

CONNECTING WITH CONFIDENCE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON SELF-EFFICACY, RELATIONSHIPS AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IN ESL TEACHER EDUCATION – PHASE 1

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Abstract

Teacher self-efficacy, classroom management, and teacher-student relationships are central components of effective teaching, particularly in second language classrooms where emotional demands and communication challenges are often heightened. While these constructs have been widely examined in teacher education, much of the existing research relies on short-term or cross-sectional designs, offering limited insight into how they evolve together in the early years of teacher education. This paper presents the initial methodological phase of a longitudinal study following a single cohort of 37 pre-service ESL teachers enrolled in a four-year teacher education program at a Canadian university. Based on social cognitive theory, the study places teacher self-efficacy at the center of an examination of classroom management and teacher-student relationships. A repeated measures design is employed, with the same questionnaire administered before and after each of the four practicum experiences evenly distributed across elementary and secondary school contexts. Data collection focuses on pre-service teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, classroom management, emotional regulation, and teacher-student relationships. This paper outlines the research design, participant context, instruments, and planned analytical approach, with particular attention to feasibility, ethical considerations, and longitudinal consistency. By integrating data collection into practicum seminars, the study addresses common challenges related to attrition and measurement stability in longitudinal teacher education research. Positioned as a work in progress, this paper presents a clear and feasible methodological framework for examining how pre-service teachers develop over time.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, classroom management, teacher-student relationships, ESL teacher education, longitudinal research.*

1. Introduction and rationale

Pre-service teachers in second language education frequently encounter significant challenges during their practicum experiences, particularly in relation to classroom management, emotional regulation, and the development of meaningful teacher-student relationships. Although teacher education programs provide theoretical preparation in these areas, the transition from university coursework to real classroom settings remains complex and, for many novice teachers, demanding. Internships place pre-service teachers in situations involving substantial professional pressure, requiring rapid pedagogical and relational decision-making while simultaneously managing stress, self-doubt and formal supervision and evaluation.

Teacher-student relationships play a central role in classroom functioning and influence student engagement and cooperation, particularly in emotionally demanding learning contexts such as second language classroom (Hattie, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011). At the same time, many novice teachers do not or often hesitate to enforce behavioural expectations for fear of damaging relationships, which can further complicate classroom management. Despite having been introduced to foundational classroom management concepts, pre-service teachers often struggle to apply consequences or classroom management strategies consistently when faced with unexpected student behaviour. Our experiences as practicum supervisors support in practicum settings, cooperating teachers and supervisors commonly report ineffective responses to misbehaviour (delayed, tactical ignorance, and empty threats), repeated verbal warnings without follow-through, or the use of consequences that are stated but not applied.

Although classroom management, self-efficacy, and teacher-student relationships have been widely studied, much existing research relies on short-term or cross-sectional designs focused on single practicum experiences. Longitudinal studies following the same cohort of pre-service teachers across multiple internships remain comparatively rare (Lawson et al., 2015). The present study addresses this gap by presenting the initial methodological phase of a longitudinal research project following a single cohort of pre-service ESL teachers across four practicum experiences within a four-year teacher education program. Rather than reporting outcomes, this paper focuses on the study's design, theoretical grounding, and analytical framework, establishing a foundation for examining how self-efficacy, classroom management, and teacher-student relationships develop over time.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) which views professional learning as emerging from the interaction between teachers' beliefs, the classroom context, and what teachers do in practice. Within this perspective, teacher self-efficacy serves as the central construct. Teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to organize and carry out actions required to manage teaching and classroom situations effectively (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is responsive to contextual influences; it develops and evolves from four main sources of information: performance experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion/encouragement, and emotional/physiological states. In educational settings, self-efficacy is understood as task specific and context-dependant, making it particularly relevant for pre-service teachers working in unfamiliar classroom environments during practicum experiences (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). In the case of pre-service teachers, efficacy beliefs will be influenced by observation, feedback, and emotional responses. Consequently, practicum experiences will have an impact on the development and shaping of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Research indicates that novice teachers often experience strong emotional responses in challenging classroom situations, which can influence how they make decisions and respond to students (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). In this study, classroom management is viewed as a practice closely tied to relationships and context rather than as a fixed set of techniques. Teacher-student relationships have an important role in how classroom management strategies are applied, particularly for novice teachers. Emotional regulation is also central, as pre-service teachers must manage their own stress and reactions while responding to student behaviour. Examining these elements together over time allows for a clearer understanding of how classroom management develops during initial teacher education.

3. Research design and participants

The study adopts a longitudinal research design following a single cohort of 37 pre-service teachers across four internships within a four-year teacher education program. Data will be collected using a repeated-measures framework, with the same questionnaire administered before and after each practicum experience. This design allows for the examination of changes associated with individual internships as well as broader developmental patterns over time.

Participants are enrolled in the ESL teacher education program at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada. The program includes one practicum per year for a total of four practica evenly distributed across elementary and secondary school contexts.

Participation in the study is voluntary and independent of academic evaluation. Ethical approval will be obtained prior data collection, and all data will be collected anonymously and stored securely.

4. Instruments and data collection

Data will be collected using Slater and Main's (2020) pre-service teacher self-efficacy questionnaire, a validated tool consisting of 24 Likert-type items. Additional questions will address teacher-student relationships, classroom management perceptions, and emotional regulation, reflecting dimensions that are central to practicum experiences. The same instruments will be administered before and after each internship across four years to support longitudinal consistency and comparison. Questionnaires will be completed online and integrated into practicum seminars to ensure standardized administration conditions and to support sustained participation over time.

5. Analytical framework and anticipated contributions

Data analysis will focus on how individual participants' responses change over time across the four practicum experiences. Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses will be used at each stage to ensure the consistency of the measures and to observe general patterns of change. At this stage, the aim is to describe development over time rather than to predict outcomes or test causal relationships.

As an initial phase, this study prioritizes methodological clarity and feasibility, establishing a solid foundation for future analysis rather than reporting results. The design offers a feasible framework for longitudinal research in teacher education and prepares the ground for subsequent phases that will integrate qualitative data sources.

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