Empowering Educators: The Interplay of Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity During Challenging Times

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Abstract

In an era of increasing global challenges including pandemics, natural disasters, and geopolitical conflicts, the education sector has been forced to adapt and change rapidly. Teacher self-efficacy and professional identity are crucial constructs that significantly influence educators' ability to manage crises. This article explores the relationship between these two concepts and their collective impact on teachers' resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. Teachers with high self-efficacy and strong professional identity demonstrate flexibility and leadership, which are crucial for personal and professional growth. The article also discusses strategies for fostering these qualities in educators to better equip them for challenges in the future.

Keywords: teacher self-efficacy, professional identity, crisis teaching, resilience, entrepreneurship education.

1. Introduction

Within the confront of rising worldwide issues such as pandemics, natural catastrophes, and geopolitical pressures, the educational sector has been forced to adjust rapidly and inventively (Schleicher, 2020). In this system, the concepts of educator self-efficacy and proficient personality have risen as basic components affecting educators' capacity to viably explore and address emergencies (Bandura, 1997; Beijaard et al., 2004).

Teacher self-efficacy – the teacher's belief in his or her capability to influence student learning and achievement – has repeatedly been associated with desirable outcomes related to teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Klassen & Tze, 2014). In a similar vein, professional identity, defined as the collection of values, beliefs, and practices that influence a teacher's self-perception in relation to their professional duties, has been demonstrated to be pivotal in determining both teacher effectiveness and the duration of their careers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day et al., 2006).

The relationship between these two concepts becomes especially prominent in times of crisis, as educators must exhibit resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities when confronted with extraordinary challenges (Gu & Day, 2013). Recent research has highlighted that it is those teachers with high self-efficacy and professional identity who were best able to adapt to remote instruction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, showing greater flexibility in their

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teaching practices and maintaining higher levels of student engagement in the face of unfavorable circumstances (Kraft et al., 2020).

This literature review tries to explore how teacher self-efficacy and professional identity are interrelated and how their combination impacts the resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities of teachers in times of crisis. From a close analysis of the interrelatedness of these constructs and their involvement in crisis management, this review is likely to bring to light some insights that will help guide teacher education curricula, professional development initiatives, and educational policies designed to enhance the capacities of teachers to successfully negotiate and thrive in challenging environments.

2. Teacher self-efficacy

Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977) states that self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular task or situation. It is a key factor in determining how people approach challenges, set goals, and persevere in the face of setbacks. In the context of teacher education, self-efficacy is seen as an important predictor of success in the classroom. Teacher self-efficacy, as concept rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory, refers to teachers' beliefs in their capacity to influence student learning and achievement (Bandura, 1997). Bandura's social cognitive theory posits that self-efficacy is a key factor in determining an individual's behavior. He found that people with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of challenges, while those with low self-efficacy are more likely to give up.

Moreover, it is a key factor in determining how teachers approach challenges, set goals, and persevere in the face of setbacks (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). The same authors (2001) define it 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" (p. 783).

Several studies have found that preservice teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to be effective teachers. For example, a study by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) found that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of teacher effectiveness, even after controlling for other factors such as experience and training. Other studies have found that preservice teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to take on challenging tasks, persevere in the face of difficulties, and be successful in their teaching.

More research has also consistently shown that high levels of teacher self-efficacy are associated with numerous positive outcomes. Klassen and Tze (2014) conducted a meta-analysis revealing a significant positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and both teacher performance evaluations and student achievement. Moreover, Zee and Koomen (2016) found that teachers with high self-efficacy demonstrate greater job satisfaction, lower burnout rates, and increased commitment to the profession.

In the context of crisis management, Kraft et al. (2020) observed that teachers with higher self-efficacy were better equipped to adapt to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. They displayed greater flexibility in instructional strategies and maintained higher levels of student engagement despite the challenging circumstances.

All of the above underscores the importance of fostering self-efficacy in preservice and in-service teachers, it could be done through targeted interventions, supportive environments, and professional development opportunities.

3. Professional identity

> "Real knowledge comes from those in whom it lives." – John Henry Newman

Conversely, professional identity consists of a set of values, beliefs, and practices that define a teacher's self-conception of themselves within the framework of their professional roles (Beijaard et al., 2004). This construct is inherently dynamic, evolving throughout a teacher's career and shaped by individual experiences, societal norms, and the contexts provided by institutions (Day et al., 2006).

Erikson (1968), being a pioneer in this field, defined professional identity as an individual's sense of personal and social identity within the context of their chosen profession. It involves the integration of professional roles, values, and commitments into one's self-concept.

Later, Ibarra (1999), described professional identity as a dynamic and evolving sense of self that emerges through engagement in professional roles and activities. It involves the internalization of professional values, beliefs, and norms, and the alignment of personal identity with the expectations of the profession.

Furthermore, research by Pratt and Rafaeli (2001) talks about professional identity as the meanings, feelings, and behaviors associated with being a member of a particular profession. It includes the adoption of professional roles, internalization of professional norms, and identification with the values and goals of the profession.

Overall, professional identity as a concept, refers to the self-perception, beliefs, values, and sense of belonging that individuals develop about their chosen profession. It is the understanding and internalization of what it means to be a professional in a specific field or occupation. Professional identity encompasses how individuals view themselves about their professional role, the knowledge, and skills they possess, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with their profession (Gardner & Shulman, 2005).

In the educational context, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that a strong professional identity is a key element in creating effective educators and in sustaining their careers. Teachers with a strongly developed professional identity demonstrate greater levels of commitment to their work, are better at decision-making, and are clearer about the purpose of their teaching practices (Flores & Day, 2006).

During times of crisis, teachers' professional identity significantly influences how they respond to different situations. According to Hong in 2010, teachers with strong professional identities demonstrated higher levels of resilience and were more likely to persevere under difficult conditions. This type of resilience becomes particularly important during times of turbulence in education, such as when learning rapidly shifted online during the COVID-19 pandemic as shown by Schaefer et al. (2020).

4. The Interconnectedness of teacher self-efficacy and professional identity

The interdependence between teachers' self-efficacy and their professional identity is a complex and dynamic relationship that has important implications for teacher performance, especially during times of adversity.

This interdependence becomes particularly evident during times of crisis when teachers must rely on both their self-efficacy and their sense of professional mission to effectively navigate adversity.

Gu and Day (2007) found that teachers who maintained a strong sense of professional identity during challenging times were more likely to exhibit high levels of self-efficacy in their ability to overcome obstacles. Their research highlighted how a strong professional identity acts as a resource for teachers, allowing them to maintain confidence in their abilities even in the face of adversity.

Another study by Canrinus et al. (2012) demonstrates that teachers' sense of self-efficacy significantly contributes to their overall professional identity. This study found that self-efficacy, along with job satisfaction and motivation, were key indicators of teachers' professional identity.

Similarly, Lasky (2005) observed that teachers with high self-efficacy were better able to maintain their professional identity in the face of educational reforms and policy changes. This suggests that self-efficacy acts as a protective factor, helping teachers to preserve their sense of professional self even when external factors threaten to undermine it.

Furthermore, Hong (2010) discovered that early-career teachers with a more developed professional identity and higher self-efficacy were less likely to leave the profession. This research underscores the importance of nurturing both constructs in teacher education programs and early career support systems to promote teacher retention and resilience.

These studies collectively highlight the symbiotic relationship between teacher self-efficacy and professional identity. They suggest that efforts to enhance one construct are likely to have positive effects on the other, creating a virtuous cycle that can help teachers navigate the challenges of their profession more effectively. This interdependence underscores the importance of nurturing both constructs in teacher education programs and ongoing professional development to promote teacher resilience, effectiveness, and retention.

5. Crisis management and teaching

The concept of crisis teaching has been very relevant in the past couple of years with what the world has gone through, not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic but also because of ongoing wars and conflicts around the world.

Crisis teaching is defined as the "rapid transformation of educational practices in response to emergency conditions" by Hodges et al. (2020). Much of this often involves a shift from traditional face-to-face teaching toward online or hybrid learning environments.

Tschannen-Moran and McMaster, 2009, found that highly self-efficacious teachers are most likely to implement new teaching methods and technologies within the platform of educational disruption. It simply means that teachers with high self-efficacy and strong professional identity are better at handling the challenges associated with crisis teaching. On the other hand, Beijaard et al. (2000) found that teacher educators with a strong professional identity had a better sense of pedagogical values and practices, which remained firm, even in unknown pedagogical contexts.

Davies and Talbot (2008) also highlight the critical role of education in conflict-affected areas, not just for academic purposes, but also for promoting peace and stability. They argue that teachers in these contexts need to be equipped with skills to address conflict-related issues and promote social cohesion.

Notably, MacIntyre et al. (2020) established that higher levels of self-efficacy for educators were related to improved flexibility and coping mechanisms in reaction to fast-tracked changes in online instruction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It paid emphasis to how self-

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efficacy stood out in the teachers' capacities to cope under stress and maintain well-being during times of educational crisis.

In the latest research, Kraft et al. (2020) found that teachers reporting stronger professional identity indicated a higher likelihood of using innovative pedagogies and maintaining higher levels of student engagement for longer during remote learning. Their study highlighted the role of professional identity in motivating teachers to transcend the crisis teaching challenges while managing to continuously deliver quality education.

In the context of war and conflict, Winthrop and Kirk (2008) emphasize the importance of teachers' ability to provide psychosocial support to students, in addition to academic instruction. This aligns with the concept of teacher self-efficacy and professional identity, as teachers must adapt their roles to meet the complex needs of students in crises.

All the above, points to the critical need for teacher self-efficacy and professional identity in the framework of crisis management at a school. Moreover, they suggest that their development in teachers might strongly improve educators' capability to respond effectively to unexpected situations without detriment to quality education, even in very difficult times.

6. Cultivating self-efficacy and professional identity

Given the critical role of self-efficacy and professional identity in crisis management, it is essential to consider strategies for cultivating these qualities in teachers. Based on the previous review, the are several strategies that can be implied to foster self-efficacy and professional identity among teachers.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of comprehensive professional development programs that address both pedagogical skills and teachers' sense of professional purpose. Their research highlights the need for teacher training that goes beyond just imparting technical skills and also focuses on developing teachers' professional identity and sense of mission.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), professional development should combine instruction in specific teaching strategies with broader discussions about educational philosophy and purpose. Such as collaborative programs that foster a sense of community among teachers, allowing for peer learning and support.

Moreover, teachers should engage in the same style of learning they are expected to practice with their students. This is why training should be directly relevant to the subjects and grade levels teachers are teaching, this process must be ongoing, not just a one-off workshop. This comprehensive approach would address both the practical skills teachers need to manage crisis teaching situations and support their development of a strong professional identity, which is crucial for resilience and effectiveness in challenging times.

More research suggests that mentoring and collaborative learning communities have been shown to be particularly effective in enhancing both self-efficacy and professional identity among teachers. Avalos (2011) found that teachers who participated in collaborative professional development activities reported higher levels of self-efficacy and a stronger sense of professional identity.

It could be done in several ways:

(a) PLC communities provide a platform for teachers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and collaboratively develop solutions, strengthening their professional identity. Vescio et al. (2008) reviewed research on PLCs and found that well-

developed PLCs have positive impacts on both teaching practice and student achievement.

(b) Mentoring Programs: Ingersoll and Strong (2011) reviewed 15 empirical studies and found that support and mentoring for beginning teachers have a positive impact on three sets of outcomes: teacher commitment and retention, teacher classroom instructional practices, and student achievement. This suggests that mentoring not only enhances self-efficacy but also contributes to the development of a strong professional identity.

(c) Trust et al. (2016) explored how participation in online professional learning networks can enhance teacher self-efficacy and professional identity. They found that these networks provide opportunities for continuous learning, reflection, and collaboration that contribute to teachers' professional growth. It could be also done in a cross-school collaboration. Rempe-Gillen (2018) studied cross-school teacher collaborations and found that they can significantly enhance teacher self-efficacy and professional identity, particularly when teachers from different contexts share and learn from each other's experiences.

These studies collectively underscore the value of collaborative and mentoring approaches in teacher professional development. They suggest that creating opportunities for teachers to work together, share experiences, and learn from each other can be a powerful way to enhance both self-efficacy and professional identity. This is particularly relevant in the context of crisis teaching, where collaborative problem-solving and peer support can be crucial for navigating challenges effectively.

7. Conclusion

The interdependence of teacher self-efficacy and professional identity plays a crucial role in educators' ability to manage crises effectively. Teachers who possess high levels of self-efficacy and a strong professional identity demonstrate greater resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving skills in the face of challenging circumstances. As the education sector continues to navigate an increasingly complex and unpredictable landscape, fostering these qualities in teachers becomes necessary.

Future research should focus on developing targeted interventions to enhance teacher self-efficacy and professional identity, particularly in the context of crisis preparedness. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of these constructs on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes during periods of educational disruption would provide valuable insights for policy-makers and educational leaders.

By recognizing and nurturing the interconnected relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity, we can better equip teachers to not only survive but thrive in times of crisis, ultimately ensuring the continuity and quality of education for all students.

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