



Student teachers' school teaching practice: The relation amongst perceived self-competence, motivation and sources of support



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Student teachers rate medium to high levels of self-competence in teaching.
- Sources of support consist of a social network of different agents.
- Student teachers' external motivation affects their teaching.
- Support affects student teachers' teaching.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates Greek student teachers' experiences and views about self-competence, motivation and the sources of support during school teaching practice (STP) in a four-year Bachelor of Primary Education Degree Program. The theoretical framework is based on the theory of situated learning and self-determination theory. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The main findings indicate statistically significant correlations among external motivation, support and perceived teaching self-competence during the STP course. Also institutional and social networks of support appeared to contribute to the development of teaching competences.

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1. Introduction

Teacher education programs incorporate field experiences through school teaching practice (STP) which aim to bridge theory with practice so as to provide prospective teachers with authentic experiences from which they can develop teaching skills and competencies thus, develop a genuine perception of pedagogy and see the 'full picture' of the teaching profession (Hillman, Bottomley, Raisner & Malin, 2000; Leko & Brownell, 2011; Maslak & McLaughlin, 2003; Noonis & Jernice, 2011; Perkins & Unger, 1999; Scott, Gentry, & Phillips, 2014; Whitney, Golez, Nagel, & Nieto, 2002).

Previous research has shown that student teachers hold positive attitudes towards STP, they perceive their experiences from that as an important and essential part for their professional life (Zeichner & Gore, 1990), either because they understand pupils' needs within the classroom and other school related matters (Noonis & Jernice,

2011) or because they develop a better image of their duties (McDonnough & Matkins, 2010) or because they can build their self-confidence (Ober, 2013). Nevertheless, the STP component of undergraduate studies in teacher education programs has been claimed in some studies for not sufficiently preparing prospective teachers to cope with full time teaching (i.e. Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grudnoff, 2011 in Scott et al., 2014, p. 295), as well as being a multi-task activity from which the accomplishments for student teachers are three-fold: (a) planning and implementing teaching while managing classroom behavior in mainstream classes, (b) developing confidence and (c) being assessed (Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999), ending in heavy workload and pressure.

Furthermore, in the last two decades research on prospective teachers' field experiences has focused on relating the socialization process of student teachers to the procedural and pedagogical components of the STP (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012, p. 164), indicating that this dimension of becoming a teacher can affect student teachers' performance in the classroom, their professional development and the type of teacher they become (Flores, 2006; Hargreaves, 1992; Krečić & Grmek, 2008; Kuzmic, 1994; Lamote & Engels, 2010; McNally, Cope, Inglis, & Stronach, 1997; Zeichner &

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Gore, 1990; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). Attempts have been also made to design and apply effective supervision strategies during teaching practicum [i.e. develop supportive supervisory relationships and effective communication between supervisor(s) and student teacher] based on the recognition of the role that personal characteristics, experiences and resources student teachers use, mentors' and tutors' support and the school culture can have on student teachers' development in teaching (Blumberg, 1980; Caires et al., 2012; Cohn & Gellman, 1988; Flores & Day, 2005; Glickman & Bey, 1990; Stones, 1984; Zahorik, 1988). School culture is the environment where student teachers are exposed in order to learn how to teach. This type of learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, the workplace, not in the individual mind (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is important to acknowledge the situated character of student teacher understanding and levels of communication during teaching as well as the relationship between learning and the social situation of the apprenticeship according to the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Previous studies have paid attention to support and supervision structures of student teachers during teaching practice, empirical evidence of the relation amongst student teachers' motivation to teach, their perceived self-competence of teaching and the sources of support during their school teaching practice is scarce and the present study aims to examine these relations.

The present research is based on the theory of situated learning as proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) where “learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world and legitimate peripheral participation is proposed as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent” (p. 35). Student teachers do not simply transport and apply theory into practice during their first teaching experiences. Their actions are based on the premise that meaning, understanding and acting are defined relative to a school context and culture, not to self-contained structures (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and these actions are supported by expert mediators. Supervision strategies and sources of support can play an important role in the social dimension of becoming a teacher. Thus, this article is aimed at examining the influence of sources of support and motivation types to prospective teachers' perceived self-competence. As such, this article makes a contribution to the growing literature base around increasing student teachers' self-competence in teaching and offers insights into the interplay of motivation types, sources of support during teaching experiences and self-competence in teaching.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Student teachers' perceived self-competence of teaching

Student teachers' sense of self-competence in teaching refers to the beliefs teachers have about their capability to successfully perform teaching-related tasks (Kim & Cho, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Student teachers have appeared in previous research to have higher sense of self-competence than in-service teachers had (De la Torre Cruz & Casanova Arias, 2007; Kim & Cho, 2014). This difference has been explained in the literature with the fact that in-service teachers have experienced more obstacles in the teaching profession throughout the years compared to novice teachers who are very enthusiastic and optimistic. It seems that the experience effect influences the level of self-efficacy beliefs and attitudes. Prior research on the pre-service teachers' self-competence regarding teaching has indicated factors that affect these beliefs and attitudes: “the teacher education program, the practicum, the school environment, student attitudes toward the cooperating teachers and peer student teachers, and other

interpersonal relationships with staff and with students' families” (Kim & Cho, 2014, p. 72). Student teachers' perceived self-competence of teaching can be positive and lead to teaching efficacy depending on their performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977), their personality characteristics and capabilities, their motivation to teach (Kim & Cho, 2014; Oh, 2011; Poulou, 2007; Yeung & Watkins, 2000) as well as their attempts to build effective relationships with their students (Ng, Nicholas, & Williams, 2010). Nevertheless, student teachers' relatively high levels of self-competence in teaching, motivation for teaching and the sources of support during their teaching experiences has not been explored.

Well known scales for measuring pre-service teacher perceived self-competence of teaching are adaptations of in-service teacher efficacy from (a) the Bandura's teacher self-efficacy scale; (b) the TSES (Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001); (c) the OSTES (Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale); and (d) the TEBS – Self Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs System—Self Form (TEBS-Self) as reported in Huangfu (2012). However, the items in these scales are not representative enough concerning the student teachers' perceptions of self-competence in teaching (Huangfu, 2012). Moreover, they do not appear to adequately cover the aspect of pupil diversity management in the class. In the Greek context a scale measuring student teachers' perception of self-competence in teaching was used by Kaldi (2009a) with four subscales identified from the factor analysis (preparation and certain aspects of teaching, carrying out teaching, dealing with pupils, audiovisual means and teaching materials) showing that student teachers believed that they were overall moderately competent concerning different aspects of teaching. Therefore the scale by Kaldi (2009a) was identified as more suitable to be applied because it was used in a similar context in the past.

2.2. Self-determination theory in prospective teachers' autonomous motivation to teach

Prospective teachers' autonomous motivation for teaching has received relatively little research in comparison to in-service teachers (Kim & Cho, 2014; Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Self-determination theory (SDT) explains the concept of autonomous motivation which is considered as the freedom to initiate and regulate one's decision to a certain conduct of behavior (Fernet, Senécal, Guay, Marsh, & Dowson, 2008, p. 257; Kim & Cho, 2014). SDT is considered as an approach to human motivation and personality that highlights the importance of humans' developed inner resources for behavioral self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). It investigates people's inherent growth tendencies and psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). They have also recognized the needs for competence, for relatedness and for autonomy which appear to be essential for personal growth, integration and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT motivation can be broadly categorized into extrinsic and intrinsic types. External motivation represents that one's behavior is regulated by external powers such monetary rewards, prizes, scores or obligation to carry out specific tasks (Kim & Cho, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Internal motivation refers to inner-self forces that drive the person to act and behave in certain modes and get satisfaction from just performing the task each time. Ryan and Deci (2002) enriched the dichotomous view of motivation into further categories from one end to the other (extrinsic to intrinsic motivation continuum), i.e. extrinsic, introjected, identified, intrinsic. Introjected motivation refers to one's regulation of behavior by

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