International Education:
Intersectionality of Teacher Self-Efficacy and Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the connections, if any, between teacher self-efficacy and their intercultural competence within an international and mixed ability setting. The research was focused specifically within international school settings due to the potential higher frequency of intercultural populations within these schools. The purpose was to better understand the intersectionality of intercultural competence related to teacher exposures/experiences, such as awareness, knowledge, experience/skills, and attitude towards cultural differences and how that might impact classroom experiences for teachers, and overall school culture. While a subgoal was that through reflexivity, if teacher self-efficacy and the relationship it has with intercultural competence was explored, the self-evaluation of this experience could influence teacher and student experiences, goals, and potential outcomes. With one more subgoal of how researchers/educators can create learning experiences for pre-service teachers in a teacher preparation program to provide more cultural relevance without these future teachers having international teaching experience to prepare them for their future diverse classrooms. The study was completely voluntary for in-service teachers and used using mixed research methods to conduct the study and analyze the data. Researchers used a self-efficacy scale and an intercultural developmental inventory and combined that data with descriptive findings from semi-structured interviews with participants and all data was then analyzed utilizing categorized themes. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy and intercultural competence and yielded themes of not belonging, multiple cultural identities, and expatriate enjoyment.

Keywords: Intercultural, Teacher Self-Efficacy, International Education

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Introduction

Background & Purpose

Culturally responsive teaching continues to stay at the forefront within classroom education. Regardless of students and teachers in person, or not, by understanding their students, teachers have much to gain such as respect, engagement, and improving their classroom community (Gay, 2010). While international schoolteachers not only have the classroom experience, but they also have the cultural experience of living *and* teaching abroad. International schoolteachers have an advantage to their practice by being encompassed within the environment that some of their students might call home. International schoolteachers are exposed to different languages, customs, religions, traditional foods, mannerisms, etc. By living in a new location and teaching an international population they are constantly raising their awareness, knowledge, experience, skills, and attitude towards difference in general (Huber & Reynolds, 2014). Thus, international schoolteachers were the target population for this study since they would potentially have a higher exposure to several intercultural factors. Many international schoolteachers spend their whole career moving from place to place and living and learning in a new environment to assimilate more cultural experiences. Through this lifestyle of teaching and learning, while also living abroad, these educators are accumulating a diverse set of skills. Thus, the researcher was eager to discover if these cultural exposures did translate to a connection to their belief in their capacity to teach, first and foremost. As a subgoal, how might the process of this research and reflexivity impact them and/or their classrooms and school and a final subgoal, how that might these possible connections of intercultural competence and self-efficacy be harnessed and understood for other educators that were not able/willing to travel and teach internationally to truly display culturally responsive teaching and meet a diversity of needs in their everyday classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

For the contexts of this research study, several frameworks were utilized: Social Learning Theory and Theory of Learning and Development. First, Bandura's Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of observation and modelling. When one is an international schoolteacher and they are living and working in a location different from their home country, they are exposed to various languages, customs, foods, cultural norms, etc. When learning about these new factors in their lives, they can even mimic these acquired assimilations through attention, repetition, retention, and a general motivation to learn more about the people and places around them (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura also wrote about self-efficacy and how it relates to social learning theory. He stated how it included four sources of influence: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological/emotional states (Bandura, 1998). While this can be investigated for any one person, by applying these four influences on teachers, one could assess how teacher motivation, behavior, and environment impacts their daily job, educating students. He documents 20 years of research around self-efficacy and summarizes his work by primarily suggesting that if one had a belief in oneself, then that can result in more effective, successful, and overall healthy life, which overlaps into their working world as well (Bandura, 1998).

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory also known as Sociocultural Development Theory, rests on 5 major tenants: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other (MKO), the Zone

of Proximal Development (ZPD), language, and the impact of culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Each of these tenants relate to the context of this study due to the social interactions of a classroom community, school community, and neighborhood community in general. Everyone can be a knowledgeable other to everyone else, since cultural aspects can be taught at any age to another person of any age. Then, with the ZPD where learning occurs with guidance and/or collaboration from others and finally, understanding language and impact of culture in general of other people and the location one lives and works can influence each of the other tenants and how social development might transform learning experiences throughout one's life.

Methods & Data Sources

Research Methods

This study was completely voluntary for in-service teachers and used mixed methods to conduct the study and analyze the data. Researchers used Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey (TSES) that consisted of 24 questions to measure teachers' belief in their capacity to teach in relation to efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management. The TSES was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) through numerous revision cycles and testing of hundreds of individuals to generate a final instrument that can accurately identify teacher perspectives in relation to three factors: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. This assessment tool utilized a 9-point response scale, and the response descriptors ranged from: 1- nothing and going up to 9 - a great deal.

In addition, Bennett, Hammer, and Wiseman 's (2003) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) that consisted of 50 questions to measure cultural competence in relation to one's own viewpoint and acquired skills and opinions towards cultural differences and similarities. The IDI was developed by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) and these researchers have tested hundreds of thousands of people from various cultural groups and countries to create a reliable and valid measuring tool. The assessment is offered in 17 different languages through using back translation protocols. This assessment tool utilized a 5-point response scale, and the response descriptors ranged from: disagree, disagree somewhat more than agree, disagree some and agree some, agree somewhat more than disagree, and agree. The IDI is also broken into a continuum called Intercultural Developmental Continuum where there are 5 stages, or orientations in which participants taking this survey can fall within. On this continuum, participants received a perceived orientation (PO), a developmental orientation (DO), and an orientation gap (OG), which was the difference between the PO and DO. The PO (Perceived Orientation) and the DO (Developmental Orientation) scores are determined using formulas that are proprietary (Hammer et al., 2003, Appendix C). Thus, while the algorithm is not available for public knowledge, the data shows participant 'perception' versus 'reality' in terms of their intercultural competence scores and where that score has them fall within the continuum (Hammer et al., 2003). Then, these findings were combined with 10 question semi-structured interviews from the teacher participants and analyzed utilizing categorized themes via MAXQDA.

Participants

International schools were selected as research locations for this study due to the potential higher frequency of intercultural competence. The findings in this paper are from three

schools spanning PK-12 in western Europe with 20 teachers who volunteered to be a part of this study. However, this is just one phase of the study, as research is ongoing with other research locations. The requirements for teachers to participate were that they had a minimum of 3 years teaching experience and taught at least in two different international and/or not native country schools. From those that volunteered, they each had at least 10 years teaching experience, with an average of 23 years, they all spoke at least intermediate level in 2 languages, and they had all taught in at least 2 countries.

Results

Teacher participants completed the Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey (TSES), the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), and the 10-question semi-structured interview for the data collection of this study. However, the results within this paper documents data only up to a certain point as the data collection process is still occurring in other locations.

TSES & IDI

The group average results of the TSES were 80.2% out of a total score of 100% self-efficacy. This means that the participants feel that they are confident in their abilities to teach in relation to student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management 80.2% of the time they are teaching. Out of the three-category factor analysis, the category that teachers consistently scored higher versus the other two was instructional strategies, averaging 84% and when reflecting on these survey results in the interviews, several participants noted that this was the factor that they had more personal control over since their knowledge base and lesson planning was mostly up to them. Subsequently, student engagement and classroom management required more student participation within their classes, thus depending on others.

As for the group average results of the IDI in terms of perceived orientation (PO) that was 84.3% out of a total of 100% and the group average of the developmental orientation (DO) competence was 69.3% out of a total of 100%. The participants did show to have a slight overestimation of their perception of intercultural competence, but only by 15.0% and still demonstrated a positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy and intercultural competence. Thus, these results demonstrate that these participants fell within the 'acceptance' orientation on the Intercultural Development Continuum, thus comprehending culturally difference deeply and how it impacts daily life. The lower the orientation gap (OG) between the PO and DO, the more realistic your perception is with reality in terms of your intercultural competence. It was mentioned by several participants that the time of day, their disposition, and which cultural identity they were identifying with at the particular time of completing the survey, did impact their results and this is noted as a potential limitation of this study.
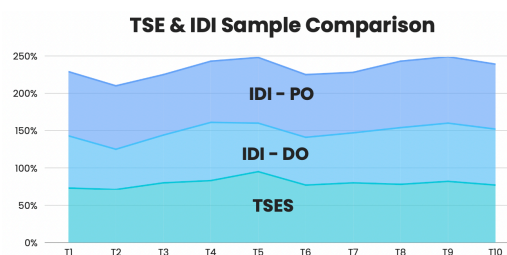

Figure 1: TSE & IDI Sample Comparison Data

Highlighted above is a sample of 10 participants from multiple schools to highlight the varying scores. For example, Teacher 2 (T2) experienced slightly lower than average scores of 71% for TSES, and 54% IDI-DO and 85% IDI-PO. Then you see from Teacher 5 (T5) you see slightly elevated scores of TSES of 95% and 65% IDI-DO and 88% IDI-PO. These increases and decreases of scores within their results have similar patterns of connection with a standard deviation of 15.5 and 15.6, thus demonstrating the connection between the scores also.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 questions and were held via Zoom and recorded with approval for transcription purposes. The teachers were given assessment results approximately 48 hours ahead of time to review and reflect prior to the interview. The interview questions included inquiring about teacher background in terms of degrees, years teaching, languages spoken, describing cultural identity, and then reflecting on the survey results from the TSES and IDI and overall school culture. After analyzing the transcriptions of these interviews utilizing various coding strategies and MAXQDA, the following themes became clear: multiple cultural identities, not belonging, and expatriate enjoyment.

Interviews Theme 1: Multiple Cultural Identities.

The first theme identified was multiple cultural identities, which occurred in 100% of the participants. Some of the participants identified with their home country identity and another country in which they lived the longest, while others identified with their current country of residence and where their ancestors came from, even if they had never lived there. While others also identified with a spouse and their home country, if it differed from theirs and where they currently live. While reflecting on the surveys they took, a frequent comment in the transcripts was how the teachers felt like they needed to wear only one 'cultural hat' at a time and couldn't always demonstrate their multiple cultural identities. They noted that it was dependent upon who they were with or where they were (restaurant, school, etc.) if they were to change their demeanor, language used, clothing, etc. One teacher described her cultural identity as a "global citizen" since she identified with so many (D.D., personal communication, 2024).

Interviews Theme 2: Not Belonging.

The second theme identified was not belonging, which came up in a few different contexts; the first context was when a teacher visited their home country and felt as though they were growing beyond the knowledge/exposure of their home country family members and friends, and the other context was when they first arrived within a new location and having that period of time before assimilation. One participant in particular even cried during the interview noting that when she went back to her hometown, she "felt misalignment after only being abroad for 3 years" (M.L., personal communication, 2024). Thus, with the international teaching lifestyle described by many interviewed, after several years, many moved on to their next location, constantly living in this assimilation state and conveying an idea of never truly feeling 'at home' where they are, and unsure where their 'home' might be.

Interviews Theme 3: Expatriate Enjoyment.

The third theme identified from the interviews was expatriate enjoyment and it was a frequent topic of conversation within the interviews as well. Even though some participants struggled with periods of not belonging and having long adjustment periods, they still expressed the joy of living and teaching abroad above the frustration of assimilation to a new location. All participants had lived and worked in at least 2 countries, but several had experience in many more than that and even comparing country to country, each participant was still able to pull positive experiences from each situation and didn't seem to have a negative feeling from living and teaching abroad, especially since they continued to do so. One teacher described it as "getting out of my comfort zone" (CB, personal communication, 2024) and loving the space the grow and learn again and again.

Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship(s), if any, between self-efficacy and intercultural competence with the assumption that international schoolteachers would have the potential to score higher in terms of intercultural competence survey, thus yielding higher self-efficacy rates. With the context of these three international schools that have completed this study, it did show that they had positive correlation with their TSES and IDI surveys. Then, with the added contextual information from the surveys to aid in the test score analysis, the teachers enjoyed living and teaching abroad, didn't like feeling like they don't belong, thus try to assimilate into the country/culture as soon as they can, and many even identified their current country as part of their cultural identity since they have immersed themselves there. Having these exposures and experiences has seemed to raise their general awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards cultural differences and it has seemed to impact their classrooms and overall school culture positively since they believe that their capacity to teach in terms of engagement, instruction, and classroom management demonstrated by high scores on their TSES. Through this study, researchers were better able to understand more about how exposure, experience and even immersion of various cultural aspects assisted teachers in feeling confident in their capacity to be culturally relevant classroom leaders.

Implications & Significance

While the results of this study are focusing on international schoolteachers, other schools are currently within the data collection phase and future findings and discussions comparing data are to come. The findings of this study confirmed the hypothesis of the researcher in that those teachers that had exposures/knowledge/experience of other cultures scored higher on an intercultural competence survey, thus scoring with a similar high score on a self-efficacy survey and feeling confident to teach diverse students. A future hope for this continued research and further implications is to harness intercultural skills for others who have varying experiences, especially those who do not have international teaching experience. Furthermore, to that these intercultural skills and create, modify, and implement course content in teacher preparation courses for future teachers as they continue their journey to their future diverse classrooms and to become confident classroom leaders who are culturally responsive to their future students.

Limitations

As with any study, the sample of participants could limit the outcomes and results of the study, especially with this study only focusing on international teachers. If more participant were included in the study, then the results could have been more statistically significant. In addition, the study only utilized one tool for assessing self-efficacy and one tool for assessing intercultural competence, and both of those tools have their own limitations and reliability factors as they are continuously being improved by their creators. In addition, participant's disposition prior to taking the assessments is a factor of possible limitation as well, as previously mentioned. While the results from this study could have yielded higher intercultural development scores due to international setting and overall cultural experiences with living abroad, teaching abroad, bilingual/multilingual, etc., researchers are currently acquiring data from public school locations in multiple countries to compare international schoolteachers with public school teachers to assist with further implication for teacher preparation programs.

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