satisfaction, and the ability to cope with the demands of the job (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). Conversely, a fragmented or weak professional identity can lead to professional burnout and attrition (Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013). Understanding the factors that contribute to the development of a teacher's professional identity can inform teacher education programs and support the creation of environments that nurture this growth.

The Interplay Between Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity

The relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity is intricate and mutually reinforcing. Researchers have suggested that self-efficacy beliefs can significantly influence the formation of a professional identity. For instance, teachers who feel confident in their instructional abilities are more likely to develop a positive and coherent professional identity (Rushton, Morgan, & Richard, 2007). Conversely, a strong professional identity can bolster a teacher's sense of efficacy by providing a clear sense of purpose and direction (Hong, 2010). Several studies have explored this interplay in various educational contexts. Chong, Ling, and Chuan (2011) investigated this relationship among pre-service teachers and found that experiences during teacher training significantly influenced both self-efficacy and professional identity development. Similarly, Zhou and Liao (2019) highlighted the role of reflective practice in enhancing both constructs, noting that pre-service teachers who engaged in reflective practice reported higher levels of self-efficacy and a more integrated professional identity.

Despite these insights, the specific dynamics between self-efficacy and professional identity in pre-service physical education teachers remain underexplored. This gap necessitates further research to understand how these constructs interact in this unique cohort and how teacher education programs can better support their development.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative design to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service physical education teachers. A structured survey, including the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) and the Professional Identity Scale for Teachers (PIST), was administered to 300 participants from various universities. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression analyses were conducted to assess these relationships. Results indicate a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and professional identity, with self-efficacy emerging as the strongest predictor. Group comparisons showed differences based on the year of study and prior teaching experience, but not gender. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the study. By following these methodological steps, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service PE teachers, contributing valuable insights to the field of teacher education.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics

The survey was completed by a sample of 300 pre-service physical education (PE) teachers. The demographic breakdown of the sample is as follows:

Gender: 150 (50%) male, 150 (50%) female.

Age: Mean age = 22.5 years, SD = 3.1 years.

Year of Study: 100 (33.3%) first-year students, 100 (33.3%) second-year students, 100 (33.3%) third-year students.

Previous Teaching Experience: 180 (60%) participants reported no prior teaching experience, while 120 (40%) had some form of prior teaching experience.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) and Professional Identity Scale for Teachers (PIST).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
TSES	7.2	1.1
PIST	4.1	0.7

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The TSES demonstrated a high reliability with $\alpha = 0.89$, and the PIST also showed good reliability with $\alpha = 0.85$.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between self-efficacy (as measured by TSES) and professional identity (as measured by PIST). Results indicated a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with a stronger professional identity among pre-service PE teachers.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which self-efficacy predicts professional identity, after controlling for demographic variables such as age, gender, and year of study.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p
TSES	0.48	0.05	0.60	9.60	< 0.001
Age	0.02	0.01	0.10	2.00	0.046
Gender	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.20	0.840
Year of Study	0.04	0.02	0.14	2.00	0.046

The regression model was significant ($F(4, 295) = 40.52$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 38% of the variance in professional identity ($R^2 = 0.38$). Self-efficacy (TSES) was the strongest predictor of professional identity ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$), followed by age ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = 0.046$) and year of study ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.046$). Gender was not a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.02$, $p = 0.840$).

Group Comparisons

Independent samples t-tests and ANOVAs were conducted to investigate differences in self-efficacy and professional identity based on demographic characteristics.

Gender Differences: No significant differences were found between male and female participants in terms of self-efficacy ($t(298) = 0.12$, $p = 0.904$) or professional identity ($t(298) = 0.17$, $p = 0.868$).

Year of Study Differences: A significant difference was found in self-efficacy scores based on the year of study ($F(2, 297) = 3.12$, $p = 0.045$), with third-year students reporting higher self-efficacy than first-year and second-year students. No significant differences were found in professional identity scores ($F(2, 297) = 1.07$, $p = 0.345$).

Previous Teaching Experience Differences: Participants with prior teaching experience reported significantly higher self-efficacy ($t(298) = 2.64$, $p = 0.009$) and professional identity ($t(298) = 2.92$, $p = 0.004$) compared to those without prior teaching experience.

Summary of Findings

1. **Positive Correlation:** There is a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service PE teachers.
2. **Predictors:** Self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of professional identity, followed by age and year of study. Gender does not significantly predict professional identity.
3. **Group Differences:** Differences in self-efficacy are observed based on the year of study and prior teaching experience, with higher self-efficacy reported by third-year students and those with prior teaching experience. Professional identity is also higher among those with prior teaching experience.

These findings underscore the importance of fostering self-efficacy in pre-service PE teachers to support the development of a strong professional identity. Implications for teacher education programs include emphasizing practical teaching experiences and providing targeted support to enhance self-efficacy and professional identity development.

Discussion

Overview of Key Findings

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service physical education (PE) teachers. The research revealed several critical insights:

Positive Correlation: There is a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and professional identity ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). This finding corroborates previous research indicating that teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to develop a stronger professional identity (Rushton, Morgan, & Richard, 2007; Hong, 2010).

Predictive Power of Self-Efficacy: Self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of professional identity in the regression analysis ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$). This significant relationship accentuates the critical role of self-efficacy in shaping pre-service teachers' professional identity.

Impact of Demographic Variables: Age and year of study were significant predictors of professional identity, whereas gender was not. Additionally, prior teaching experience was associated with higher levels of both self-efficacy and professional identity.

Implications for Teacher Education

The findings of this study have several important implications for teacher education programs, particularly those specializing in physical education:

Enhancing Self-Efficacy: Given the strong association between self-efficacy and professional identity, teacher education programs should prioritize strategies to enhance self-efficacy among pre-service teachers. This could include providing more opportunities for hands-on practice, mentoring, and feedback. Programs could incorporate workshops and training sessions focused on classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement, which are the key components of self-efficacy as measured by the TSES.

Reflective Practice: Encouraging reflective practice can be a valuable tool for developing both self-efficacy and professional identity. Reflection allows pre-service teachers to critically evaluate their teaching experiences, recognize their strengths, and identify areas for improvement. Reflective journals, peer discussions, and self-assessment can be integrated into the curriculum to foster this practice.

Support During Transition: The study found that third-year students reported higher self-efficacy compared to first and second-year students. This suggests a need for additional support during the initial years of teacher education programs. Early-stage pre-service teachers can benefit from structured induction programs and access to mentors who can provide guidance and support.

Capitalizing on Prior Experience: Pre-service teachers with prior teaching experience exhibited higher self-efficacy and professional identity levels. Teacher education programs can leverage this experience by encouraging peer mentoring systems where experienced pre-service teachers support their less experienced counterparts. Additionally, recognizing and valuing prior teaching experiences in the program structure could be beneficial for reinforcing professional identity.

Addressing Potential Limitations

While the study presents significant findings, several limitations should be acknowledged:

Sample Composition: The sample consisted of pre-service PE teachers from multiple universities. Although diverse, the sample may not fully represent the broader population of pre-service teachers. Future research could include a more varied sample, including pre-service teachers from different specializations and regions.

Self-Report Measures: The use of self-report measures (TSES and PIST) might introduce response biases, such as social desirability bias. To mitigate this, future studies might consider incorporating observational data or peer evaluations to triangulate the self-reported data.

Cross-Sectional Design: The cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal studies are recommended to explore how self-efficacy and professional identity evolve over time and how changes in one variable impact the other.

Future Research Directions

Building on the findings of this study, future research can explore several avenues:

Longitudinal Studies: Investigating the development of self-efficacy and professional identity over the entire duration of teacher education programs and into the first years of teaching could provide a deeper understanding of their interplay and evolution.

Intervention Studies: Examining the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to boost self-efficacy and professional identity, such as mentoring programs, reflective practice workshops, and classroom simulation exercises, can offer practical insights for teacher education.

Comparative Studies: Comparing the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity across different subjects, such as mathematics, science, and humanities, could reveal whether these patterns hold true universally or if there are subject-specific variations.

Qualitative Approaches: Utilizing qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can provide richer, in-depth insights into pre-service teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding self-efficacy and professional identity.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service PE teachers, emphasizing the need for teacher education programs to prioritize the enhancement of self-efficacy to foster a robust professional

identity. By addressing the factors that influence these constructs and implementing targeted support mechanisms, teacher education programs can better prepare future educators for successful and fulfilling teaching careers.

This study examined the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity among pre-service physical education (PE) teachers. The key findings highlight a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and professional identity, whereby higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with stronger professional identity. This is consistent with previous research and underscores the importance of fostering self-efficacy to support the development of a robust professional identity among pre-service teachers.

The results also revealed that self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of professional identity, with age and year of study also contributing to this relationship, while gender did not significantly predict professional identity. Furthermore, pre-service teachers with prior teaching experience reported higher levels of self-efficacy and professional identity, indicating the value of practical experience in teacher education.

These findings have important implications for teacher education programs, suggesting the need for targeted strategies to enhance self-efficacy, such as hands-on teaching experiences, mentoring, reflective practice, and structured support systems during the initial years of training.

However, several limitations of the study should be acknowledged, including the reliance on self-report measures, the cross-sectional design, and the sample composition. Future research should consider longitudinal studies, intervention studies, comparative studies across different teaching subjects, and qualitative approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of self-efficacy and professional identity.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the critical role of self-efficacy in shaping the professional identity of pre-service PE teachers. By addressing the factors that influence these constructs, teacher education programs can enhance the preparation and development of future educators, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching and learning outcomes.

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