

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-EFFICACY FOR TEACHING IN
INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

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Dedication

To my parents, Isami and Fumiko Hatakeyama, whose wisdom, love, and perseverance have shaped me into the person I am today. You taught me the value of education, not just as a tool for success but as a lifelong journey of curiosity and growth. Your example of hard work and resilience has been my guiding light, reminding me to never give up, no matter how challenging the path.

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Abstract

This study explores the development of self-efficacy in pre-service teachers enrolled in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) program, focusing on factors that influence their confidence in working in inclusive early childhood classrooms. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions to achieve specific goals. In education, teacher self-efficacy is a key predictor of success, particularly in navigating the complexities of inclusive education. Using a single-case study approach, this research integrates surveys, interviews, artifacts, and a research journal to explore how pre-service teachers perceive their readiness to work in inclusive environments. Findings reveal five key professional self-efficacy-forming experiences: mentor teachers, field experiences, coursework, university staff, and a sense of accomplishment, each aligning with Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy. Additionally, five personal experiences were identified as influential: close encounters with individuals with disabilities, leadership experiences, challenging life experiences, age, and mental health. These professional and personal experiences collectively shape pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and confidence in inclusive education. The study highlights the need for structured support, intentional mentorship, and opportunities for reflection to cultivate self-efficacious early childhood educators.

****Keywords:**** pre-service teachers, teacher self-efficacy, early childhood, inclusion

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in fostering children's self-regulation, promoting socially responsible behavior, and supporting cognitive development, regardless of their abilities (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017). Research indicates that a positive teacher-student relationship enhances young children's academic achievement and behavioral skills, emphasizing the significant influence of social and emotional development on overall growth and learning (Alzahrani et al., 2019).

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard (2007), early experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain, laying the foundation for future learning, health, and behavior. To build on this foundation, high-quality preschool programs are essential in addressing academic and health disparities, ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities for success. Such programs are most effective when led by highly skilled educators who provide evidence-based instruction and care (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023). Furthermore, to truly support young learners, these programs must be developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, promoting children's emotional, physical, and cognitive well-being (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). Central to this effort are early childhood educators, who play a pivotal role in creating inclusive, supportive learning environments, implementing developmentally appropriate practices, and fostering strong, trusting relationships with both children and their families.

Furthermore, high-quality preschool inclusion experiences benefit all children, those with and without disabilities, by promoting social competence, early academic skills, and smoother transitions into elementary school settings (Lawrence et al., 2016). Children can develop the

necessary foundational skills for lifelong learning and success based on the foundation of their inclusive preschool experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Early childhood teacher candidates will work with children who exhibit a wide range of learning behaviors and needs. Inclusive education encompasses supporting children with disabilities, English language learners, those with undiagnosed behavioral challenges, and typically developing children. As students with disabilities spend more time in general education classrooms with typically developing peers, it is crucial to equip teachers with the necessary skills to support all learners effectively (Carta, 2017; Hawaii State Teacher Association, 2018; McLean, 2020; Wallis & Oklahoma, 2024).

Given this reality, teacher self-efficacy plays a crucial role in supporting learners with diverse learning needs, fostering inclusive classroom environments, and improving teacher retention, consequently enhancing student learning outcomes (Wallis & Oklahoma, 2024). Research has also shown a strong connection between teacher self-efficacy (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016), job satisfaction (Barnett, 2004), job retention (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016), and burnout (Friedman, 2000; Lazarides & Warner, 2020; Zee & Kroomen, 2016). However, retaining skilled early childhood educators remains a significant challenge (Bassok et al., 2021; Hamel et al., 2025).

Theoretical Framework

Using Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989) as a theoretical framework, I examined how pre-service teachers' experiences influence their self-efficacy in addressing the diverse needs of preschool students. SCT describes how environmental, behavioral, and personal factors influence human behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1986a). Emphasizing cognitive processes, SCT

explains how children and adults interpret social experiences and how these interpretations, in turn, shape behavior and development (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). Anderson and Chen (2002) add that “self-other” relationships are closely tied to SCT (p. 619), which are activated and influenced by social interactions. A key concept within SCT is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986b), a person’s belief in their ability to succeed in particular tasks or situations (Bandura, 1994, 1997). High self-efficacy tends to boost motivation and resilience when facing challenges, whereas low self-efficacy can result in avoidance and lack of engagement (Bandura, 1994, 1997). Studies have also shown that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to remain in the teaching profession, leading to teacher retention, a significant issue in early childhood education (Novey, 2020). Furthermore, higher levels of self-efficacy improve student learning and development (Chen et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2021)

Purpose Statement

This qualitative case study explores the professional and personal experiences that shape pre-service teachers’ self-efficacy as they prepare to implement inclusive practices to meet the diverse needs of preschool-age students. It examines the factors that influence their confidence and preparedness in working within inclusive early childhood classrooms, providing insights into how self-efficacy develops during teacher preparation.

While pre-service teachers’ self-reported self-efficacy may not always align with actual classroom practices, their perceived self-efficacy plays a crucial role in fostering motivation and resilience, which, in turn, impacts teacher retention (Stewart et al., 2021; Yada et al., 2021). Research by Sharma et al. (2012) indicates that pre-service teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to implement inclusive practices effectively.

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how pre-service teachers develop self-efficacy for inclusive education and identify key influences on their confidence and readiness to teach in inclusive settings. The findings will inform recommendations for how teacher preparation programs can better support and strengthen this critical aspect of teacher development, ultimately improving outcomes for both educators and students in inclusive early childhood classrooms.

Research Questions

This study had one central research question and two sub-questions.

Central question: How do pre-service early childhood teachers develop their self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

1. What professional experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?
2. What personal experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

Overview of Method

This study utilized a qualitative case study, focusing on a bounded case of pre-service teachers enrolled in the Early Childhood Education program. The research explored participants' previous and current self-efficacy-forming experiences, providing insight into the factors that shaped their confidence in teaching diverse learners. In this approach, I served as the primary data collector and analyst, employing both inductive and deductive analysis to develop a detailed and meaningful descriptive narrative. The study began with a survey of pre-service teachers enrolled in the Early Childhood Education program, followed by the selection of nine

participants for one-hour online interviews. Data were analyzed using directed content analysis and in vivo coding to identify key themes.

By examining pre-service teachers' backgrounds and experiences, this study sheds light on the factors influencing their perspectives on their ability to deliver instruction in early childhood inclusion settings effectively. Specifically, it considers how various sources of self-efficacy, such as personal experiences, social influences, and prior successes or challenges, shape their ability to support the diverse needs of young children. This approach provides a contextual understanding of their developmental journeys, offering insights into how teacher preparation programs can enhance self-efficacy in inclusive early childhood education, and perhaps identifying specific areas or aspects that may contribute to self-efficacy, which directly reflects areas of confidence that support quality teaching, the ability to promote inclusive environments, and positive student outcomes.

Background

In 2012, my journey into mentoring pre-service teachers opened my eyes to a spectrum of pre-service teacher characteristics. Among these emerging educators, I encountered a range of confidence, hesitancy, resilience, and rigidity. While some pre-service teachers entered the program filled with self-assurance and navigated the classroom challenges with excitement, others seemed to demonstrate a visible sense of timidity and unease. As a mentor, my role extended beyond sharing knowledge and strategies; it became a mixture of providing encouragement and guidance. I observed the confident pre-service teachers thrive under mentorship, eagerly absorbing insights, experimenting with new methodologies, and embracing the dynamic nature of teaching. They demonstrated a willingness to take risks, adapt quickly to shifting classroom dynamics, and actively engage students meaningfully.

Conversely, the timid pre-service teachers presented a unique set of challenges. Despite my efforts to model teaching strategies, offer suggestions, and share my experiences, they had difficulties breaking out of their comfort zones. Tasks such as reading aloud in front of a class or implementing interactive learning activities left them visibly anxious and hesitant. Through the lens of a colleague, I sought to empower these pre-service teachers, fostering an environment of collaboration, support, and mutual learning. I encouraged open dialogue, welcomed their questions and concerns, and provided constructive feedback tailored to their needs. However, despite my efforts, a low level of confidence seemed firmly established in their approach to teaching.

As an early childhood teacher at a public school, I encounter the challenges of nurturing young children, particularly those with special needs or behavior challenges. The need for a highly skilled and capable workforce in early childhood education and early childhood special education within Hawaii's public schools is evident. The increasing number of children with special needs or behavioral complexities further underscores the urgency of equipping early childhood educators with the necessary tools and support (Mickelson et al., 2022). This realization ignited my curiosity about the reasons behind and processes shaping varying levels of confidence among pre-service teachers.

Significance

Teacher self-efficacy is associated with numerous positive outcomes, including resilience, job retention, and overall effectiveness in the classroom (Bandura, 1997; Bellows, 2021; Bellows et al., 2022; Ingersoll, 2001). Given its foundational role in shaping future educators, understanding the factors that influence pre-service teachers' self-efficacy is essential (Cayirdag, 2017; Hammack et al., 2024; Rhew, 2024; Yada et al., 2021). I became particularly

interested in the potential to strengthen pre-service teachers' self-efficacy to enhance their effectiveness within inclusive classroom settings. By identifying key factors that contribute to their confidence and professional competence, I aspire to contribute to teacher preparation programs for future early childhood educators. Strengthening teacher self-efficacy can better prepare early childhood educators to navigate the complexities of inclusive classrooms and sustain a long-term commitment to the field because teacher self-efficacy is strongly related to resilience (Bandura, 1997; Bellows et al., 2022), job retention (Bellows, 2021; Ingersoll, 2001), and classroom effectiveness (Bellows et al., 2022).

Little is known about how personal experiences outside formal education and teaching shape pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. While research has explored factors influencing self-efficacy in relation to coursework and teacher preparation programs (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Smith et al., 2024), I did not find any studies investigating the impact of life experiences beyond academic settings. Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative case study research focusing specifically on pre-service early childhood educators' self-efficacy in inclusive classroom settings and their ability to address student diversity. This study adds to the existing literature by examining how personal experiences influence pre-service teachers' confidence in working with young children of all abilities and behaviors. By exploring self-efficacy development through the lens of pre-service early childhood educators, this research provides valuable insights into how personal and professional experiences interact and contribute to the development of self-efficacy.

Definition of Terms

A clear definition of the following terms is critical to understanding this study. These terms originate from the fields of early childhood education, special education, and inclusive education.

Developmental Disabilities refer to a group of conditions caused by impairments in physical, learning, language, or behavioral areas. These conditions start in childhood, affect daily functioning, and often persist throughout a person's life (Zablotsky et al., 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024a). Some examples are autism spectrum disorder (ASD), behavior disorders, brain injury, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, intellectual disability, and spina bifida (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024a).

Developmental Delay (DD) is defined as delays in areas of speech and language development, motor development, social development, and cognitive development among children age 5 or younger (Demici & Kartal, 2018). Although 5-15% is the estimated prevalence of DD in the pediatric population, the reported prevalence varies depending on various factors (Gottlieb et al., 2009). To qualify for DD 3-5, a student's cognitive and adaptive behaviors are delayed, or more than one of the following areas is delayed: motor, communication, academic, or adaptive behavior. To qualify for the Speech or Language Disability category, a student must have a significant problem in the comprehension or production of an oral communication system, such as articulation, voice, or fluency, or a considerable problem with understanding or production of language.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Use of DAP enables a teacher to recognize and support each individual as a valued member of the learning community and support culturally, linguistically, and individually appropriate practices for each child (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). DAP is disseminated through a position statement, a book, and other resources (Bredekamp et al., 2022).

Early Childhood Education is the early childhood period from birth to age eight that addresses infants and toddlers, preschool, kindergarten, and primary grades (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

General Education is a mainstream classroom composed of students without identified special education eligibility (Bricker et al., 2020).

Highly qualified early childhood educators refer to educators with at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a teaching license from the Hawaii Teachers License Board, including preschool. To be considered a highly qualified teacher in Hawaii, teachers must have a passing score on a Praxis content exam, hold a National Board certification in early childhood generalist or have earned 30 college credits in the subject area, and have completed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Hawaii qualified teacher rubric (Hawaii State Department of Education, 2024).

High-quality early childhood education practices and experiences refer to the recommendations for early childhood educators by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, pp. 111-183). They include

developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), a comprehensive and effective curriculum, and collaboration with families based on the individual child's uniqueness.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that children with disabilities can access a free, appropriate public education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

IDEA Part B assists states in providing a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities ages 3 through 21 (IDEA, 2004).

Inclusion is the term used interchangeably with inclusive education.

Inclusive education is a philosophy that welcomes all students to have access to learning and recognizes the diversity of learners (Friend, 2018, p. 21).

Inclusive practices entail educators intentionally designing and adapting the learning environment based on children's diverse and unique assets, strengths, abilities, and needs, sometimes undiagnosed or still being formally determined (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

Prekindergarten (PK) is used for this study to refer to 4-year-old children entering kindergarten the following year. For example, if a child will enter kindergarten in August 2025, their birthday must fall between August 1, 2019, and July 31, 2020, to be considered PK.

Pre-service teachers are candidates who enroll in a teacher education program or take prerequisite early childhood education courses before applying to their university teacher education programs. This study uses the terms pre-service teachers and teacher candidates interchangeably.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in controlling motivation, behavior, and social environment.

Self-efficacy-forming experiences are the experiences that pre-service teachers encounter before and during their teacher education program and the perceived influence these experiences have on developing their self-efficacy beliefs (Siwatu, 2011).

Special Education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of individuals with a disability. A special education teacher or another qualified individual delivers the instruction under the guidance or supervision of a special education teacher. Special education is a service, not a specific person or place (Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Student Support, 2016).

Teacher Candidates are used interchangeably with pre-service teachers.

Teacher Preparation Programs are organized educational pathways that equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and experiences required to become effective educators. This study focuses specifically on programs designed for early childhood educators.

Typically Developing Peers are children without developmental delays or identified disabilities in the general education or mainstream classroom (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024b).

Summary

This chapter introduced the study by highlighting the crucial need to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary skills to support all learners, emphasizing the importance of self-efficacious early childhood educators and their role in student success. It also explored the

theoretical framework and methodology used in the study. Additionally, key terms relevant to the research were defined to provide clarity and context, establishing a foundation for understanding early childhood education and self-efficacy.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to early childhood pre-service teachers and their development of teacher self-efficacy for inclusive practices. It begins by exploring the increasing prevalence of challenging behaviors among young children and inclusive early childhood education and practices, a pressing concern in early education settings. The chapter then examines the need for well-prepared early childhood educators and early childhood teacher preparation programs at the University where this study took place, focusing on how these programs aim to prepare teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to address diverse classroom needs. Next, Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, particularly self-efficacy, is reviewed, providing the theoretical framework for this study and offering insights into the factors that shape self-efficacy. Lastly, the review of pre-service teacher self-efficacy highlights its importance in fostering effective teaching practices and supporting inclusive education.

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

According to Gruenberg and Miller (2011), inclusive education is the key to effective learning experiences for children with and without disabilities. In addition, typically developing children in inclusion settings develop a more positive attitude towards children with disabilities than children who do not encounter peers with disabilities (Yu et al., 2012), score higher on empathy scales than children who have social contact only with other typically developing peers (Diamond, 2001), and have more strategies for helping peers, and demonstrate prosocial behaviors (Diamond, 2001; Diamond & Carpenter, 2010; Ogelman & Secer, 2012).

Successful inclusion focuses on individual developmental growth while integrating knowledge and skills within the general education curriculum (Warren et al., 2016). Research

indicates that most children with disabilities thrive in high-quality inclusive programs with typically developing peers rather than in self-contained classrooms, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting independence (Odom et al., 2002; Warren et al., 2016). A joint position statement (2009) by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood inclusion as:

The values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. (DEC & NAEYC, 2009, p. 2)

This statement underscores that early childhood inclusion helps children with disabilities build social relationships and friendships, fostering their development and enabling them to reach their full potential (DEC & NAEYC, 2009). Moreover, research indicates that inclusive, high-quality preschool programs significantly improve early literacy for children with and without disabilities (Green et al., 2014; Lawrence et al., 2016; Philips & Meloy, 2012).

Inclusive Early Childhood Practices

The literature suggests that teachers must have several skills to teach effectively in inclusive classrooms: teacher training on teaching children with disabilities (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021), positive attitude towards inclusion (Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2017), knowing content and pedagogy (Sharma et al., 2021), managing the classroom environment and behavior (Dicke et al., 2014), and working collaboratively with parents and paraprofessionals (Sharma et al., 2012). Inclusion for children with a range of abilities involves active engagement among children with and without disabilities and collective learning experiences facilitated by adults in collaboration (Hilbert, 2009; Strain, 2017). The success of children with disabilities in inclusion

preschools depends on specialized instruction focusing on social aspects of the early childhood curriculum (e.g., focus on play, making friends, and cooperation) and the developmental needs of children with and without disabilities (Buysse et al., 1998). The lack of specialized instruction often leads to the child's placement in a fully self-contained preschool classroom (Hanson et al., 2001).

According to Rausch et al. (2021), the learning environment can be modified physically, socially, and temporally to ensure it is developmentally appropriate and inclusive for all children.

Physical Modifications, also known as environmental modifications, can enhance engagement for children of all abilities. Some examples of physical modifications are adjustments of furniture arrangement, material selection, classroom-wide visual supports, and lighting (Rausch et al., 2021).

Social Modifications refer to frequent and meaningful social interactions for children with different abilities, occurring when the teacher actively promotes child-directed interactions (Reska et al., 2012). Some examples of social modifications include planned interactions among children (e.g., using a buddy system), modeling support for communication and problem-solving, and encouraging a sense of belonging and friendship.

Temporal Modifications refer to teacher behaviors that significantly impact peer interactions for children with varying abilities. Without careful and intentional design and facilitation of child interactions by the teacher through adjustments to the timing of routines and activities, children with disabilities may not successfully interact with their typically developing peers (Rausch et al., 2021). Examples of temporal modification include adjustments, such as the timing of routines, activity level, group size, and routine length, as well as the use of cues and a balance between daily teacher- and child-directed experiences (Rausch et al., 2021). These

modifications help create a more accessible and inclusive learning environment by promoting engagement, participation, and meaningful social interactions for all children.

Increasing Challenging Behaviors Among Young Children

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted the lives of young children, their families, and early childhood educators, creating a ripple effect with lasting consequences (Jalongo, 2021). Critical developmental milestones were often delayed for young children due to reduced access to stimulating environments and social interactions (Allen, 2022). Early intervention services, which are crucial for addressing developmental delays or disabilities, were either unavailable, transitioned to virtual platforms, or declined altogether due to families being cautious about safety and exploration (Egan et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022).

Although children entering preschool in 2024 did not directly experience the pandemic's peak, they were still affected by its lingering impact, particularly through parenting practices shaped by the pandemic, such as overprotection, increased reliance on screens, and heightened stress, which may have contributed to observable developmental delays (Yakub et al., 2024). In addition, overprotective parenting patterns, which may have been exacerbated by pandemic-related fears, can negatively influence children's mental health, leading to issues such as increased anxiety and difficulty in social interactions (Yakub et al., 2024). Furthermore, the use of technologies (e.g., watching YouTube videos) became the norm among young children (Kim et al., 2024). Kim and others (2024) found that 21.0% of children started using YouTube before age four in 2023, averaging 4.8 days per week for 68.5 min per day, while the American Academy of Pediatrics (2023) recommends no more than 30 minutes screen time per day for young children younger than five years olds.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing the indirect effects of the pandemic on children's development, even for those who were not directly exposed to its peak, by supporting parents in adopting balanced parenting practices and managing stress effectively.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including promoting safe social interactions, setting healthy screen time limits, and providing support for parental well-being. During the pandemic, many parents adopted protective behaviors to safeguard their children from health risks. Even after restrictions eased, some parents continued to limit their children's exposure to social environments such as parks and playgroups. This overprotectiveness can hinder children's social and emotional development. A study found that overprotective parenting was associated with greater parenting stress and increased fear in children related to COVID-19. The pandemic led to increased screen time for children, as parents relied on digital devices for education and entertainment. Excessive screen exposure is linked to decreased opportunities for optimal development and lower cognitive abilities, specifically attention, early reading skills, and language development. Furthermore, research indicates that screen time can impact young children's cognitive development, affecting abilities such as perception, attention, learning, memory, language, and executive function. The pandemic increased stress levels among parents due to factors like job insecurity, health concerns, and balancing work-from-home responsibilities. Elevated parental stress is associated with negative outcomes in children's social-emotional development. A study revealed that higher parental stress during the COVID-19 pandemic correlated with lower social-emotional behavior scores in children.

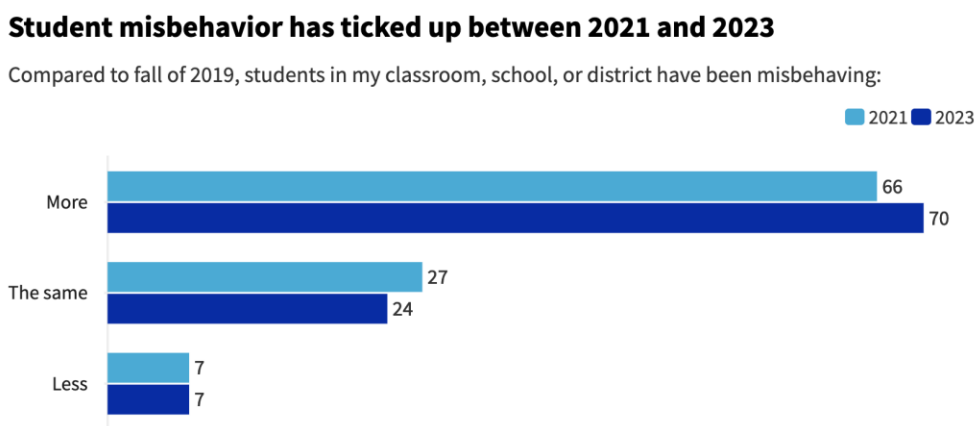
Furthermore, emotional and behavioral problems in preschool children, including anxiety and other disorders, were prevalent before the COVID-19 pandemic, with rates ranging from

6.9% to 14.7% across various countries (Jing et al., 2024). However, these rates surged significantly during the pandemic, reaching up to 73.6% in some regions (Jing et al., 2024). A meta-analysis of 38,059 participants revealed a 24.3% increase from pre-pandemic levels, with Western countries exhibiting higher prevalence rates than Eastern countries (Jing et al., 2024).

Additionally, a study by Prothero (2023) found that 70% of P-12 educators, including 1,058 teachers, principals, and district leaders, reported an increase in student misbehavior in 2023 compared to the fall of 2021 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Student Misbehavior in 2021 and 2023



The same study (Figure 2) found that a third of educators reported that students have been misbehaving “a lot more” than before the pandemic (Prothero, 2023).

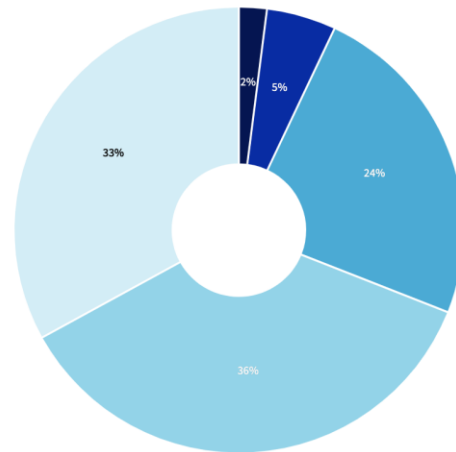
Figure 2

Level of Misbehavior

A third of educators say students have been misbehaving "a lot more" compared with before the pandemic

Compared to fall of 2019, students in my classroom, school, or district have been misbehaving:

- A lot less
- A little less
- About the same amount
- A little more
- A lot more



A study in Japan found that children who experienced the pandemic lagged over four months behind in development by age five (Sato et al., 2023). Hygiene practices, such as constant sanitization, inadvertently reduce sensory experiences critical for young children's growth (Sato et al., 2023). Consequently, many children face behavioral, social, cognitive, and physical challenges due to missed opportunities for socialization and early learning during this critical development period. Young children exposed to chronic stress and trauma due to the pandemic, without the support of a nurturing relationship, are at a higher risk of developing emotional, behavioral, and cognitive challenges (Guevara, 2022). These findings highlight the urgent need for post-pandemic interventions and recovery efforts to support preschool children's mental health worldwide.

Need for Well-Prepared Early Childhood Educators

Teaching young children with diverse needs is no longer the sole responsibility of special education teachers; it is now a collective responsibility that all educators must share in inclusive classrooms to meet each child's unique needs. Kaskaloglu-Almulla (2019) highlighted how general education teachers are increasingly expected to include students with varying abilities and skills in their classrooms. To ensure high-quality early learning experiences, preschool teachers must be well-prepared, confident, and capable of providing age-appropriate,

developmentally appropriate, and meaningful learning experiences for all children, including those with and without disabilities.

On top of the already demanding expectations placed on early childhood educators, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented additional challenges and magnified the importance of inclusive early childhood classrooms (Loades et al., 2020). The restrictions and disruptions caused by the pandemic likely had adverse psychological effects on young children. As a result, the pandemic underscored the urgent need for well-prepared early childhood professionals who can effectively address these developmental challenges and support children's diverse needs. The increase in challenging behavior among preschool students underscores the immediate need to support pre-service teachers in working with young children exhibiting diverse needs and creating a caring, inclusive, and responsive learning environment for all preschool students (Barnett & Jung, 2021; Prothero, 2023; Sremba, 2023).

Research consistently shows a strong connection between early learning outcomes and teacher qualifications (Ackerman, 2004; Manning et al., 2017). Effective early childhood educators with at least a four-year degree and specialized training in early childhood education engage in more responsive interactions with children (Cadima et al., 2024; Ryan & Ackerman, 2004). The role of teacher qualifications underscores the importance of ensuring that early childhood educators are adequately prepared to meet the challenges and diverse needs of the children they serve.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Public Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms

The IDEA Part B, Section 619 (Office of Special Education Program, 2025), which addresses the supplemental state grants program for preschool children with disabilities ages 3 through 5, has played a significant role in shaping the development of public pre-kindergarten

programs by mandating that children with disabilities, starting at age three, receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004). This federal legislation emphasized the importance of early intervention and inclusion, leading to the expansion of public pre-kindergarten offerings that are inclusive and accessible to all learners. As a result, school districts have increasingly developed preschool programs that integrate children with and without disabilities, promoting social-emotional development, language acquisition, and academic readiness for all students. IDEA Part B also requires the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for eligible preschool-aged children, ensuring that their unique learning needs are identified and addressed (IDEA, 2004). This focus on early and equitable access to education has not only enhanced opportunities for children with disabilities but has also elevated the overall quality and accountability of public pre-kindergarten programs nationwide.

Retain Early Childhood-Licensed Teachers in Hawaii

Expanding access to high-quality early childhood education in Hawaii requires qualified educators who can meet the diverse needs of preschool students, as these professionals play a pivotal role in nurturing young children's growth by supporting foundational skill development for kindergarten readiness and shaping experiences that influence their lifelong learning trajectories (Bueno et al., 2010; Horm et al., 2022; Lipsey et al., 2018; NAEYC, 2020).

In 2023, 52 individuals completed State-approved teacher education programs, earning their licenses in early childhood education in Hawaii (Hawaii Teacher Standards Board, 2024a). Despite this influx of qualified educators, only 15 newly licensed teachers worked with preschool-age children. This disparity highlights a gap between the number of licensed early childhood professionals and those actively participating in early childhood classrooms.

Currently, the state has 438 licensed early childhood teachers and 158 licensed early childhood special education teachers (Hawaii Teachers Standard Board, 2024b). However, only 81 teachers work with preschool-aged children (13.6%).

Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs at ABC University

ABC University (pseudonym) has three teacher preparation program tracks for early childhood education: a) Bachelor of Education in Elementary and Early Childhood Education, b) Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education, and c) Master of Education in Early Childhood Education. Below, I explain each track in more detail.

Bachelor of Education in Elementary & Early Childhood Education

This two-year, campus-based program offers dual preparation for a Bachelor of Education degree in both Early Childhood Education (P-3) and Elementary Education (K-6), which operates as a cohort-based program (ABC University, 2025). This program no longer admits new students. As part of their curriculum, these students are expected to gain practical experience by being placed in both upper and lower-grade classrooms. This strategy was designed to provide the teacher candidates with a comprehensive understanding of different classroom dynamics and the unique needs of students across various age groups. The aim of providing a wide range of educational settings is to equip participants better to apply inclusive teaching practices and adapt to the diverse needs of their future classrooms.

Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education & Early Childhood Special Education

This two-year hybrid program enables candidates to earn a degree and dual teaching licenses at the early childhood level. It prepares educators to teach children with and without

disabilities in preschool through 3rd grade across general, inclusive, and special education settings. The program is cohort-based to support collaborative learning (ABC University, 2025).

Master of Education in Early Childhood Education

This statewide graduate program emphasizes leadership development among early childhood education professionals. It offers three track options: Non-licensure M.Ed., Initial licensure as a generalist for PK-K or PK-3, and Add-a-field licensure as a generalist for PK-K or PK-3. The hybrid program incorporates both online and summer components and follows a cohort model for collaborative engagement (ABC University, 2025).

Coursework to Support Students with Disabilities and Challenging Behavior

Coursework that emphasizes supporting students with disabilities and managing challenging behaviors is critical to preparing effective general education teachers. Research indicates that targeted training in classroom behavior management can significantly enhance preservice teachers' self-efficacy as classroom managers (O'Neill, 2015). However, many teacher preparation programs do not adequately equip future educators with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities. For instance, only 73% of elementary teacher preparation programs require at least one course focused on supporting students with disabilities (Smith, 2020). As a result, many general education teachers enter the profession without sufficient strategies for addressing diverse learning needs and behavioral challenges. A national teacher survey found that just 30% of general education teachers felt confident in their ability to effectively teach students with learning disabilities (Mitchell, 2019).

To address this gap, Smith (2020) recommends that general education teacher preparation programs require coursework specifically focused on supporting students with disabilities, ensure that preservice teachers demonstrate an understanding of how to meet the needs of these

students, and provide field experiences that involve interaction with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). A comprehensive review of over 900 articles found that most coursework-based practicums lasted one semester, averaging 41.1 hours over approximately 8.5 weeks. In contrast, student teaching residency models extended across a full year (O'Brien et al., 2024). Common field activities included lesson planning, data collection, video recording, reflection, and feedback. Tutoring was the most frequent instructional method, allowing preservice teachers to practice scaffolding strategies in a controlled environment (O'Brien et al., 2024).

At ABC University, there are notable differences in the program coursework addressing children with diverse needs. In programs that primarily focused on general education students without disabilities, a limited number of courses were dedicated to addressing the needs of children with disabilities and managing challenging behaviors. Pre-service teachers in the Bachelor of Education in K-6 & Early Childhood Education cohort programs are required to complete foundational coursework, including Foundations of Inclusive Schooling (3 credits), before beginning the program. In contrast, pre-service teachers in bachelor of education in the Early Childhood Education & Early Childhood Special Education cohort program take six courses (3 credits each) related to disabilities and challenging behaviors in two years: Classroom Management, Mild-Moderate Disabilities, Severe Disabilities and Autism, Teaching & Learning for Diverse Young Children, Young Children with Communication Needs, and Technology for Children with Disabilities. The Master of Education in Early Childhood Education program offers one specialized course, Early Intervention for Special Populations (3 credits).

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) offers a robust framework for understanding how

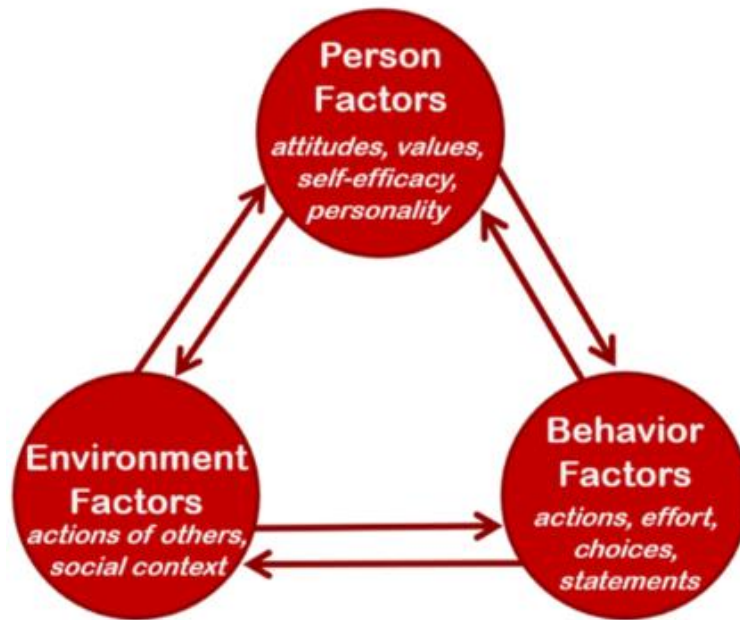
individuals learn and adapt behaviors through observational learning, internal cognitive processes, goal setting, self-regulation, and reinforcement (Bandura, 2014). The theory underscores the significance of social and cognitive influences in shaping behavior, highlighting the dynamic, reciprocal nature of learning and behavior modification. SCT posits that learning occurs within a social context, where personal, behavioral, and environmental factors interact to influence human behavior (Bandura, 1974, 1977, 1986a, 1991, 2014). One of its central tenets is that individuals learn by observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and the consequences of those behaviors (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, SCT emphasizes how individuals cognitively process social experiences, shaping their behavior and development (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). Anderson and Chen (2002) further elaborated that SCT is deeply intertwined with *self-other* relationships, which are activated and influenced by interpersonal interactions.

Bandura (1997) introduced the core principle of triadic reciprocity, which consists of three interacting factors: personal, behavioral, and environmental (Figure 3). Rooted in human agency, SCT posits that individuals are self-developing, self-regulating, self-reflecting, and proactive in shaping their behaviors and environments (Zhou & Brown, 2015).

SCT operates within this interdependent causal structure, known as triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) suggests that human behavior results from the dynamic and reciprocal interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors, a concept further reinforced by Green and Piel (2010), who define human behavior as a triadic interaction among these same elements.

Figure 3

Triadic Reciprocal Causation



Observational learning, imitation, and modeling play a crucial role in acquiring new behaviors (Morse, 2017; Stone, 2024). For example, children learn social norms and problem-solving by observing and mimicking peers or adults, and the outcomes of these behaviors, whether positive or negative, reinforce or discourage future actions (Schunk, 2012). Overall, SCT provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals learn and develop within social contexts, emphasizing the interplay between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors and the role of social influences in shaping behavior.

The initial five constructs of SCT (Observational Learning, Internal Process, Goal Setting, Self-Regulation, and Reinforcement and Punishment) were established, while the construct of self-efficacy was introduced later and became an additional part of SCT (Ramirez et al., 2012). These components explain how individuals acquire and maintain behaviors and how behavioral patterns are developed and changed.

Observational Learning

Observational learning, or modeling, is the process through which individuals learn by observing the behaviors of others (Bandura, 1986a; Morse et al., 2019; Stone, 2024). Bandura identified four key processes of observational learning or effective modeling: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation and reinforcement (Bandura, 1997; Davidson Films, 2003).

Attention is crucial, as people must recognize the correct cues in modeled events and information while maintaining focus during the activity. Various factors influence the level of attention given, including distinctiveness, prevalence, complexity, and functional value (Stone, 2024). Additionally, attention is affected by multiple characteristics, such as physical, verbal, and cognitive factors (Bandura, 1997).

Retention involves retaining information through symbolic coding, mental images, cognitive organization, rehearsal, and motor rehearsal (Van Canegem et al., 2023). When a person observes a model's behavior without performing the responses, they can acquire the modeled responses only in representational form (Bandura, 1997; Stone, 2024).

Production refers to how individuals translate symbolic representations of modeled patterns to guide their performances, influenced by factors such as physical and mental ability (Bandura, 1997). For example, a young basketball player observing a college player dunk a ball may attempt to replicate the action but is physically unable to reach the net, regardless of repeated attempts. However, an older child or adult might successfully dunk the ball after practice (Stone, 2024).

Motivation and Reinforcement factors play a crucial role in observational learning, as motivation is essential for individuals to put learned behaviors into practice (Morse et al., 2019; Stone, 2024). People need a good reason to imitate behavior because no amount of attention,

retention, or reproduction will overcome a lack of motivation (Bandura, 1969, 1986a, 1997; Davidson Films, 2003). Additionally, individuals who receive negative feedback about their actions or behaviors may be less motivated to adopt new behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Morse et al., 2019).

Modeling influences can produce three types of effects, depending on the processes involved. Observers may acquire new patterns of behavior by watching others' performances. Observing punishment tends to reduce exploratory behavior and aggression. Additionally, observing previously inhibited behaviors may increase when individuals witness models engaging in threatening or prohibited activities without experiencing adverse consequences (Bandura, 1997; Jardaneh, 2021; Lech, 1986).

Internal Process

Internal processes refer to the cognitive functions that mediate learning. According to SCT, learning can occur without an immediate behavior change, meaning that an individual can acquire knowledge or skills by observing others. However, whether or not this leads to a change in behavior depends on various internal processes, such as attention, retention, and motivation (Nickerson, 2024). For instance, a student might learn how to solve a math problem by watching a teacher's demonstration. However, whether the student attempts to solve the problem independently later depends on the internal processing of the information and the motivation to apply it (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Goal Setting

Goal setting is a central component of SCT, guiding behavior toward achieving specific outcomes (Saks, 2024). This principle suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors they believe will help them reach their goals. Effective goal setting requires

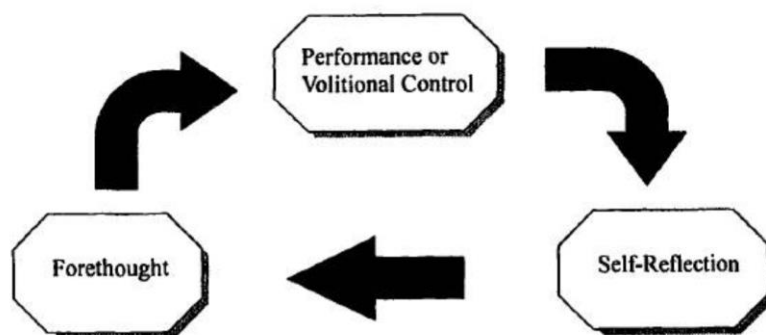
establishing clear objectives and anticipating and valuing the potential outcomes. For instance, a student who sets a goal to achieve high grades will likely engage in study behaviors and seek assistance when needed, motivated by the anticipated reward of academic success (Nordengren, 2019).

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is how individuals manage their behavior to achieve personal goals (Bandura, 1991). Within SCT, self-regulation is divided into three phases (Zimmerman, 2000): **The Forethought Phase** involves setting goals, planning strategies, and motivating oneself to begin a task. For example, a student might set a deadline for completing a project and outline the necessary steps to achieve it. **The Performance Phase** focuses on self-control and self-observation during the task. The student monitors their progress, maintains focus, and adjusts their approach to stay on track. **The Self-Reflection Phase** includes evaluating performance and reacting to the outcomes. After completing the project, the student reflects on what was successful and identifies areas for improvement, using this insight to guide future efforts. Figure 4 illustrates the dynamic and iterative nature of three phases of self-regulation in achieving goals (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998).

Figure 4

Cyclical Phases of Self-Regulation



Reinforcement and Punishment

Reinforcement and punishment shape expectations of behavioral outcomes and influence the likelihood of repeated behaviors (Schunk, 2012). Positive reinforcement (e.g., rewards) increases the probability of a behavior recurring, while negative punishment (e.g., removal of an aversive condition) reduces the likelihood of that behavior recurring (Bandura, 2014; Krcmar, 2019; Schunk, 2012). These influences can stem from internal factors, such as personal feelings of pride or shame, or external factors, such as praise from a teacher or criticism from peers. For instance, a student who receives positive feedback and a good grade for a well-done project is more likely to put effort into future projects. On the other hand, harsh criticism for a minor mistake may discourage them, reducing their willingness to take risks or engage in similar tasks.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) introduced self-efficacy as one of the personal factors within his Triadic Reciprocal Causation framework, which explains human behavior as the result of dynamic interactions between personal factors, behavior, and the environment. Personal factors, including thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and physiological responses, play a central role in shaping behavior. Among these, self-efficacy beliefs are crucial for initiating and maintaining behavior change (Lopez-Garrido, 2025). The concept of self-efficacy is a cornerstone of SCT (Bandura, 1986b). It refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve specific goals or tasks (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Bandura (1997) highlighted that self-efficacy influences an individual's decisions, effort, perseverance, and resilience when facing challenges. In SCT, personal efficacy is conceptualized as propositional beliefs (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Furthermore, Bandura (1997) argued that "perceived self-efficacy" is a stronger predictor

of behavior than “past performance,” as efficacy judgments incorporate more information than the action itself (p. 81).

A proactive approach to challenges through viewing difficulties as opportunities to develop new skills and expand their capabilities characterizes individuals with high self-efficacy (Yang et al., 2024). This positive outlook not only enhances their personal performance but also inspires those around them. By modeling resilience and a constructive attitude, teachers with high self-efficacy create a ripple effect, fostering a culture of perseverance and optimism among students and colleagues. Bandura (1997) emphasized that individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to recover quickly from setbacks, focusing on solutions rather than being hindered by fear of failure. They approach challenges with a problem-solving mindset, prioritizing effective strategies to overcome obstacles. This resilience (often called grit) is a critical factor in their ability to tackle complex and demanding tasks, further reinforcing their confidence and ability to succeed. In educational settings, this influence is particularly impactful, as teachers with high self-efficacy not only enhance their teaching effectiveness but also empower their students and peers to embrace challenges and strive for continuous growth (Luo et al., 2024).

In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy often harbor pessimistic thoughts and anticipate failure, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bandura, 1997; Fleischauer, 2000; Oliveira Fernandez et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2024). This mindset leads them to select simpler, less demanding tasks, limiting their opportunities for growth and development. By avoiding challenges, they miss the chance to experience the growth and satisfaction that come from overcoming difficulties, further reinforcing their negative self-perception and making it increasingly difficult to take on new challenges.

Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, Self-Efficacy

To ensure clarity for my study, I will define each concept to provide a comprehensive understanding of its distinct characteristics. By carefully examining their unique traits and how they manifest in various contexts, a deeper insight can be gained into how these concepts contribute to personal growth and development.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall sense of self-worth and personal value (Muris & Otgaar, 2023). It answers questions like, "Do I like myself?" and "Am I worthy?" Unlike self-confidence or self-efficacy, self-esteem is broader, focusing on intrinsic value rather than specific skills or accomplishments. It develops through life experiences and social interactions, with positive reinforcement strengthening it and criticism or negative experiences diminishing it. While self-esteem contributes to a positive self-concept, it does not directly determine one's abilities or competencies.

Self-confidence is the belief in one's abilities across various situations (Kane et al., 2021). Unlike self-efficacy, self-confidence is not necessarily tied to a history of past successes. Instead, it reflects a general sense of assurance and trust in one's capabilities. Self-confidence influences motivation and the willingness to take on challenges.

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is content-specific and refers to the belief in one's ability to succeed in a particular area or task. An individual may have high self-efficacy in math instruction but low self-efficacy in managing a classroom with students with diverse behavioral needs.

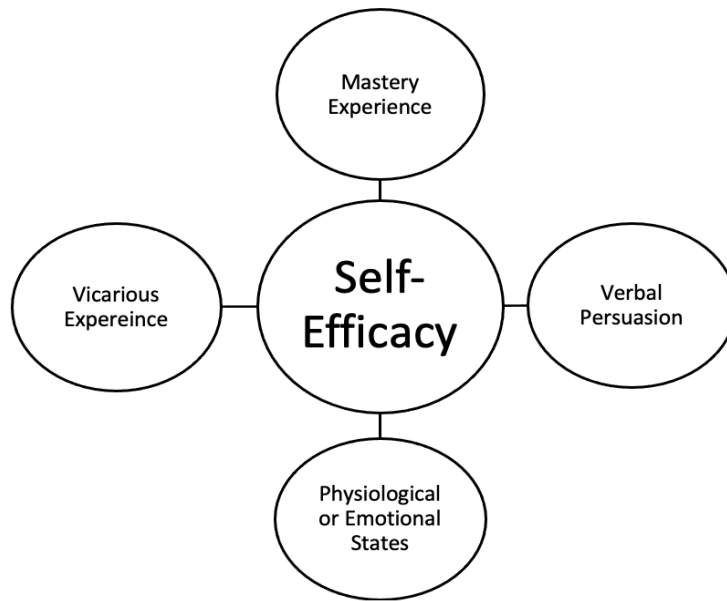
Four Sources of Self-Efficacy Development

Bandura (1997) identified four sources of self-efficacy development: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological or emotional states

(Figure 5). The following explores these four sources in the context of teaching and teachers, highlighting how they contribute to the development of self-efficacy in educational settings.

Figure 5

Four Sources of Self-Efficacy



Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences are based on teachers' past teaching practices and the most effective way to develop a strong sense of efficacy, as they involve learners achieving small wins and progressively more complex tasks (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1997; Taylor, 2023). These successes are essential for building a resilient sense of efficacy, crucial for overcoming obstacles through persistent effort. This process fosters the cognitive and self-regulative abilities necessary for effective performance (Bandura, 1997). As learners master increasingly complex tasks, their belief in their capabilities is reinforced, enhancing their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Experiencing low effort and subsequent failure does not provide meaningful feedback about one's capabilities (Thiel & Semrau, 2022). However, failing at relatively easy tasks can harm individuals' perceived personal efficacy, leading them to doubt their abilities (Bandura, 1997).

However, those who experience occasional failure but continue to improve over time (grit) are more likely to increase their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). This process of gradual improvement and overcoming challenges strengthens their belief in their ability to succeed, more so than those who succeed consistently without seeing any improvement in their performance (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences come from observing other teachers' and professionals' successes or failures (Bandura, 1977, 1997). This process is fundamental to SCT, as it demonstrates how seeing people similar to oneself succeed through sustained effort can significantly enhance belief in one's own capabilities (Davidson Films, 2003). When individuals witness others they perceive as similar to themselves achieving success, they are more likely to develop a belief that they, too, can master the comparable activities required to succeed (Wood & Bandura, 1989). This observation is crucial in educational and professional settings. For instance, mentor teachers who model or demonstrate a new instructional strategy before asking pre-service teachers to implement it themselves can significantly improve novice teachers' efficacy beliefs and confidence (Nix, 2016). This modeling serves as an effective tool for promoting a sense of self-efficacy for pre-service teachers, providing a concrete example of success and the steps needed to achieve it (Bandura, 1997).

On the other hand, observing individuals perceived to have similar competence fail despite putting in effort can have a detrimental effect. Such observations can lower the observers' judgment of their own capabilities and undermine their efforts. This negative vicarious experience can lead to decreased motivation and a reluctance to engage in similar

activities, as individuals may begin to doubt their ability to succeed despite effort (Bandura, 1997).

The impact of vicarious experiences highlights the importance of selecting appropriate models in educational and training settings. Effective models should be relatable and demonstrate both the process and the success of overcoming challenges. Models can include showing not just the result but also the steps taken, the mistakes made, and the perseverance required to succeed. Such comprehensive modeling can give observers a realistic and attainable pathway to success (Bautista, 2011). Moreover, creating a supportive environment where successes are shared and celebrated can amplify the positive effects of vicarious experiences (Nikoçeviq-Kurti, 2021). Encouraging learners to share their experiences and challenges can create a community of practice where individuals learn from each other's journeys. This collective learning experience can further enhance self-efficacy as individuals see that struggles and successes are a natural part of the learning process (Withy, 2020).

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion involves the influence of encouragement and feedback from colleagues, mentors, and professors, which strengthens individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1997). When people receive positive and constructive feedback that reassures them of their potential, they are more likely to exert greater effort and maintain their focus, even when faced with challenges. According to Wood & Bandura (1989), "if people receive realistic encouragement, they will be more likely to exert greater effort and to become successful than if they are troubled by self-doubt" (p. 365). This type of encouragement helps individuals avoid dwelling on their doubts and instead concentrate on overcoming obstacles.

As a tool for fostering confidence and growth, verbal persuasion directly addresses self-doubt, promotes positive self-perception, and provides a realistic benchmark for progress (Bandura, 1994, 1997). Often delivered by mentors, coaches, teachers, or respected colleagues, verbal persuasion involves actionable feedback that goes beyond general praise. Instead, it consists of specific and constructive comments that guide individuals on how to improve, helping them internalize the belief that they can overcome challenges (Celestine, 2019; Hier & Mahony, 2018). This approach builds confidence while fostering a mindset that values effort and perseverance as integral to success. Positive feedback and encouragement create a supportive atmosphere where individuals feel valued and understood (Rusticus et al., 2023). Such an environment enhances collaboration and collective problem-solving, as individuals are more willing to share ideas and contribute when they feel confident and supported (Kim et al., 2021). Verbal persuasion can instill a growth mindset, encouraging individuals to view their abilities as improvable through effort and dedication (Haro Soler, 2019). This perspective is particularly important in educational and professional settings, where ongoing development and adaptability are essential for success.

Physiological or Emotional States

Physiological or emotional states refer to the physical or emotional conditions teachers experience in teaching contexts, such as stress, anxiety, and fatigue, which can significantly impact their teaching effectiveness (Desombre et al., 2018; Dicke et al., 2014; Oliveira Fernandez et al., 2016). By accurately interpreting their own physical and emotional states, individuals can better assess their ability to manage tasks and challenges (Atabek, 2020). For example, excitement or anxiety can strongly influence a pre-service or early-career teacher's motivation and persistence. Finding effective strategies to alleviate anxiety, whether through

internal methods such as mindfulness and stress management techniques or external support like mentorship and peer collaboration, can play a crucial role in enhancing self-efficacy (Nix, 2016).

To support teachers' positive physiological or emotional state, creating a supportive work environment where teachers feel valued and understood can significantly impact their emotional well-being (Benevene et al., 2020). Schools and educational institutions can play a vital role by providing resources for stress management, encouraging peer support networks, and fostering an open dialogue about the challenges teachers face. Such environments help reduce anxiety and promote a culture of resilience and continuous improvement (Benevene et al., 2020).

On the other hand, Bandura (1997) stated that anxiety and stress lead to low self-efficacy. In Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Bandura posited that “stress reactions primarily stem from a low sense of efficacy to exercise control over aversive threats and taxing environmental demands” (Bandura, 1997, p. 262). McCarthy (2019) elaborated that stress is a psychological process resulting from teachers' appraisal of the balance between classroom demands and the resources available to meet those demands.

Pre-Service Teachers Self-Efficacy

During the early stages of pre-service teachers' development, mastery experiences (e.g., successfully navigating and overcoming teaching challenges) are particularly vital for building confidence because self-efficacy influences various aspects of teaching, including classroom management, effort invested in instruction, goal setting, and aspirations (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). For pre-service teachers, self-efficacy serves as a critical determinant of their future success in the classroom (Bandura, 1997). Nevill (2008) agrees, stating that college students, in particular, need to develop self-efficacy because it impacts the course and rate of cognitive processing and learning outcomes.

Research highlights the importance of providing pre-service teachers with exposure to practical and inclusive teaching experiences as a means to build their self-efficacy (Murphy, 2019). Unlike specially trained special education teachers, many general education teachers lack experience managing the behaviors of children with disabilities and children who exhibit challenging behaviors (Murphy, 2019). Nevertheless, they are still expected to provide differentiated instruction to all students, including those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 504 plans, or behavior plans. Special education teachers receive specific training to address the unique needs of students with disabilities, including techniques for behavior management, individualized instruction, and inclusive education strategies. This gap in training means that general education teachers often find themselves unprepared to handle the diverse needs of students (Mader, 2017). They are frequently left to figure out how to work with students with various needs while on the job, leading to significant stress and challenges. The expectation to cater to such a wide range of needs without adequate preparation or support can be overwhelming, particularly for new teachers who lack classroom experience. Pre-service teachers often enter the profession with idealistic expectations, but the reality of managing a diverse classroom can quickly lead to frustration and burnout (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Friedman, 2000).

Beyond coursework and practicum experiences, satisfaction with teacher education programs also influences self-efficacy (Cifoci et al., 2011). Yada et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of previous teaching experiences, particularly with students with disabilities, in enhancing pre-service teachers' confidence in implementing inclusive practices. Even informal influences, such as learning from educator relatives, can provide valuable vicarious experiences that positively impact self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Simsar and Davidson (2020) found that the combination of college method courses and teaching experiences played a crucial role in shaping the self-efficacy levels of these pre-service teachers, many of whom had limited classroom teaching experience. Lazarides and Warner (2020) further emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in teachers, noting its negative correlation with teacher burnout and its positive association with job satisfaction. This sentiment was echoed in a study by Zee and Koomen (2016), who concluded that pre-service teachers with high self-efficacy levels experienced lower levels of stress and burnout while also reporting greater personal accomplishment and job satisfaction.

Another way to build self-efficacy in pre-service teachers involves providing the necessary training, resources, and support to handle diverse classroom situations (Woodcock et al., 2022). Professional development programs focusing on behavior management, inclusive practices, and differentiated instruction can equip teachers with the skills they need to succeed, as well as mentoring and peer support networks can provide new teachers with practical advice and emotional support, helping build their confidence and competence in the classroom (Weinberg, 2022).

The study by Woodcock et al. (2012) revealed various concerns among pre-service teachers, including the adequacy of resources, acceptance, and support within the school community, workplace conditions, and maintaining academic standards. These concerns highlight the multifaceted challenges that new teachers face, particularly in inclusive education settings, requiring them to cater to a diverse student population.

While pre-service teachers' self-efficacy is related to resilience, instructional quality, commitment to finishing a teaching degree, and teaching performance (Bandura, 1994; Giles & Kent, 2016; Lazarides & Warner, 2020; Lodewyk & Winne, 2005; Mahler et al., 2018; Nix,

2016; Ross, 1994), it is also related to burnout (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Roberts et al., 2019). Pre-service teacher self-efficacy is foundational in shaping future educators' confidence and effectiveness in the classroom (Cayirdag, 2017; Hammack et al., 2024; Rhew, 2024).

Overall, the development of a strong sense of self-efficacy among pre-service teachers is a dynamic process that involves experiencing and overcoming challenges. It requires a balance of support and challenge, allowing pre-service teachers to build their skills, gain confidence, and ultimately believe in their ability to achieve their goals.

The Relationship Between Teacher Retention and Teacher Self-Efficacy

Research suggests a strong correlation between teacher self-efficacy and job retention (Bellows, 2021; Bellows et al., 2022; Ingersoll, 2001). The high attrition rates among early educators are a significant concern (Bellows et al., 2022; Ng, 2024; Whitebook, 2014). Research reveals that nearly one-third of preschool to primary school teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Dupriez et al., 2016). This high turnover is closely tied to burnout, which arises from a discrepancy between teachers' idealistic expectations and the realities of their professional self-efficacy. Friedman (2000) describes this phenomenon as "shattered dreams of idealistic performance" (p. 595). Burnout among new teachers is further intensified by various factors, including parental demands, time management challenges, workplace stress, and work-family conflict (Agyapong et al., 2022; De Los Santos et al., 2023). Many novice teachers enter the profession with aspirations of making a meaningful impact, but often become overwhelmed by the challenges of managing classrooms, addressing diverse student needs, and meeting administrative requirements. This mismatch between expectations and reality frequently results in feelings of failure, disillusionment, and, ultimately, attrition (Agyapong et al., 2022).

Simultaneously, the early childhood workforce faces significant staff shortages, further compounding the challenges within the profession (Press et al., 2015). These shortages are often attributed to systemic issues such as inadequate pay (Guevara, 2022) and a lack of public recognition of the professional status of educators (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Early childhood educators should be more valued, and their essential role in child development should be acknowledged. This lack of recognition contributes to low morale, diminished job satisfaction, and an ongoing struggle to retain qualified professionals in the field (Chen et al., 2023).

Having self-efficacy-forming experiences (e.g., having a sibling with a disability, volunteering at a children's hospital, having satisfactory teacher preparation college courses) and recognizing one's physical and mental well-being (e.g., stress, fatigue) could potentially empower future early childhood education and early childhood special education pre-service teachers to remain working at public schools after graduation (Ciftci et al., 2011; Yada et al., 2021).

Summary

This chapter clarified the definition of inclusive education and the practices for early childhood educators. It explored the impact of young children's challenging behaviors. It examined how early childhood teacher preparation programs at ABC University equip pre-service educators in inclusive classrooms. The chapter also emphasized Social Cognitive Theory and self-efficacy as pivotal frameworks for understanding and fostering pre-service teachers' self-efficacy development and the importance of addressing the stressors that can impact their self-efficacy. Furthermore, it distinguished self-efficacy from related concepts like self-confidence and self-esteem. The chapter underscored the significant opportunities for growth and

transformation within pre-service early childhood education through a blend of theoretical insights and practical considerations.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This chapter outlines the research methods used to explore the factors that influence the development of self-efficacy among pre-service early childhood teachers at ABC University. Through this qualitative study, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the personal and professional experiences that shape pre-service teachers' beliefs in their capabilities to teach effectively, particularly in inclusive early childhood settings. In the following sections, I present the study design, describe the data sources, and explain the procedures used for data collection and analysis. I also discuss strategies employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Finally, I address researcher bias and positionality, acknowledging the ways in which my background and perspectives may have influenced the research process and interpretation of results.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the professional and personal experiences that shaped pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in implementing inclusive practices to meet the diverse needs of preschool-age students. Through this qualitative case study, I examined the factors that influence pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for working within inclusive early childhood classrooms.

The study addressed the following research questions:

Central question: How do pre-service early childhood teachers develop their self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

1. What professional experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?
2. What personal experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative single case study approach to explore early childhood pre-service teachers' development of self-efficacy for inclusion programs in public schools. The interviews were the primary data source, supported by survey results as part of the triangulation process. Data collection methods included surveys and interviews, along with an analysis of my research journal and artifacts. The study allowed for an in-depth examination of participants' experiences, reflections, and the factors influencing their self-efficacy during their teacher preparation programs. This research aimed to understand how self-efficacy is shaped before and during teacher preparation programs by triangulating multiple data sources.

Rationale for Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study examines phenomena within real-life contexts using various data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Cresswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, utilizing a deductive approach to align with a predefined theoretical framework and an inductive approach to generate rich, descriptive findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Together, these methods revealed how individuals develop their self-efficacy (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A case study method was well-suited to my research as it captured pre-service teachers' perspectives, offering insight into how their prior experiences shaped their self-efficacy development (Priya, 2021).

Bounding the Case

Case study research is an investigative approach designed to describe complex phenomena (Mertens, 2015; Yin, 2003) and to explore a bounded system, such as a class or

school, in depth (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Several factors established the boundaries of the case. All participants were enrolled in either the dual degree program of Early Childhood Education with Early Childhood Special Education or Elementary Education, and they were progressing through their third semester at the time of data collection at ABC University (pseudonym). These parameters ensured a clear and focused scope for the study (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

ABC University's teacher preparation programs for early childhood education and the participants' academic progress (third semester in the program) collectively serve to define and bind the case in this research. The case examined the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices among pre-service early childhood education students at the same university. Although ABC University offers a master's degree in Early Childhood Education, including a licensing track, students in the master's program were not included in the study, as most of these individuals already had significant experiences working with young children.

Participants

For recruitment for the study participants, I had asked early childhood education course instructors to be able to speak about my research for 5-10 minutes and share the survey link with their students. A total of 48 online surveys were distributed during their method course, with 24 responses received. Out of these survey completers, nine participants agreed to take part in a follow-up interview. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure their identities were protected. Table 1 provides a summary of nine pre-service teachers who participated in interviews, using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The participants represent diverse ages, educational programs, teaching experiences, and levels of prior interaction with individuals with disabilities. The group included seven females and two males, ranging in age from 21 to 45 years. Most

participants were enrolled in the Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education dual preparation program, while two were in the Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education dual program. All participants had experiences in preschool (PK) with additional placements across various elementary grades. Five participants reported personal or professional interactions with individuals with disabilities, including having a family member with a disability, prior work in full self-contained or special education resource settings, or experience as a paraprofessional tutor in inclusion settings. Four participants had no interaction with individuals with disabilities. The diverse sample provided valuable perspectives on the formation of self-efficacy among pre-service teachers in inclusive early childhood education settings (Table 1).

Table 1

Interview Participant Information: Pre-Service Teachers' Demographic, Program, Experiences and Origin (Pseudonyms Used)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Program</i>	<i>Teaching Experience</i>	<i>*Interaction with a person with a disability</i>	<i>Origin</i>
Casey	F	21	ECE/EE	PK, 2nd, 4th, 6th	No	Hawaii
Hannah	F	45	ECE/ECSE	FSC, PK, 3rd	own child, FSC	Hawaii
Emma	F	22	ECE/EE	PK, 2nd, 4th	No	Hawaii
Payton	F	45	ECE/ECSE	K, PK, SPED resource	Self, SPED resource, grandchild	Hawaii
Aaron	M	27	ECE/EE	PK, 2nd, 6th	Inclusion PPT	Hawaii
Sasha	F	22	ECE/EE	PK, K, 2nd, 3rd	FSC PPT	Hawaii

Isabel	F	21	ECE/EE	PK, K, 6th	Inclusion PPT	U.S Continent
Micah	M	22	ECE/EE	PK, 1st, 4th	No	Hawaii
Zoe	F	23	ECE/EE	PK, 2nd, 4th	Brother	International

Note. F refers to female; M refers to male; ECE/EE refers to Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education Program; ECE/ECSE refers to Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education Program; PK refers to preschool ages 3-5 year olds; PPT refers to paraprofessional tutor; FSC refers to a fully self-contained classroom; * Refers to before and during the teacher preparation program

All pre-service teachers interviewed had experience working with various grade levels and had worked with preschool-age children during their field placements or in prior experiences. Only two pre-service teachers had worked in an inclusion setting. Once participants were selected, I obtained their consent to participate in the study.

Data Sources

Surveys

There are many tools to measure teachers' self-efficacy (e.g., Self-Efficacy Beliefs Scale of Preschool Teachers, Teacher Efficacy for Inclusion Scale). I used the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale to measure pre-service teachers' self-efficacy regarding implementing inclusive education (Sharma et al., 2011; Sharma et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2021; Yada et al., 2021). The TEIP survey focuses on efficacy in instruction, collaboration, and behavior management (Appendix B). However, I felt that its questions did not fully capture the self-efficacy of third-semester pre-service teachers. While the TEIP survey measures efficacy in instruction, collaboration, and behavior management, these are skills that pre-service teachers are still in the process of learning and developing. To address this, I included the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale (Loreman et al.,

2007), which explores participants' inner thoughts and perceptions about working with students in inclusive settings (Appendix D). Therefore, the SACIE-R Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale (Loreman et al., 2007) was added in addition to the TEIP survey to provide a more comprehensive understanding of inner thoughts and perceptions about working with students in inclusive settings (Appendix D). By examining both confidence and efficacy (through TEIP) and concern and perception (through SACIE-R), this dual approach offers a deeper, more nuanced perspective on the participants' evolving self-efficacy. Understanding both what pre-service teachers feel capable of and what they are apprehensive about allows for a more holistic view of their readiness and growth within inclusive education settings. I combined both survey tools and demographic questions into a single Google Form.

I felt that four SACIE-R questionnaire items used words and phrases that could be considered outdated and insensitive. For instance, Question #2 originally stated, *"I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability. I feared the possibility of experiencing a disability in the future."* Concerned that participants might find this wording offensive and choose not to complete the survey, I revised it to: *"I fear the possibility of experiencing a disability in the future."* The revision to the wording change will be further discussed on limitations of the study (See Table 2).

Table 2

SACIE-R Questionnaire Revised

SACIE-R	Original	Revision
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Question 2	I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability. I fear the possibility of experiencing a disability in the future.	I fear the possibility of experiencing a disability in the future.
Question 9	I would feel terrible if I had a disability. I would find it challenging if I were to experience a disability.	I would find it challenging if I were to experience a disability.
Question 11	I am afraid to look directly at a person with a disability. I sometimes feel apprehensive about making direct eye contact with individuals who have disabilities.	I sometimes feel apprehensive about making direct eye contact with individuals who have disabilities.
Question 13	I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities. I initially feel surprised when meeting individuals with significant physical disabilities.	I feel surprised when meeting individuals with significant physical disabilities for the first time.

Initially, I intended to use the survey results to select participants for the interviews by examining their self-efficacy scores on the TEIP, as well as their attitudes and concerns regarding working in an inclusion setting (SACIE-R). My original goal was to include participants with both high and low self-efficacy scores and identify any unique participants, such as those with high self-efficacy scores but also high concerns. However, since only nine participants agreed and consented to participate in the interview, I could not use the survey results for participant selection. Instead, I used them to triangulate with the interview data.

Interviews

I sought to understand the factors that contributed to pre-service teachers' perceived self-efficacy related to inclusion. I explored these factors by examining their past experiences, including upbringing, cultural backgrounds, interactions with diverse student populations,

mentoring relationships, and coursework, which shaped their confidence and beliefs in their ability to teach effectively in inclusive settings.

The interviews began with a conversation about the artifacts that each participant was asked to bring, items that represented their identity as early childhood educators, in order to create a comfortable and open atmosphere. I used a semi-structured format as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to interview participants about themselves, their families, their prior (e.g., job, volunteer), and current (e.g., teacher preparation program, field) experiences. I developed the interview questions based on the research questions, ensuring they aligned with Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy. To ensure a comprehensive interview, I also incorporated Patton's (2002) six types of questions of behavior or experience, opinion or belief, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background or demographic into the interview design (Appendix G). See Appendix F for the interview questions. I strived for balanced consistency and flexibility, ensuring all participants were asked the same core questions while allowing for a natural discussion and exploration of their responses. The semi-structured format included a list of questions that served as a guide, but the wording and order of the questions were adapted as needed, based on the flow of the conversation.

Additionally, open-ended questions were incorporated to encourage participants to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words, fostering richer and more detailed responses (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2018). This flexible approach ensured that key themes were addressed while allowing each participant's unique context and insights to emerge organically. Each interview was conducted virtually using Zoom. Participants were asked to bring an artifact representing their identity as early childhood educators, enriching the discussion and

providing deeper insights into their personal connections to the field. To further enhance accuracy and reliability, interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording tool and transcribed using transcription software. I maintained a research journal for reflection and note-taking throughout the process.

Physical Artifacts

As stated above, participants were asked to bring at least one physical artifact, such as a work of art or a book, to represent themselves as early childhood educators (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These artifacts served as a rapport-building strategy (Edwards & I'Anson, 2020). Given that self-efficacy-forming experiences involve reflection on past experiences and emotions, the use of artifacts helped elicit deeper insights while fostering an emotional connection between the researcher and the participant.

Artifacts also played a critical role in data triangulation by offering a unique lens into participants' values and identities as educators. Participants explained the significance of their chosen artifact, which helped identify key themes in their professional perspectives. These insights were later cross-referenced with other data sources to strengthen the research findings and enhance the study's credibility (Galman, 2009).

Research Journal

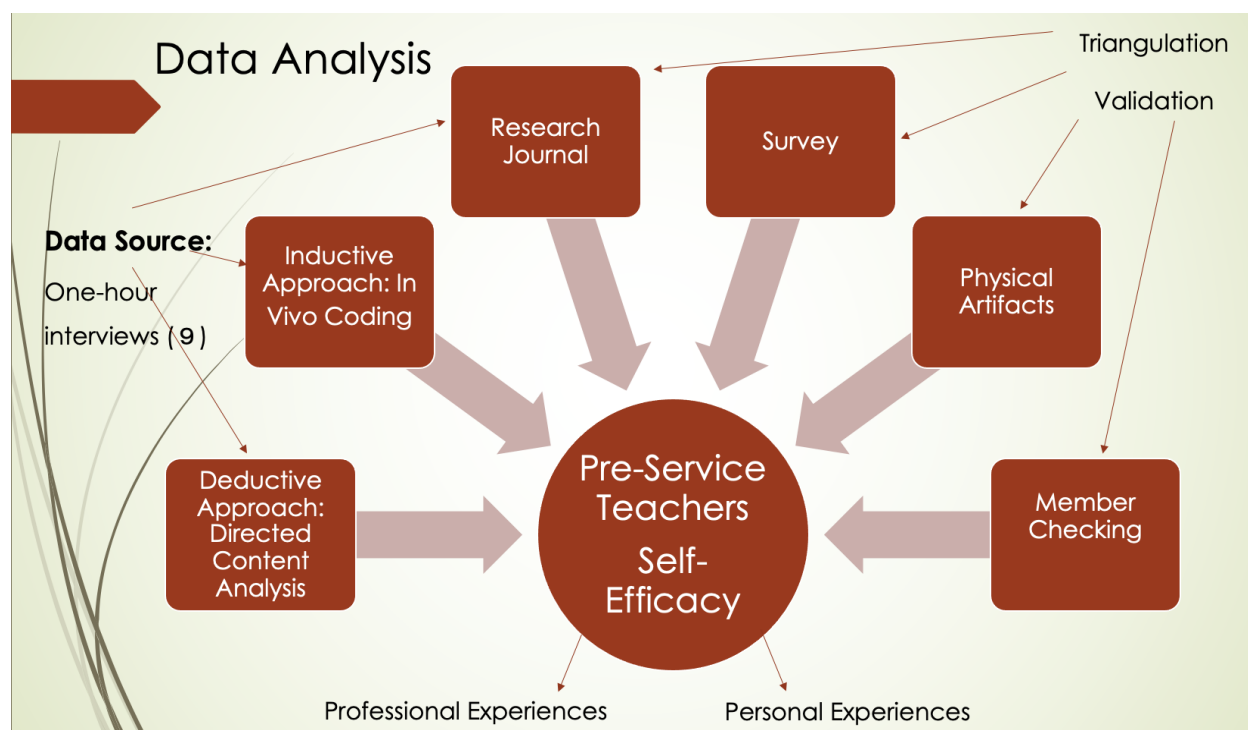
In my study, I maintained a research journal before, during, and after data collection to document participants' information, as well as my thoughts, ideas, and interpretations (Annink, 2017). Before interviews, I documented participants' basic information and initial assumptions based on survey responses. I recorded key observations during interviews, including unique quotes, body language, pauses, and vocal tone, while also interpreting their potential significance. Afterward, I color-coded the notes according to Bandura's sources of self-efficacy

Concerns (SACIE-R). Each participant's responses were assigned scores to quantify their self-efficacy levels in these areas.

After one-hour interviews, I used both inductive and deductive coding, which provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data (Azungah, 2018). Indicative coding allows for the discovery of new themes and patterns, while deductive coding provides a structured framework for analysis based on existing theories (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). See Figure 7 for an overview of data analysis.

Figure 7

Overview of Data Analysis



Deductive Approach: Directed Content Analysis

After analyzing the survey results, I began with a directed content analysis of the nine pre-service teachers' interview transcriptions to find data to support Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Saldaña, 2021). I systematically coded the data using

Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy as primary codes. To refine the analysis, each primary code was further divided into subcodes based on participants' experiences as pre-service teachers to capture whether the participants' experiences contributed to the development of self-efficacy or acted as barriers (Table 3). These codes and data-derived subcodes were organized into a comprehensive codebook (Saldaña, 2021). See Table 3. The application of the predefined codes and subcodes provided a clear and organized structure for data analysis.

Table 3

Directed Content Analysis: Codebook

Codes	Subcodes: support self-efficacy	Subcodes: hinder self-efficacy
1. Enactive Mastery Experience (Bandura, 1994, 1997; Simsar & Davidson, 2020)	1.1. Delivered it successfully	1.3 Delivered unsuccessfully
	1.2. Learned	
2. Vicarious Experience (Bandura, 1997; Bautista, 2011; Wang et al., 2014)	2.1. Mentor teacher demonstrated	2.4 Mentor
	2.2. Multiple opportunities to observe	2.5 Field Supervisor
	2.3. Peer PST	2.6. Peer PST
3. Verbal Persuasion (Bandura, 1997; Hier & Mahony, 2018; Wood & Bandura, 1989)	3.1. Praise	3.3 put-downs/negative
	3.2. Actionable feedback	
4. Physiological or Emotional States (Bandura, 1997; McCarthy, 2019; Lazarides & Warner, 2020)	4.1. Sense of accomplishment	4.2. Stressed and exhausted
		4.3. Difficult and challenging
		4.4. Feels nervous and helpless

Note: PST refers to pre-service teacher

Using a numerical coding system (e.g., 2.2. Multiple opportunities to observe, 4.2 Stressed and exhausted), I manually analyzed each participant's interview transcript, assigning relevant codes to text segments. After the initial coding, I added the sub-codes (See Table 4).

Table 4

Example of Directed Content Analysis

Transcript	Code	*subc ode	**sub code
<u>Emma 24:19</u> Um, yes, yes. In in my preschool. Yeah, I would say in all the field placements that I've been in so far, there have been a few children with behavior issues . And I think I've just learned a lot from my mentor teachers about they, they really don't have one thing that it's going to work for every child and even at first I was kind of like, well, this kind of seems unfair, you know that these kids get this a certain way or they have this incentive or reward or whatever it is when the other kids don't. And that's, I think, over time, I've kind of changed that perspective of like, well, not all the kids are going to need this support, you know, so I think they, all of my mentors have really shown me what it means to know your students and know what they need . And	2	2.1 2.2	
<u>Emma 25:29</u> Yes. Good.			
<u>Emma 25:59</u> I think there is one student that comes to mind in kindergarten and that student was my classmate all throughout elementary school. I think just from a kid's perspective, or at least from my perspective as a kid I what I knew that something was different about the student and their behavior issues were more aggressive. And so that would mean like no one in the class was safe from getting hit or like, so. Every child, you were okay with it because oh, she's little different or his little different. <u>So</u> I just, it's okay. You didn't have any like, oh my gosh, I'm afraid or I hate this or anything negative thought about that. Um, I would say I was a little afraid. Yeah.	2	2.1 2.2	
<u>Emma 27:32</u> Just Well, I think my personality as a kid was not very like, I don't know, mellow reactive, so anything he would anything that this would do to me. I would just kind of take it and then Oh, tell the teacher of the river but yeah, did you change? Yeah, that's good. Let's say I'm doing right now.			
<u>Emma 28:48</u> Yes, yes, I have that.	1	1.2	
<u>Emma 28:52</u> Yeah, so one. There were a few students in my first placement with learning disabilities . And then			
<u>Emma 29:06</u> Yes, it was with EMIC and one student with autism . And then in my current field placement, I do have a C one student with an academic disability . I think that's, that's it. But my experiences with each of those have been drastically different. I would say in the student that I'm working with now is she is much more she is more attentive than any other of the students with the disability that I've worked with in the past. <u>So</u> she willing to learn and, you know, like her personality is she likes to <u>learn</u> and she likes to do what's right in the classroom, but she just struggles with the academic part. <u>So</u> there will be certain subjects where she is a little bit behind or still developing in. Whereas in my first field placement, I would say I noticed that the students with IEPs that I worked with, were more discouraged. It could be because they're older or maybe the environment I don't know, but they were they didn't want to do <u>schoolwork</u> and it was hard to get them to be motivated. And yeah, I would really have to work with them.	1	1.2	

Note. * subcodes for supporting self-efficacy development; ** subcodes for hindering self-efficacy development

I then grouped and organized the data to compile all findings across participants for each code and its corresponding subcode(s). To enhance clarity, the codes were further categorized into two groups: those that supported self-efficacy and those that hindered self-efficacy (Table 5).

Table 5

Directed Content Analysis Summary

Mastery Experiences		Vicarious Experiences		Verbal Persuasions		Physiological or Emotional States	
Support	Barrier	Support	Barrier	Support	Barrier	Support	Barrier
Having AA degree	Pay too much attention to some	MT and EAs modeling	See MT burnt out	MT appreciation	Mistreatment (e.g., put downs)	Feeling of success	difficult parents
Experience with diverse students outside of the field placement		Field placement w/another PST	Unreasonable or mean MT	Actionable Feedback from MT and CC and instructors		Confidence after working in an inclusion class	High demands of the program (much higher than expected)
Family member with disabilities		MT share what to do and not to do	Social Media	Student compliment			Balance schedule
Experience in inclusion or SPED class		Co-develop LP and co-teach w/another PST	See a lack of support at school	Other teachers on grade level			Online course (delivery method doesn't work)
In various placements			Other's bad experiences				Major projects
Experience with various type of needs			Instructors w/lack of empathy				Learning about different types of disabilities is not helpful
Strategies for behavior or disruptive issues							Need real life experiences (in classroom)
Success after try something new with students							Lack of support in the classroom
							Lack of experiences w/diverse students
							Unprepared
							University staff are not empathetic
							Needs for emotional support (counseling)
							Financial
							MT have no time to talk

Note. PST refers to pre-service teacher; MT refers to mentor teacher; SPED refers to special education; LP refers to lesson plan; CC refers to cohort coordinator

Inductive Approach: In Vivo Coding

After completing deductive coding, I applied in vivo coding to emphasize participants' perspectives and voices in their authentic language. I manually extracted significant quotes from interviews and recorded them in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This approach ensured that the

data remained closely rooted in their own words while preserving their exact language, unique voices, and personal expressions (Saldaña, 2021).

The purposes of using an inductive approach are to condense raw text data into a brief summary format, establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes evident in the raw data analysis (Thomas, 2006). Inductive coding is an exploratory approach that evolves as insights emerge from the data (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Unlike deductive coding, it requires more time for reflection and crafting meaningful themes or codes that accurately capture the essence of the data (Williams & Moser, 2019).

By placing direct quotes within quotation marks, I preserved the original phrasing to maintain the integrity of participants' statements while offering richer insights into their lived experiences, an approach that, in qualitative research, vividly and accurately represents their viewpoints and deepens understanding of emerging themes (Saldaña, 2021). I went through five steps during the in vivo coding process. After extracting excerpts from all interview participants' transcriptions, I initially generated 55 major in vivo codes. These were then consolidated into 22 codes by grouping similar ideas, further refined to 20 codes, and ultimately, three themes emerged.

Step 1: First Cycle. In the first cycle of the in vivo coding process, I focused on extracting meaningful excerpts directly from the participants' responses. This step involved carefully reviewing the interview transcripts to identify specific phrases, terms, and statements that resonated with the research questions.

During this extraction, I focused on words and expressions directly related to the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings, ensuring that the pre-service teachers' voices were authentically captured. These excerpts formed the foundation for the subsequent coding process, providing the raw material to identify emerging patterns and themes. This process resulted in 66 to 170 excerpts per participant, totaling 919 excerpts (see Table 7 for an example of this step).

Step 2: Major In Vivo Coding. By focusing on the most representative and impactful statements, I extracted concise, participant-centered major codes that encapsulated the core of their perspectives (Saldaña, 2021). To transform the 919 passages into a more structured and manageable dataset, I systematically grouped similar codes based on shared meanings and recurring ideas (e.g., combined “*children with special needs*,” “*SPED*,” and “*students with IEPs*” into one group). This process involved carefully analyzing patterns across participants' responses and merging closely related codes under broader, more representative categories. Through this consolidation process, I identified 55 major in vivo codes that captured the key themes emerging from the data. These refined codes provided a clearer framework for understanding the participants' experiences and perspectives, facilitating a more coherent and meaningful analysis.

Step 3: Code Consolidation. I consolidated the 55 major in vivo codes into 22 broader codes to further refine the data by grouping similar ideas (e.g., *concerns*, *college work*). This process helped streamline the analysis while preserving the core themes. See Table 9 for the results. I systematically grouped similar major codes into clusters based on shared themes or common ideas, ensuring each cluster represented a distinct aspect of the data. This process

involved carefully reanalyzing the content of the quotes to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and connections among participants' responses.

Step 4: Refining Codes and Identifying Themes. In this final step, I added descriptive labels using a word or phrase from each code for better organization. For example, “*Working with parents intimidates me*” was categorized under *Parents*, and “*My biggest concern is not getting the support I need*” was labeled as *Lack of support*. Adding short labels to the data at this stage served as thematic summaries, providing a clear and accessible representation of the core idea of each cluster. To enhance the efficiency and focus of the analysis, I reviewed the clusters to identify and eliminate duplicates, ensuring the lists were streamlined and avoided redundancy. This refined organization facilitated a deeper understanding of the themes and provided a clear pathway for exploring the factors influencing self-efficacy within the participants' experiences.

Assigning labels was instrumental in uncovering meaningful insights, as it emphasized a connection to the participants' lived experiences and maintained the authenticity of their perspectives. Three overarching themes emerged through this process: *Teacher Preparation Program*, *Field (School)*, and *Personal Factors*. (Figure 9).

Step 5: Alignment of Four Sources of Self-Efficacy. I thoroughly examined the 20 final in vivo codes to assess their alignment with one of Bandura's four self-efficacy factors. This allowed me to determine whether my research findings corresponded with established theoretical constructs and the findings from the directive coding, thereby understanding how different experiences shape self-efficacy in teaching contexts (See Table 10). Based on the analysis, each in vivo code aligned with one of the four self-efficacy determinant factors. Based on Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy, a visual representation of the many factors influencing self-efficacy

development emphasizes the critical role of addressing physiological or emotional states in shaping pre-service teachers' self-efficacy at ABC University (See the Note for Table 10).

Validity

Interview data were triangulated with survey results, the research journal, and the artifacts to conduct a comprehensive analysis. Triangulation involves comparing and cross-verifying the information obtained from different sources to increase the validity of the findings (Qassimi, 2023). Considering Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation, particular attention was paid to experiences or environments that influenced self-efficacy behavior. The analysis included examining:

1. Specific experiences: Identifying key moments or events that participants reported as impacting their confidence and belief in their abilities.
2. Environment: understanding the contexts or settings that either supported or hindered the development of self-efficacy.

I also focused on the patterns of behavior exhibited by participants, especially those with perceived high self-efficacy, by identifying and analyzing:

1. Actions and practices: How participants approached tasks and challenges, their problem-solving strategies, and their willingness to take on new tasks.
2. Etiquette and manners: Social interactions, communication styles, and respect for norms and conversations within their environment.
3. Habits and routines: Daily practices that contributed to their sense of efficacy, such as preparation routines, time management, and self-care practices.

4. Non-verbal cues: Body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal indicators of confidence or anxiety. These cues provided additional insights into the participants' level of self-efficacy beyond their verbal responses.

To maintain research trustworthiness, I employed a transparent approach by explicitly stating my professional roles and perspectives, as suggested by Secules et al. (2021). This process to support the validity of the study, which included member checking, triangulation, and a transparent approach, allowed for the correction of any misinterpretations, ensuring the accuracy of the research.

Triangulation

Merriam (2001) asserted that thick descriptions and multiple methods strengthen the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Because qualitative data analysis is inherently subjective, researchers must be mindful of their perspectives and how they shape their interpretations of the data (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation involves using multiple data sources to compare and cross-check information gathered at different times or from various places.

In this study, I utilized data triangulation by integrating interviews, surveys, a research journal, and artifacts to ensure accurate conclusions and meaningful transferability of the study findings to other contexts. Survey data validated participants' predominant concerns, while artifacts provided insight into their values and beliefs. For example, Payton brought a complex cube as her artifact to share, symbolizing her perspective that every obstacle was a puzzle to solve, reinforcing her resilience and grit. Similarly, Emma brought a pair of glasses to represent her commitment to maintaining an open mind. I color-coded the notes according to Bandura's sources of self-efficacy to identify emerging themes (Thorne, 2021). This reflective process

facilitated narrative analysis, allowing for pattern recognition and a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of self-efficacy sources. By cross-referencing multiple data sources, I aimed to enhance the reliability of the findings while identifying inconsistencies and uncovering discrepancies, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences.

Member Checking

To ensure the validity of the findings, I involved participants in verifying the accuracy of the research results (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2018). This method serves as a critical step in reducing subjective bias and ensuring the authenticity of the data interpretation, as noted by Cohen et al. (2011). The member-checking process began by sharing a concise summary of the interview data with each participant. I invited them to review the summary and provide feedback on its accuracy and completeness. This step was crucial in capturing their perspectives authentically and confirming that the interpretations aligned with their experiences. Participants were encouraged to review and critique the summaries to ensure no details were overlooked and their voices were accurately represented in the analysis. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the summaries by signing their approval, with no additional feedback or corrections provided. Through this process, I was able to ensure that they reflected the participants' experiences and insights. Member checking enhanced the study's validity and fostered a sense of shared ownership in the research, aligning closely with ethical and rigorous inquiry principles.

Reliability

Two survey tools I used in this study were the TEIP and SACIE-R. The TEIP scale is a widely used instrument developed to assess teachers' perceived self-efficacy in implementing inclusive practices (Sharma et al., 2012). A recent study by Selenius and Ginner Hau (2023)

examined the stability and internal consistency of the TEIP scale across 12 countries, with sample sizes ranging from 105 to 1,231 participants. The participants included a diverse mix of pre-service and in-service teachers from preschool, primary, secondary, vocational, and special education settings. The study found that the TEIP demonstrated sufficient to good internal consistency across various contexts. However, the authors recommended clearly articulating the specific definitions and constructs underlying the scale to ensure its validity and reliability across diverse educational settings.

In a review of survey tools used to measure teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, Ewing et al. (2018) identified the SACIE-R as the only questionnaire with adequate psychometric properties that effectively captures the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of teachers' attitudes. Originally developed by Loreman et al. (2007) and later revised and administered by Forlin et al. (2011), the SACIE-R has been used with preschool and primary school teachers, as well as pre-service teachers. The scale specifically addresses teachers' interactions with children with special needs (behavioral), their concerns about inclusion (affective), and their willingness to support and engage with students with special needs. These affective concerns often include issues such as workload, preparedness to teach children with diverse needs, and the challenge of giving sufficient attention to all students in an inclusive setting.

Moreover, the SACIE-R has been validated across diverse international contexts, including Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Canada, Australia, and the United States, further supporting its reliability and applicability across cultures. Ewing et al. (2018) concluded that the SACIE-R appears to be one of the most psychometrically sound instruments currently available

and commended for its cultural adaptability and robustness in evaluating attitudes toward inclusive education.

To complement the surveys and enhance the study's overall reliability, I conducted semi-structured interviews with all nine participants. This approach followed a consistent interview protocol that provided a structured framework of guiding questions while allowing the flexibility to explore participants' unique perspectives more deeply. By using the same core questions across all interviews, I ensured consistency in data collection while capturing rich, meaningful insights into the participants' lived experiences.

Additionally, I ensured trustworthiness by conducting regular checks for bias throughout the interview process and data analysis. By periodically reviewing interview transcripts and findings, I identified and addressed any potential biases, whether stemming from my own assumptions or the framing of questions. For instance, when participants compared two cohort coordinators, I remained neutral by setting aside personal feelings, as I found myself relating to one coordinator's perspective. Instead, I focused on objectively documenting participants' insights to maintain the integrity of the research. These checks helped ensure that the data accurately reflected the participants' experiences without being unduly influenced by my personal perspective.

This comprehensive approach ensured that the data accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and minimized potential biases, resulting in a more robust and credible analysis. The study employed a case study approach, which, by design, focuses on a particular context. While this limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized across different settings, the study offers valuable insights that may be transferable to similar teacher preparation environments.

Researcher Bias and Positionality

The relationship between researcher and participants carries the potential to influence the research process and introduce bias, particularly when the researcher holds personal beliefs or shares similar experiences with the participants. As Creswell (2007) explains, “researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 21). In this study, the researcher’s empathy and familiarity with events similar to those described by participants may have unintentionally influenced data interpretation and findings. I identify as a mentor teacher, a doctoral candidate, a researcher, an older female, and a person born in another country. These intersecting identities shape the lens through which I view the world and the research process.

My deep commitment to inclusive education also informs my positionality. I am a passionate advocate for supporting all children, particularly those with developmental delays or learning differences. As a preschool inclusion teacher, I believe that every child is unique and should not be labeled or limited by diagnostic terms, as children learn and grow at different rates. I have witnessed many “late bloomers” who thrive when provided with the right support, patience, and opportunities.

This personal and professional stance, while grounded in experience and empathy, presented a potential source of bias when interpreting participants’ perspectives on inclusion and teaching diverse learners. For example, when participants expressed doubts or concerns about working in inclusive settings, I had to be mindful of not allowing my own strong beliefs in the potential of all learners, or my frustrations with systems that label children prematurely, to overshadow or distort their narratives.

To address potential bias in this study, I adopted a reflexive approach throughout the research process. Reflexivity involves a continual process of examining how my own background, experiences, values, and assumptions may influence the study, including data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Holmes, 2020). I actively engaged in reflexivity by maintaining a research journal, which served as a space for ongoing self-reflection. In this journal, I regularly documented and examined my thoughts, emotions, and assumptions to help bracket my subjectivities and remain conscious of their potential impact. This practice enabled me to strive for neutrality and openness when interpreting participants' responses.

For example, when participants expressed frustration about coursework demands and program expectations, I was reminded of my own experience navigating college while raising three children, maintaining a job, and managing family responsibilities. While I deeply empathized with their challenges, I recognized in myself a tendency to compare their experiences to my own and to view some responses as complaints rather than legitimate expressions of struggle. I also noticed that I often aligned more closely with the perspectives of instructors, given my background and current professional role. These biases, particularly my inclination to judge pre-service teachers for expressing dissatisfaction or to feel greater empathy toward faculty members, were openly acknowledged in my journal.

By engaging in this reflective process, I sought to remain transparent about how my positionality, as someone who strongly values inclusion and has firsthand experience juggling multiple life roles, may have subtly shaped my interpretations. My goal was not to eliminate bias entirely, but to continuously reflect on and mitigate its influence. Through this reflexive practice, I aimed to honor and accurately represent the diverse voices and lived experiences of the participants, while upholding the integrity and credibility of the research.

Summary

This chapter presented the research methods, explaining the rationale for choosing a qualitative case study to explore the factors influencing pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. It outlined the study's scope and context, specifying the parameters of the research. An overview of the research design and data collection methods, including surveys, interviews, artifacts, and a research journal, was provided. The chapter detailed the interview process and how surveys and artifacts were integrated into the study. Additionally, it described the data analysis approach, highlighting the coding procedures. Strategies to ensure validity and reliability, such as member checking and data triangulation, were discussed. Lastly, the chapter reflected on the researcher's positionality and its influence on interpreting the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I presented the findings related to the research questions on professional and personal self-efficacy-forming experiences that influence participants' self-efficacy. Using in vivo coding and directed content analysis of interviews, artifacts, and survey results, I answered my research questions. By examining data from multiple sources, including surveys, interviews, artifacts, and the research journal, I cross-verified findings to support a more robust and holistic understanding of the phenomena.

Professional Experiences

Three overarching themes emerged through in vivo coding, which were *Teacher Preparation Program, Field (School)*, and *Personal Factors*. (Figure 9). Out of three themes, two were related to professional self-efficacy-forming experiences.

I thoroughly examined the 13 final in vivo codes related to professional self-efficacy-forming experiences to assess their alignment with Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy: Mastery Experiences, vicarious Experiences, Verbal Persuasion, and Physiological or Emotional States. This allowed me to determine whether my research findings corresponded with established theoretical constructs and the findings from the directive coding, thereby understanding how different experiences shape self-efficacy in ECE teaching contexts (See Table 6).

Each in vivo code was categorized under one or more of Bandura's sources of self-efficacy, aligning the theoretical frame to the professional development experiences the participants reported. The results highlighted that Physiological or Emotional States and Vicarious Experiences played especially significant roles in shaping participants' self-efficacy beliefs. Codes such as "too much coursework," "high demand," and "lack of support" reflected

emotional strain, while terms like “cohort members,” “mentors,” and “classroom experiences” indicated learning by observing others. A visual summary in Table 6 illustrates the relationship between these codes and their aligned sources of self-efficacy. For instance, “classroom management” was linked to three sources—Mastery Experiences, Vicarious Experiences, and Physiological or Emotional States—demonstrating how one experience can simultaneously engage multiple self-efficacy pathways. Similarly, the code “SPED” was associated with three sources, revealing the multi-layered impact of special education teaching experiences on pre-service teachers’ confidence and growth.

Table 6

Alignment of In Vivo Coding for Professional Experiences and Four Sources of Self-Efficacy

Theme	Code	Four Sources of Self-Efficacy
Program	“too much coursework”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“not enough ECE coursework”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“cohort members”	Vicarious Experiences
	“instructors”	Verbal Persuasions Physiological or Emotional States
	“classroom experiences”	Mastery Experiences Vicarious Experiences
Field (school)	“high demand”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“mentor”	Vicarious Experiences
	“behavior issues”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“classroom management”	Mastery Experiences Vicarious Experiences Physiological or Emotional States
	“feedback”	Verbal Persuasions
	“lack of support”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“SPED”	Mastery Experiences Vicarious Experiences Physiological or Emotional States
	“parents”	Physiological or Emotional States

Note. Mastery Experiences in blue; Vicarious Experiences in green; Verbal Persuasion in yellow; Physiological or Emotional States in red

For the directed content analysis, I created a codebook (See Table 2 in Chapter 3) that included primary codes representing the four sources of self-efficacy and subcodes categorizing supporting and hindering factors. I systematically analyzed the pre-service teachers' experiences before entering and during their teacher preparation program. Table 7 represents how different sources of self-efficacy were influenced by professional experiences.

Table 7

Directed Content Analysis Results Related to Professional Experiences

Source of Self-Efficacy	Supporting Factors	Hindering Factors
Mastery Experiences	Experiences in inclusion or SPED classrooms	Balancing attention to students
	Having strategies for working with children with behavioral issues	
Vicarious Experiences	Mentor teacher modeling	Mentor teacher
	Field placement with another pre-service teacher	Lack of support
		Lack of empathy
Verbal Persuasions	Mentor teacher appreciation and praise	Mentor teacher
	Actionable feedback	
	Student compliment	
Physiological or Emotional States	A sense of accomplishment	Stress
	Confidence after working in a inclusion class	Concerns

Note. SPED refers to special education

Supporting Professional Factors for Mastery Experiences

The directed content analysis revealed two key supporting professional factors for mastery experiences: having experience in inclusion or special education classrooms, and acquiring strategies to work with students with behavior issues. Pre-service teachers who had

hands-on experience in inclusion or special education settings demonstrated a higher level of self-efficacy in their ability to support students with disabilities or behavior issues. Payton had extensive experience in diverse educational settings, including inclusion classrooms and Fully Self-Contained (FSC) classrooms. She worked with multilingual students, students with disabilities, students with behavioral challenges, and students who use wheelchairs. Drawing from her own experiences as an individual with a disability, Payton brought a unique perspective to her teaching, enabling her to connect with and support her students on a deeper level. Payton responded with 5 (agree) to all the questions related to inclusive instruction on the TEIP scale, except for question #15, *"I can use a variety of assessment strategies."* Payton's answers suggested a positive perception of her self-efficacy in implementing inclusive instruction.

Hannah gained valuable mastery experiences by identifying and addressing her students' needs to support their success. She observed that one student frequently came to school tired and disruptive. Recognizing the issue, she offered the student a short nap, which resulted in a noticeable improvement in behavior and engagement. In another instance, Hannah paired a student who was disruptive in class with a partner during collaborative work. This arrangement allowed the student to focus better by engaging with someone to share ideas. Hannah reflected that being placed in a special education classroom for her field assignment was particularly beneficial, as it enhanced her ability to understand and respond to diverse student needs effectively. Hannah responded with 5 (agree) to all the TEIP questions related to managing aggressive behavior, indicating a strong sense of self-efficacy in working with students who exhibit disruptive or aggressive behaviors, as well as those with disabilities.

These experiences provided the pre-service teachers with practical exposure to diverse teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and the implementation of Individualized

Education Programs (IEPs). By actively engaging with students who had disabilities or challenging behaviors, pre-service teachers developed a deeper understanding of how to create an inclusive learning environment. This direct involvement was a foundation for building their self-efficacy as they gained firsthand knowledge of effective practices and approaches.

Hindering Professional Factors for Mastery Experiences

One hindering factor was identified: balancing attention to students. Teachers often devote significant attention to students who disrupt the class, and pre-service teachers are no exception. Striking a balance between supporting students who require extra assistance and acknowledging those who are consistently on task is a challenging skill to master. Emma reflected on the difficulty of balancing equality and equity in the classroom, emphasizing that each child has different needs, making it challenging to cater to everyone. However, when pre-service teachers focus too heavily on students needing extra support while unintentionally overlooking those following expectations, they often feel they have failed in their teaching role. This struggle to distribute attention effectively can undermine their confidence and hinder the development of their self-efficacy.

Supporting Professional Factors for Vicarious Experiences

Two key findings of supporting factors for vicarious professional experiences for developing self-efficacy in pre-service teachers: mentor or other teachers modeling, and being placed in a classroom with another cohort member. Mentors and educational assistants (EAs) played a crucial role in preparing pre-service teachers to help students with diverse needs by modeling effective strategies. Many pre-service teachers highlighted how their mentors demonstrated practical techniques that worked well in the classrooms. For example, Emma shared that her mentor teacher developed and implemented a system to support a student prone

to aggression when upset. The mentor teacher not only explained the system but also demonstrated its successful application, giving Emma a clear, actionable model to follow. Emma's responses to the TEIP questions reflected this experience, as she expressed confidence in her ability to calm disruptive students and clearly communicate behavioral expectations.

Casey observed both their mentor teacher and EA modeling strategies for effectively supporting students with IEPs or students exhibiting challenging behaviors. These hands-on demonstrations provided valuable insights into managing diverse classroom dynamics and tailoring support to meet individual needs. The influence of this experience was evident in Casey's high scores in efficacy in instruction, highlighting her high confidence level in this area.

Some pre-service teachers also mentioned that their mentors provided direct guidance on specific classroom situations. For example, Zoe shared that her mentor teacher advised her not to approach a particular student during a behavioral episode. Instead, the mentor suggested taking the student outside to help him calm down in a different environment. This practical advice addressed immediate behavioral challenges and demonstrated the importance of adapting strategies to suit individual circumstances. Payton described her mentor as a "*godsend*" because she could always rely on her for guidance and answers.

These experiences highlight the critical role of mentor teachers and EAs in bridging the gap between theory and practice. They offer pre-service teachers guidance and real-world examples of effective teaching strategies. Through modeling, explanation, and direct advice, mentors and EAs help pre-service teachers build confidence and competence in working with students with diverse needs.

Another factor supporting vicarious experiences was Micah's co-teaching arrangement with a fellow cohort member in the same classroom. This collaboration enabled him to share

lesson planning and instructional responsibilities, which played a key role in strengthening his confidence and competence. Micah noted that working alongside a peer helped him develop essential collaborative skills while also providing a sense of security, reducing the pressure often associated with solo teaching. Additionally, this partnership fostered mutual learning and support, allowing both pre-service teachers to exchange ideas, address challenges, and reflect on their teaching practices together.

Through this co-teaching experience, Micah gained valuable mastery and vicarious experiences by successfully delivering lessons with the help of a cohort member. The co-teaching experience enhanced Micah's practical skills and reinforced the importance of collaboration in professional development and classroom management. Micah scored the highest on the "*Concerns*" factor of the SACIE-R results, suggesting lingering apprehensions about inclusive teaching. However, the co-teaching experience provided a supportive environment that potentially helped alleviate some of these concerns.

Hindering Professional Factors for Vicarious Experiences

Conversely, three distinct themes were identified as barriers that hindered the participants' self-efficacy growth: negative experiences with a mentor teacher, a lack of support at school, and a lack of empathy from cohort coordinators and other university staff. Lacking or having negative mentorship hindered some pre-service teachers' growth and confidence. For instance, Casey and Payton reported encountering challenges with one of their mentors, describing situations where their mentor teachers either displayed unkind behavior toward them or engaged in unprofessional actions directed at students. Although Payton had a supportive mentor teacher last semester, these experiences created discomfort and frustration, leaving Casey and Payton feeling unsupported during a critical professional development phase. Witnessing or

being subjected to such behavior undermined their ability to build a strong foundation of self-efficacy.

Similarly, Zoe and others shared that their mentor teachers appeared burnt out and overwhelmed due to a lack of administrative support for them and their students. This sense of burnout affected the mentors' ability to provide guidance and exposed Zoe and others to the harsh realities of teacher stress and inadequate educational resources. Zoe's experience highlighted how a mentor's struggles can inadvertently impact a pre-service teacher's outlook and confidence in managing similar challenges. Zoe's efficacy in instruction score was the lowest among the participants.

These examples underscore the influence mentor teachers have on pre-service teachers. A positive mentorship can inspire and empower, while a negative or strained mentorship can create barriers to self-efficacy development, leaving pre-service teachers less prepared to handle the complexities of the classroom. Recognizing and addressing the critical role of mentors is essential for enhancing the quality and impact of field experiences in teacher preparation programs.

Furthermore, several pre-service teachers reported witnessing a lack of empathy from cohort coordinators and instructors, which negatively impacted their self-efficacy. Zoe, Micah, Emma, and Aaron highlighted the need for greater support and flexibility from some instructors and field supervisors. A major concern was the rigid deadlines, which were not adjusted for preplanned family vacations, along with the perceived overwhelming workload created by multiple instructors assigning tasks simultaneously. The persistent pressure and lack of flexibility contributed to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and self-doubt, ultimately hindering their sense of efficacy in navigating the demands of their teacher preparation program.

The pre-service teachers expressed a desire for more leniency regarding family obligations, personal commitments, and deadlines, particularly as they struggled to balance schoolwork, fieldwork, and employment. Zoe and Aaron, in particular, emphasized the overwhelming nature of managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. The high-pressure environment of completing academic assignments, fulfilling fieldwork requirements, and maintaining a job often leaves them feeling stressed and unsupported.

Zoe also shared that having a supervisor who did not express understanding of personal challenges made it even more difficult for her peers to meet expectations, further compounding their sense of pressure. The participants collectively highlighted the importance of supervisors and instructors demonstrating empathy and flexibility, recognizing the complex realities of pre-service teachers' busy and stressful lives. They felt that greater understanding and adjustments, such as more reasonable deadlines or accommodations for personal obligations, could significantly alleviate stress and create a more supportive learning environment.

Supporting Professional Factors for Verbal Persuasion

Three key supporting professional experiences factors for verbal persuasion for developing self-efficacy in pre-service teachers were identified: appreciation and praise, actionable feedback, and student compliments. As Payton worked on building rapport with her students, her mentor praised her, saying, *"Building relationships with students is half the battle."* Similarly, Sasha sought insights from other kindergarten teachers about teaching and assessment and received positive feedback on her performance.

Some instructors and cohort coordinators offered actionable feedback that was incredibly helpful for pre-service teachers. Payton, for instance, mentioned two instructors from whom she continued to seek advice, highlighting their ongoing guidance and support. Similarly, Aaron,

Micah, and Zoe shared that a cohort coordinator had provided honest, constructive feedback regarding their progress. This candid criticism was appreciated and seen as instrumental in helping them improve their teaching skills. They valued the openness of their cohort coordinator, recognizing that receiving such direct feedback promoted their understanding of their strengths and areas for growth, ultimately contributing to their development as educators.

Payton shared a meaningful experience with a student who had been struggling with both academic performance and behavior. The student tested her patience early on, but Payton remained patient and consistent, not taking his actions personally. Over time, the student's behavior improved, and one day, he unexpectedly approached her and complimented her. He told her, *"I think you're okay. I think I will like the teaching, and I won't mind if you teach me."* This interaction was especially significant to Payton because the student had been known to challenge other teachers, yet she had remained calm and patient with him. This verbal persuasion from Payton's student not only strengthened her self-efficacy, but also contributed to her sense of mastery in handling difficult situations. Her low Concerns and high Sentiments scores on the SACIE-R scale aligned with this finding.

Hindering Professional Factors for Verbal Persuasion

One hindering factor was also noted: mistrust or misstatements by mentor teachers. Zoe and others reported that some mentors treated pre-service teachers more like students than emerging educators, making it difficult for them to earn respect from their students. Some pre-service teachers experienced put-downs and harsh criticism from their mentors in front of students, which hindered their ability to establish authority and gain respect. The participants reported that this lack of respect undermined their confidence and competence, leaving them feeling untrusted in taking on professional responsibilities or making decisions.

Supporting Professional Factors for Physiological or Emotional States

Two key factors supported physiological or emotional states for the development of self-efficacy in pre-service teachers: a sense of accomplishment and confidence after working in inclusion classrooms. I focused on identifying keywords that reflected a sense of accomplishment and feelings, such as “*confident*,” “*feel comfortable*,” and “*I can*.” These words indicate positive self-perceptions and a belief in one’s ability to effectively manage tasks and overcome challenges. These keywords provided insight into areas where participants might have felt less self-efficacious or struggled with perceived obstacles in their roles.

A few participants reported that experiencing a sense of accomplishment boosted their confidence in teaching in inclusive classrooms. For example, Casey felt more prepared for solo teaching after gaining valuable experience and skills in an inclusion classroom. Her total TEIP score (80) exceeded the average (77.4), and her efficacy to use inclusive instruction (31) was notably higher than the average (27.1).

Similarly, Emma expressed increased confidence in leading the class and delivering instruction independently. Her growth in competence was recognized by the principal, who offered her a part-time teaching position, reinforcing her development as an educator. However, her TEIP scores did not reflect this progress, reflecting her total TEIP score (70) was lower than the average (77.4). Casey and Emma scored higher than the average on the SACIE-R Attitude score, indicating a positive attitude toward inclusive education.

Hindering Professional Factors for Physiological or Emotional States

I searched for keywords that represented negative feelings such as stress, exhaustion, difficulty, nervousness, helplessness, and fear. Words and phrases such as “*overwhelmed*,” “*challenging*,” “*worried*,” and “*I’m not sure*” were noted as indicators of emotional strain. A

high number of factors caused stress and concerns caused by their professional experiences among these pre-service teachers, such as parents, lack of field experience, inadequate training, classroom support, schoolwork, cohort coordinators, mentor teachers, and online learning platforms. Pre-service teachers collectively reported seven types of concerns.

Parents. Working with parents proved to be a significant source of stress for many young pre-service teachers. Sasha shared that she felt unprepared, saying she had not received sufficient training to engage with parents. Emma expressed concern about working with difficult parents, while Casey admitted, *“The thought of working with parents scares me.”*

Zoe and others shared a similar apprehension, *“I am scared of talking to the parents because they are older than me.”* These concerns were echoed in the TEIP survey, particularly in questions #3 and #9, which focused on parent interactions. While the pre-service teachers felt confident in their abilities to make parents feel welcome at school, they were less confident in engaging parents in the school activities of their children with disabilities.

Lack of Field Experience. Rather than focusing solely on theoretical knowledge about various disabilities at the university level, many pre-service teachers expressed the need for more practical exposure to real-world situations in the field. They felt that more hands-on experience would better prepare them for the complexities of working with students with disabilities. This sentiment was reinforced by the SACIE-R survey, specifically the question, *“I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills required to teach students with disabilities.”* Seven out of nine participants indicated either 3 (agree) or 4 (strongly agree) with this statement, indicating a widespread sense of inadequacy in their ability to support students with disabilities effectively. This result highlights a critical gap in teacher preparation programs, where theoretical learning about disabilities may not be enough for pre-service teachers to feel prepared fully.

Schoolwork. All nine participants reported experiencing significant stress due to the demands of their schoolwork. Casey shared that the pressure often became so overwhelming that she needed to take breaks to manage her stress levels and regain focus. Similarly, for Sasha, Micah, and Zoe, major course projects and the challenge of balancing their academic schedules were primary sources of stress. They noted that the heavy workload and tight deadlines often stretched them.

In addition, both Zoe and Sasha specifically mentioned that the demands of their teacher preparation program had proven to be more challenging than they initially anticipated. What they had expected to be manageable became an ongoing struggle as they tried to keep up with the various responsibilities, from coursework to field experiences. This unexpected difficulty further emphasized the perceptions of the intensity of the program and the additional strain it placed on their time and energy. As a result, the participants' experiences highlight the importance of providing adequate support and resources to pre-service teachers, particularly in managing the heavy workload and balancing the multiple demands of teacher preparation.

Cohort Coordinator and Mentor Teachers. Many participants in one particular cohort reflected positively on their experiences with a cohort coordinator, praising her understanding and the strong working relationship they had developed with her. These positive experiences highlighted the importance of having a common understanding and clear communication between the cohort coordinator, instructors, and pre-service teachers.

In contrast, Aaron struggled to adjust to working with another cohort coordinator, contributing significantly to his stress. This adjustment period was challenging for him, as he expressed that he found it difficult to establish rapport and a sense of familiarity with the coordinator. Similarly, Isabel and Zoe expressed a desire for more opportunities to engage in

meaningful conversations with their cohort coordinator and mentor teachers. They felt that additional time for discussion would have helped them navigate their roles more effectively and gain the support they needed. The challenges faced by Aaron, Isabel, and Zoe underscored the need for consistency and strong interpersonal connections between pre-service teachers and their mentors or cohort coordinators.

Adequate Training. All seven pre-service teachers in the elementary and early childhood education program expressed concern that inadequate training on teaching preschool students and students with disabilities significantly hindered their readiness to teach young children. These teachers emphasized that, without specific guidance and preparation in working with this population, they felt unprepared to address the unique needs of preschoolers and children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting. The SACIE-R Concerns score (M=15.3) and the Attitudes score average (M=15.0) were high, indicating that they were concerned about inclusive education despite having relatively positive attitudes. The Concern scores of two pre-service teachers in the early childhood and early childhood special education program were lower than the average, indicating they had fewer concerns.

Online Learning Platform. Sasha expressed that online courses were not practical for her. She struggled to stay engaged and fully comprehend the material, and her struggle to maintain focus and connect with the content significantly hindered her learning experience.

Zoe echoed this sentiment, adding, *“We don’t even get to talk to our instructors because the courses are asynchronous.”* She emphasized that the lack of real-time communication with instructors made it challenging to ask questions, clarify doubts, or engage in meaningful discussions that would enhance her understanding of the course material. Both Sasha’s and Zoe’s comments highlighted a common frustration among students enrolled in asynchronous online

courses. They felt disconnected from the learning process without the opportunity for direct interaction with instructors and peers.

Lack of Classroom Support. Lastly, all nine participants voiced significant concerns about the inadequate support they anticipated once they would transition into full-time teaching roles. Many had observed firsthand the reality of limited support on public school campuses, which fueled their fears of being underprepared and overwhelmed when responsible for managing classrooms independently. Casey described this situation as her *"worst nightmare,"* expressing deep anxiety about facing the demands of teaching without the necessary resources and guidance.

Reflecting on his experiences in an inclusion classroom, Aaron pointed out that the only support typically available comes from an EA, which he noted was often insufficient to meet the diverse needs of students in such settings. This lack of comprehensive support highlights a significant gap that these pre-service teachers foresee in their future classrooms. The participants with concerns reflect a broader resource allocation and support issue within the educational system.

Their fears about being unprepared and unsupported underscore the critical need for better preparation, ongoing mentorship, and adequate classroom resources to ensure that new teachers are equipped to handle the complexities of managing diverse classrooms. Seven out of nine pre-service teachers indicated 3 (agree) or 4 (strongly agree) on the SACIE-R question #14, *"I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills required to teach students with disabilities."*

The TEIP Results (Professional)

The results of the TEIP survey ($n = 9$) were summarized across three subscales. For the EI (efficacy to use inclusive instruction) category, participants' scores ranged from 22 to 36, with a mean score of 27.11 and a standard deviation (SD) of 4.43. Based on this SD, scores below 22.68 ($M - 1\text{ SD}$) were considered to reflect low efficacy, while scores above 31.54 ($M + 1\text{ SD}$) indicated high efficacy. In the EC (efficacy in collaboration) category, scores ranged from 21 to 36, with a mean of 26.44 and an SD of 4.36; therefore, scores below 22.08 suggested low efficacy and scores above 30.80 reflected high efficacy. For the EMB (efficacy in managing behavior) category, participant scores ranged from 21 to 33, with a mean score of 23.89 and an SD of 4.04. Scores below 19.85 were considered low efficacy, and those above 27.93 were considered high efficacy. The SD for all three subscales was over 4.0, suggesting a wide variability in participants' self-perceptions of their efficacy across the domains. An SD above 4.0 in a small sample size implied that while some pre-service teachers felt confident in their inclusive teaching abilities, others felt significantly less prepared. This spread indicated that experiences and self-efficacy levels were not uniform among participants. Notably, one participant reported the highest self-efficacy scores of all the participants, with a maximum score of 36 in both EI and EC, and 33 in EMB.

Table 8

Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice Results ($n=9$)

Category	Range	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Efficacy to Use Inclusive Instruction	22-36	27.11	4.43

Efficacy in Collaboration	21-36	26.44	4.36
Efficacy in Managing Behavior	21-33	23.89	4.04

Note. Scale of 1-6, 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Disagree somewhat, 4=Agree somewhat, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree, 36 maximum score

Personal Experiences

Among the three overarching themes identified through in vivo coding, *Personal Factors* emerged as a key contributor to personal self-efficacy-forming experiences (Figure 9). These personal influences played a significant role in shaping pre-service teachers' beliefs in their own capabilities and resilience within the teaching profession.

The data revealed a range of personal experiences that either supported or hindered the development of self-efficacy. Positive influences included being open-minded, demonstrating resilience, holding leadership roles, and receiving encouragement from supportive family members. These experiences contributed to enhanced confidence and emotional strength. In contrast, negative personal experiences, such as being bullied during childhood, were found to diminish self-worth and negatively impact self-efficacy beliefs.

Furthermore, lived experiences with individuals with disabilities, particularly within the family context, were shown to have both supportive and challenging effects. For example, participants who had siblings or relatives with disabilities described these relationships as opportunities for vicarious learning and emotional growth. At the same time, the emotional weight of such responsibilities could also pose challenges to their mental and emotional well-being.

To better understand how these personal experiences aligned with Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy, the final in vivo codes were examined and categorized accordingly (Table 9).

Codes such as “pick myself up and keep pushing,” “bullied,” and “own disabilities” were primarily associated with Physiological or Emotional States, reflecting the internal emotional processes that influence self-efficacy. Meanwhile, experiences involving “family” and “brother/uncle with disabilities” aligned with multiple sources, including Vicarious Experiences, Verbal Persuasion, and Mastery Experiences, underscoring the multifaceted nature of these personal narratives. The in vivo code “leadership” was also categorized under Physiological or Emotional States, illustrating how taking on leadership roles contributed to the participants’ emotional resilience and confidence in handling responsibilities.

Table 9

Alignment of In Vivo Coding for Personal Experiences and Four Sources of Self-Efficacy

Personal	“be open-minded”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“family”	Vicarious Experiences Verbal Persuasion Physiological or Emotional States
	“brother/uncle with disabilities	Mastery Experiences Vicarious Experiences Physiological or Emotional States
	“own disabilities”	Mastery Experiences Physiological or Emotional States
	“bullied”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“pick myself up and keep pushing”	Physiological or Emotional States
	“leadership”	Physiological or Emotional States

Note. Mastery Experiences in blue; Vicarious Experiences in green; Verbal Persuasion in yellow; Physiological or Emotional States in red

Using a codebook, the results of the directed content analysis identified key personal experiences that influenced pre-service teachers’ self-efficacy. Supportive experiences included interactions with individuals with disabilities, which helped foster empathy, confidence, and preparedness for inclusive teaching. These experiences often provided vicarious learning and

emotional insight. In contrast, social media and mental health challenges were common hindering factors. Participants noted that social media often led to unhealthy comparisons and self-doubt, while mental health struggles, such as stress and anxiety, interfered with their emotional well-being and confidence in their teaching abilities (See Table 10).

Table 10

Directed Content Analysis Results Related to Personal Experience

Source of Self-Efficacy	Supporting Factors	Hindering Factors
Mastery Experiences	Personal connections with individuals with disabilities	
Vicarious Experiences		Social media
Physiological or Emotional States		Mental health

Supporting Personal Factors for Mastery Experiences

Pre-service teachers with personal connections to individuals with disabilities, such as family members, also reported higher self-efficacy in working with students with similar needs. This personal familiarity often seemed to translate into a more intuitive understanding of how to approach and support students with disabilities or challenging behaviors. For example, Zoe had a brother with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and her experiences growing up with him profoundly shaped her perspective. She recalled being physically hurt by him at times and observing his difficulty sitting still, as well as the struggles her parents faced due to his behaviors. During the interview, Zoe said, “*I feel like I can handle it because my brother had ADHD.*” These challenges eventually led her family to relocate because the expectations for students at school did not align with his behavior. Through these experiences, Zoe learned how to earn her brother’s trust, developed skills to help calm him, and discovered his strengths. This

experience taught her that a disability does not define or limit a person's potential for accomplishment.

Payton had a granddaughter with a learning disability, which had taught her valuable lessons in patience and adaptability. She learned how to break down concepts into smaller, more manageable steps to help her granddaughter understand what she was learning. This experience has deepened Payton's ability to support and teach children with diverse learning needs.

Expanding on the influence of personal experiences, one of Hannah's daughters received early intervention services when she was younger, and Isabel's uncle had learning disabilities. Notably, Hannah, Zoe, and Payton all responded positively to TEIP Questions #12 and #13, which focus on their efficacy in collaborating with other professionals to support students with disabilities.

Although directed content analysis identified having a family member or close contact with individuals with a disability as a contributing factor to self-efficacy, Zoe, who had the most extensive personal experience with disruptive behavior, scored the lowest on TEIP Question #2 *"I am able to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy"* and Question #7 *"I am confident in my ability to prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom before it occurs."* Similarly, Hannah also scored low on these questions. I noted in the research journal, *"Gap: Hannah's TEIP score is low, and her SACIE-R score is high,"* and *"Hannah appeared very confident, with extensive experience working as a mom of a child with EI (Early Intervention) services and a preschool teacher's aide."* My interpretation from the interview, as recorded in the journal, was that *"although Hannah had significant experience working with preschool-aged children, she lacked experience managing students with disruptive behaviors causing the low TEIP score."* All other participants rated TEIP Questions #2 and #7 with a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6

(strongly agree), Hannah scored 2. While personal experiences, such as caregiving or working with children with disabilities, seemed to enhance self-efficacy in collaboration, they did not necessarily translate to increased perceived self-efficacy in managing challenging behaviors.

Hindering Personal Factors for Vicarious Experiences

Interestingly, social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have fueled some pre-service teachers' fears about working with parents. Casey reported that she and others watched many Instagram and TikTok posts of challenging or negative interactions between educators and parents. These posts often highlighted conflicts or critical feedback from parents, creating inherently difficult parent-teacher relationships. This exposure to exaggerated social media heightened anxiety among pre-service teachers, shaping their perceptions of what it meant to engage with parents in a professional setting. Moreover, Isabel shared that she heard about the bad experiences her cohort peers had at the seminar. She said, *"I am really shocked about what parents are like."* Some participants shared that the negative experiences by others made them worry about how they would handle parent-teacher conferences, address concerns, or respond to criticism in a constructive manner.

However, regarding the TEIP questions related to parents, for Question #3, *"I can make parents feel comfortable coming to school,"* and Question #4, *"I can assist families in helping their children do well in school,"* all nine pre-service teachers responded with either 6 (strongly agree) or 5 (agree). However, for Question #9, *"I am confident in my ability to get parents involved in school activities for their children with disabilities,"* four pre-service teachers responded with 2 (disagree) or 1 (strongly disagree), indicating that pre-service teachers feel less confident in convincing parents to participate compared to supporting families.

Hindering Personal Factors for Physiological or Emotional States

Stress and overwhelming concerns related to personal responsibilities were major hindering factors that disrupted pre-service teachers' emotional well-being. Many pre-service teachers held part-time or full-time jobs after school to meet financial obligations or support their families. Some were raising families of their own, which added another layer of responsibility. The combination of academic stress from coursework and personal responsibilities frequently left them feeling emotionally and physically exhausted.

Participants described the challenge of managing competing demands with limited time. For instance, Micah shared that he often completed homework assignments while at work in order to meet deadlines. This lack of separation between professional, academic, and personal responsibilities contributed to persistent stress and burnout. In addition, the influence of social media appeared to have a negative impact on emotional states, particularly among Gen Z and millennial pre-service teachers. Many reported feeling pressure from constantly comparing themselves to others online, which intensified feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

Artifacts

I incorporated artifacts shared by each participant as a component of triangulation. These artifacts offered tangible evidence of their personal perspectives through lived experiences. See Table 11 for the list of each participant's artifact and the explanation they provided for sharing the artifact.

Table 11*Artifact Shared by the Participants*

Participant	Artifact	Explanation
Casey	Two books	Casey used these books in a pre-kindergarten class last semester. They are her favorite books on social-emotional learning, and they remind her of how much she enjoys working with young children. These books also rekindle her sense of purpose as a teacher.
Hannah	Photo of her three-year-old student's easel painting	Children are encouraged to paint freely at the center where Hannah worked, allowing them to communicate and express themselves creatively. During a conversation with the child, they discussed lines, and as the child painted, the child excitedly described how their lines were moving in different directions and using various colors. Hannah appreciated this moment because it showed the child's unique expression through art, particularly since he was the only one to paint lines in such a way. This experience reinforces her belief in the value of creative expression and open-ended learning in early childhood education.
Emma	Eyeglasses	Her glasses symbolize the importance of awareness of the lens through which Emma views the classroom and her students. Emma believes it's essential to approach teaching with empathy, being conscious of her own biases and perceptions while understanding that children see the world differently from adults. The glasses also serve as a reminder of how students perceive her, prompting her to reflect on her teaching practices and consider the kind of teacher she wants to be. This reflection helps her create a more inclusive and thoughtful approach to her students' needs and perspectives.

Payton	Complex puzzle	Payton shared that a complex puzzle symbolizes how she approaches challenges in her personal life and teaching. Payton views every obstacle as a puzzle to solve, something to figure out through unique angles or methods. Having a disability and facing hardships has shaped her perspective, making her think differently and approach situations in ways that may differ from her peers, who often tackle challenges head-on. Payton compares this to working with students in special education, acknowledging that many students don't approach education in traditional ways or see things as others do. Just as she figures out different ways to fit the puzzle pieces together, she strives to find creative ways to make learning more accessible and understandable for her students.
Aaron	A birthday card from his student	Aaron explained that, although it wasn't related to school, it was from his time working with kids in the Parks program, where he helped them with homework and taught classes. One of the students he had been working with for a long time made him a card for his birthday. Aaron valued the gesture, reflecting his teacher role and deep connection with the students he worked with.
Sasha	Thank you letter from her students	Sasha shared that the letters were from second and third graders, and she was only in the classroom twice a week last semester. Despite the limited time, she felt that receiving such heartfelt appreciation from the students was rewarding. The experience gave her a sense of gratification and motivated her to continue pursuing a career in education. Sasha said she would always remember the students and their impact on her journey.
Isabel	A bag full of keepsakes	Isabel explained that the bag contains items she collects from her field placements, such as goodie bags from her students or professional conferences. These items help her stay excited about teaching, especially during stressful times. Isabel shared that she has wanted to be a teacher since she was eight years old, and these small reminders help her continue her passion for education and stay focused on learning how to make a meaningful impact.

Micah	Vial of oil and water	The vial contains water colored with a bath tablet and oil, which he used in a science lesson about the different densities of fluids. The water, more dense than the oil, sinks to the bottom when the liquids are poured in various orders. Micah chose this item to represent him as an educator because, while the concept is simple, the lesson behind it is made meaningful by the educator's ability to help students understand and learn from the experience. This reflects his goal of making simple concepts impactful through thoughtful teaching.
Zoe	A photo of herself	Zoe brought a picture of herself as a teacher's assistant to represent a key moment in her journey toward becoming an educator. This photo, taken as a student assistant in a second-grade classroom at her old high school, marks when she first realized her passion for teaching. The image serves as an artifact of her early experiences in education, symbolizing the beginning of her commitment to the profession and her desire to impact students positively.

Table 12 explained the artifacts' significance. I compared these qualitative findings against the results of individual survey data to identify patterns, validate themes, and detect any discrepancies.

Table 12

Interpretation of Artifacts

Participant	Artifact	Significance
Casey	Two books	Social-emotional learning
Hannah	Photo of her three-year-old student's easel painting	Understanding of early childhood education Developmentally Appropriate Practices
Emma	Eyeglasses	Consciousness of her own biases
Payton	Complex puzzle	Grit
Aaron	A birthday card from his student	Connection to students

Sasha	Thank you letter from her students	Reward of teaching
Isabel	A bag full of keepsakes	Passion for teaching
Micah	Vial of oil and water	Meaningful lesson planning
Zoe	A photo of herself	Commitment to teach

The SACIE-R Results (Personal)

The SACIE-R results ($n = 9$) were analyzed across three personal-related subscales, each consisting of five items (Table 13). In the Sentiments category, which captured participants' emotional reactions and comfort levels toward inclusive education, scores ranged from 10 to 15, with a mean of 12.22 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.86. A higher Sentiments score indicated a more negative emotional perception or lower comfort level with inclusion. Based on this, a score below 10.36 ($M - 1\text{ SD}$) was considered indicative of higher comfort with inclusion, while a score above 14.08 ($M + 1\text{ SD}$) suggested a more negative emotional perception of inclusive education. In the Attitudes category, which reflected participants' overall beliefs and support for inclusion, scores ranged from 13 to 17, with a mean of 15.00 and an SD of 1.22. A score below 13.78 ($M - 1\text{ SD}$) reflected a less favorable outlook, whereas a score above 16.22 ($M + 1\text{ SD}$) indicates a more positive attitude toward inclusive practices. In the Concerns category, which measured participants' apprehensions about implementing inclusion (e.g., workload, preparedness, or equitable classroom attention), scores ranged from 13 to 19, with a mean of 15.33 and an SD of 2.06. A higher score signified greater concerns. Therefore, scores below 13.27 ($M - 1\text{ SD}$) suggested fewer concerns, while scores above 17.39 ($M + 1\text{ SD}$) indicated significant apprehensions about inclusive education. The relatively high standard deviations in

the Sentiments and Concerns categories suggested a wider variation in participants' emotional comfort and perceived challenges related to inclusion.

Table 13

Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised Results (n=9)

Category	Range	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sentiments	10-15	12.22	1.86
Attitudes	13-17	15.00	1.22
Concerns	13-19	15.33	2.06

Note. Scale of 1-4, 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly agree, 20 maximum score

Answering the Research Questions

The pre-service teacher participants reported that their confidence often stems from a combination of personal and professional experiences, particularly from observing and interacting with individuals they respect and admire. Engaging with or witnessing the work of others, especially those who support students with disabilities or behavioral challenges, can be especially influential. Participants described how these experiences help prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive classrooms by providing practical insights and enhancing their readiness to teach in diverse educational settings.

The research question and two sub-questions were the following:

How do pre-service early childhood teachers develop their self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

1. What professional experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

2. What personal experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

After reviewing the results from surveys, interviews, artifacts, and research journal entries, I identified five professional self-efficacy-forming experiences and five personal self-efficacy-forming experiences that influenced the development of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in inclusive practices.

Professional Self-Efficacy-Forming Experiences

The study identified five key professional self-efficacy-forming experiences that shape pre-service teachers: mentorship, fieldwork, coursework, university staff (instructors, cohort coordinators), and a sense of accomplishment. Each of these experiences aligns with one of Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy development.

Mentor Teachers (Vicarious Experiences/Verbal Persuasion). The guidance of mentors who model effective practices and demonstrate strategies for working with diverse students plays a pivotal role in shaping pre-service teachers with development. These mentors engage in meaningful conversations, offering valuable insights and ongoing support. All nine participants agreed with TEIP question #13: *"I am able to work jointly with other professionals and staff to teach students with disabilities in the classroom."* Having mentors who possess expertise in early childhood and inclusive education and who can effectively demonstrate teaching strategies during field placements significantly enhances the quality of field experiences for pre-service teachers.

Fieldwork (Mastery and Vicarious Experiences). Adequate time spent in inclusive classrooms, where pre-service teachers can observe and practice inclusive strategies, is critical to developing self-efficacy. Isabel exemplified this connection, reporting high TEIP scores that

reflected her strong teaching self-efficacy within inclusive settings. During her field placement, she assumed the primary support role for a student with learning disabilities. She observed and documented the student's progress while communicating regularly with her mentor and the school counselor. These hands-on experiences significantly reinforced her self-efficacy in working in inclusive environments.

Furthermore, Isabel reported a low score in the Concerns domain, indicating minimal apprehension about working in inclusion settings. Isabel's low score suggests a link between her positive field experiences, her confidence in her abilities, and her reduced perception of challenges in inclusive education. Isabel's experiences underscore the importance of meaningful and supportive field placements in fostering self-efficacy and alleviating concerns about inclusion. This finding is further supported by the artifacts Isabel shared (a bag full of keepsakes), serving as a reminder to maintain her passion for teaching and stay focused on continuous learning.

Coursework (Physiological or Emotional States). Reasonable and meaningful coursework aligned with real-world inclusive practices builds self-efficacy for inclusive teaching. Lack of adequate coursework to prepare students for early childhood and inclusive education adds stress and hinders self-efficacy development.

University Staff (Verbal Persuasion). Feedback from cohort coordinators and instructors was crucial in shaping pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. Positive feedback reinforced the participants' confidence in their teaching abilities, while constructive suggestions provided clear guidance on the steps needed for growth and improvement.

A Sense of Accomplishment (Mastery Experiences/Physiological or Emotional States). Experiences such as receiving thank-you letters from students or witnessing students'

growth and development foster a sense of accomplishment. Aaron, Sasha, and Isabel each shared cards or keepsakes given to them by their students, which provided them with a sense of fulfillment at the end of the semester spent working in their classrooms.

Personal Self-Efficacy-Forming Experiences

This study identified five personal self-efficacy-forming experiences that shaped pre-service teachers' self-efficacy: close encounters with individuals with disabilities, leadership experiences, challenging life experiences, age and life stage, and mental health.

Close Encounters with Individuals with Disabilities (Mastery/Vicarious Experiences). Personal experiences with individuals with disabilities prior to entering the program can profoundly shape an individual's understanding, empathy, and approach to inclusive practices. Zoe's background provides an example of how such experiences can influence self-efficacy. Her SACIE-R survey results indicated a high score in the Concerns domain, reflecting a notable level of apprehension about working in inclusive settings. Growing up with a brother diagnosed with ADHD, Zoe developed a firsthand awareness of the complexities and challenges associated with inclusive practices. While her experiences fostered empathy and insight, they illuminated the significant demands of managing inclusion. This finding was supported by Zoe's TEIP results, which showed lower scores across all three factors: Efficacy in using inclusive instruction, collaboration, and management behaviors. Her scores were among the lowest of the participants, suggesting that despite her personal connection to disability, she knew how difficult it was to work with individuals with disabilities and expressed a lack of confidence in her professional capacity to handle these responsibilities.

Leadership Experiences (Physiological or Emotional States). Previous leadership roles likely played a crucial part in building confidence in classroom management and decision-

making, contributing to self-efficacy development. Participants with prior leadership experiences (e.g., Aaron, Sasha, Isabel) exhibited self-confidence. According to the research journal entries, participants with leadership backgrounds shared their accomplishments. They talked about confidently taking on challenges, maintaining eye contact, and speaking with a firm voice. For instance, Micah served as an international youth leadership group member and played ukulele in a foreign country. At the same time, Isabel organized a food drive after her town was devastated by a fire. While self-confidence alone does not guarantee self-efficacy, leadership experiences that closely relate to teaching, such as coaching, can significantly enhance the development of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. These experiences offer practical opportunities to develop skills like decision-making, communication, and guidance, essential for effective teaching.

Challenging Life Experiences (Physiological or Emotional States). Overcoming personal challenges can foster resilience and grit, essential qualities that support the development of self-efficacy in the face of difficulties. Life events such as accidents, parental divorce, injuries, disabilities, or the death of a loved one often require individuals to adapt, persevere, and find strength in adversity. These experiences can shape their outlook and confidence, particularly in professional settings like the early childhood classroom, where resilience is critical for success.

While Payton's life experiences have helped her develop empathy and confidence in working with children with disabilities, they have also introduced unique challenges. Her SACIE-R survey results indicated a high score in the Concerns domain, reflecting significant apprehensions. During her interview, Payton shared that although she feels capable and confident in her ability to connect with children with disabilities, she has reservations about her physical disability. She worries that it might limit her ability to fully engage in activities such as playing on the floor or participating in other physically demanding tasks with young children.

These concerns were further reflected in her TEIP results, where she scored below average in managing behavior. This highlights the nuanced nature of concerns in inclusive education, where an individual's personal limitations, rather than their attitudes toward inclusion, can significantly influence their confidence and perceived ability to perform in the classroom.

Age and Life Stage (Mastery/Vicarious Experiences). Life experience, potentially influenced by age, could significantly shape self-efficacy: Hannah and Payton, both mothers in their forties, provide an example of this dynamic. Despite their proven success in managing inclusion classrooms, the survey results indicate that both individuals self-reported lower levels of efficacy in behavior management compared to the average. This finding is intriguing, as it suggests that their experiences in inclusive settings might not have fully translated into self-assurance regarding certain aspects of teaching. Additionally, Hannah and Payton were less concerned about providing appropriate attention to students, balancing workload, and creating an inclusive environment, which may reflect confidence in their ability to address these challenges without feeling the same pressure or urgency as others. Their lack of concern could indicate how life experiences, including motherhood and age, shape pre-service teachers' perceptions of their capabilities, potentially influencing how they prioritize various aspects of teaching and classroom management.

Mental Health (Physiological or Emotional States). Social-emotional factors significantly influenced teacher self-efficacy, especially during the high-stress period of teacher preparation. Interviews and survey results revealed that seven out of nine pre-service teachers reported high levels of concern, reflecting the emotional burden that program requirements placed on their confidence and sense of competence.

Pre-service teachers were often tasked with managing far more than academic requirements. In addition to coursework, fieldwork, assignments, and lesson planning, many also juggled part-time jobs, family obligations, and the need to build relationships with mentor teachers, university staff, and peers. Financial strain added to their stress, making time and energy management even more difficult.

All nine participants reported feeling overwhelmed by their workload. Here are some specific stressors reported among participants:

- Casey and Hannah struggled with time management. Casey also worried about effectively engaging with parents.
- Emma was concerned about her preparation to teach independently, especially when working with students with IEPs. She felt she needed more training in special education.
- Payton raised concerns about the physical demands of working with young children, especially the need to move frequently between sitting and standing.
- Aaron expressed anxiety about co-teaching in a special education setting, particularly around value alignment and collaboration.
- Sasha focused on logistical classroom concerns: student numbers, creating a positive learning environment, curriculum implementation, and available support.
- Isabel felt overwhelmed managing five classes, attending her field placement twice a week, and volunteering once a week. Although she felt supported during the previous semester, she shared that this semester felt more isolating.
- Zoe and Emma also expressed concerns about the timeliness of support for students requiring IEPs, which presented an unexpected challenge in their teacher preparation

experience. Additionally, Zoe felt overwhelmed by financial pressures, particularly as an international student.

- Micah's stress and concerns stemmed from major projects and deadlines, balancing coursework, and time management. He also acknowledged the reality of handling student needs on a 'case-by-case' basis once he has his own classroom. Like many others, Micah was worried about the inadequate support when transitioning into a full-time teaching role.

These individualized concerns collectively highlight the immense pressure on pre-service teachers as they transition into professional roles.

Several core issues emerged as contributors to lowered self-efficacy:

- **Workload Stress:** The overwhelming volume of tasks calls for increased support from instructors and program coordinators
- **Lack of Parent-Teacher Communication Training:** Many participants felt unprepared to engage with families, particularly in the age of social media.
- **Insufficient Field-Based Learning:** A lack of hands-on opportunities with students with disabilities limited pre-service teachers' confidence and competence.
- **Limited Specialized Training:** Some participants felt underprepared to teach young children with disabilities, regardless of their program focus (elementary, early childhood, or special education).
- **Isolation in Online Learning:** Online platforms lacked interactive elements, reducing engagement and hindering knowledge retention.

- **Fear of Future Classroom Support Deficits:** Participants expressed concern about entering classrooms without adequate support, suggesting that preparation programs should offer opportunities to connect with current teachers for real-world insight.

In addition to these challenges, the emotional toll was intensified by limited access to mental health support. One participant shared that she waited two months to receive counseling during a period of overwhelming stress. Notably, ABC University does not have counselors specifically designated to support students in teacher preparation programs.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the key findings related to the professional and personal experiences that shape pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. Professional experiences were examined through the four sources of self-efficacy of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states, with both supporting and hindering factors identified. Personal experiences were also analyzed. Data from interviews, artifacts, and survey results (TEIP and SACIE-R) were triangulated to provide a richer understanding of these experiences.

The chapter concluded by directly addressing the research questions, emphasizing the interconnected and cumulative impact of both professional and personal experiences on the development of self-efficacy.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this study presents a review of the results, synthesizing key findings from the impact of school environments, teacher preparation programs, mental health considerations, and the participants' perspectives through the lens of the theoretical framework. The discussion delves into the multifaceted nature of self-efficacy, exploring its relationship with self-confidence and self-esteem and how these factors influence pre-service teachers' development. The implications of the findings are examined, with a particular focus on the importance of teacher preparation programs and the need to address pre-service teachers' mental health to support their growth and effectiveness. Additionally, the chapter addresses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with final thoughts, reflecting on the significance of the findings.

This study aimed to find the professional and personal experiences that shape pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in implementing inclusive practice to meet the diverse needs of preschool-age students. This study explored one central research question and two sub-questions. The central question was: How do pre-service early childhood teachers develop their self-efficacy for inclusive practices? The sub-questions were:

1. What professional experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?
2. What personal experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?

Review of Results

After analyzing the survey data, interview transcripts, artifacts, and the research journal, this study highlighted professional and personal experiences that contribute to developing self-

efficacy for inclusive practices among pre-service teachers. The discovery of personal experiences as a factor in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy development for teaching in early childhood classrooms is particularly significant, as it was not addressed in the existing literature reviewed. While teacher preparation programs may have limited control over students' backgrounds or prior experiences entering the program, they can still focus on addressing the self-efficacy factors related to professional experiences.

Professional Experiences

The professional experiences of pre-service teachers in this study revealed a complex interplay between the field placements, teacher preparation programs, and the participants' mental health, each influencing the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices. Field (classroom) placements and supportive mentors were pivotal in shaping participants' understanding of inclusive education. The hands-on experiences allowed pre-service teachers to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, develop classroom management skills, and build confidence in engaging with students with diverse needs. Successful field experiences are crucial for pre-service teachers as they lay the foundation for their ability to teach effectively in their own classrooms (Shardomo & Zalewski, 2008).

According to Smith et al. (2024), pre-service teachers were more likely to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy in teaching inclusive classrooms when they felt a sense of accomplishment at the end of their student teaching semester. A key factor contributing to this sense of accomplishment was effective mentorship. Study participants emphasized the importance of observing and interacting with experienced mentors, which provided practical insights and helped ease their concerns about working in inclusive settings. Smith et al. (2024) highlighted the positive impact of strong mentoring relationships in teacher preparation.

Collaboration among teacher candidates, university faculty, and school mentors was also identified as crucial to candidate retention in preparation programs. Conversely, challenging field experiences, such as placements in under-resourced classrooms or observing mentors under significant stress, were associated with heightened anxiety and reduced self-efficacy (Ma & Cavanagh, 2018). These findings underscore the powerful influence mentors have on pre-service teachers. A positive mentorship experience inspired and empowered future educators, while a strained or negative mentorship hindered self-efficacy development, leaving candidates feeling less prepared for the realities of the classroom. Recognizing and addressing the critical role of mentors was essential for improving the quality and impact of field experiences in teacher preparation programs.

Furthermore, positive experiences at the university level were equally essential in shaping pre-service teachers' development. Many participants reported feeling overwhelmed and stressed by the demands of coursework, project deadlines, employment, and other life responsibilities. Despite these challenges, teacher preparation programs played a vital role in equipping them with foundational knowledge and pedagogical strategies for inclusive education. Participants especially valued programs that offered a strong theoretical framework, practical teaching tools, and opportunities for collaboration with peers and mentors. These experiences underscored the importance of providing adequate support and resources to help pre-service teachers manage the heavy workload and balance the multiple demands of teacher preparation.

Pre-service teachers' mental health also emerged as an essential factor influencing participants' experiences in both field assignments and teacher preparation courses. The pressures of managing heavy workloads, navigating challenging classroom environments, and coping with the emotional demands of teaching were significant stressors for many pre-service

teachers. A significant gap was identified in parent-teacher communication and engagement, which many participants recognized as a source of stress and uncertainty. This perceived lack of preparation in handling parent relationships, compounded by the influence of social media on perceptions of these interactions, underscored the need for more focused training. Such training could better equip pre-service teachers with the skills and confidence to engage effectively with parents, ensuring a more holistic and supportive approach to inclusive education.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of school support systems, including mentors, cohort coordinators, and peers, in alleviating emotional strain and fostering a sense of self-efficacy. Mental health support and the development of resilience-building strategies were viewed as essential for helping pre-service teachers thrive and sustain long-term self-efficacy in inclusive education settings. The challenges faced by individuals such as Aaron, Isabel, and Zoe further highlighted the critical need for consistent, strong interpersonal connections between pre-service teachers and their mentors or cohort coordinators. These relationships serve as a foundation for emotional support, professional growth, and the development of confidence in navigating the complexities of inclusive classrooms.

Discussion

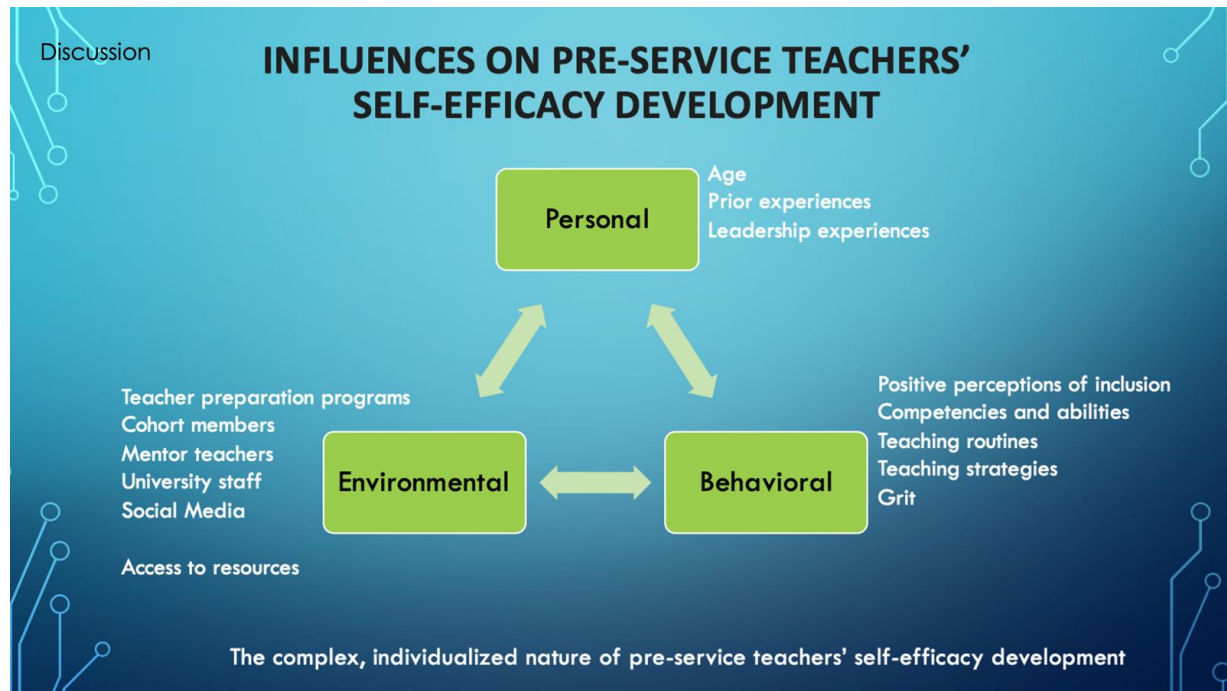
Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy is a core element of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986b), which asserts that an individual's behavior is shaped by the interaction between internal dispositions and external social and environmental influences (Bandura, 1989). The findings of this study support the framework because participants revealed that their self-efficacy was a result of a dynamic interplay among behavioral, personal, and environmental influences (See Figure 8).

Figure 8

Theoretical Framework: Self-Efficacy Influence on Pre-Service Teachers' Behavior

Determinants



This study revealed that **personal factors**, such as age and prior life experiences unrelated to teaching, played a significant role in shaping pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. These factors influenced how individuals perceived and responded to their experiences, directly impacting their actions and interactions within educational settings. Often formed before entering teacher preparation programs, these personal experiences shaped initial perceptions and confidence in teaching, sometimes without participants being fully aware of their own capabilities. According to Bausch et al. (2014), older trainees tended to report lower confidence in their learning abilities; however, their self-efficacy developed more positively over time compared to younger learners. Their extensive life experience contributed to a stronger ability to navigate training effectively, fostering greater self-efficacy. This pattern was reflected in two

participants from this study—both mothers in their forties—whose journeys aligned with these findings.

Additionally, overcoming personal challenges can foster resilience and grit, essential qualities that support the development of self-efficacy in the face of difficulties. Challenging life experiences, such as accidents, family separation, injuries, disabilities, or the passing of a loved one, often push individuals to adjust, endure, and discover resilience during difficult times. These experiences shape their outlook and confidence, particularly in professional settings like the early childhood classroom, where resilience is critical for success. Such personal growth through adversity contributes meaningfully to how pre-service teachers develop the confidence and adaptability needed to thrive in inclusive and dynamic educational environments.

During teacher preparation, **environmental factors** such as program learning experiences, cohort members, mentor teachers, cohort coordinators, and social media played a role in shaping how individuals navigated challenges and opportunities. As pre-service teachers practiced and gained experience, they refined their skills and enhanced **behavioral factors** such as competencies, teaching routines, and strategies. Intentional experiences must be carefully planned and provided by all those involved in teacher education to strengthen the teacher candidates' self-efficacy, ultimately improving their overall effectiveness in the classroom and, most importantly, teacher longevity (Stewart et al., 2021).

It was crucial to recognize the complex, individualized nature of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy development. Formative experiences, whether occurring before or during teacher preparation, vary widely in their personal impact. Pre-program experiences present unique benefits or challenges for educators, while in-program experiences offer more targeted opportunities for growth. Both types of experiences play vital roles in shaping self-efficacy.

Multifaceted Nature of Self-Efficacy

Pre-service teacher self-efficacy was shaped by a complex interplay of professional and personal experiences, each with the potential to either support or hinder development. First, mentorship emerged as a pivotal factor; engaged mentors who offered consistent guidance and constructive feedback helped foster confidence, while disengaged or unavailable mentors often impeded growth. Second, personal experiences with individuals with disabilities also influenced self-efficacy in different ways. For some, such experiences enhanced empathy and understanding; for others, they introduced self-doubt and uncertainty. Payton, who has a physical disability, exemplified this complexity. While she felt confident in her ability to connect with and support students with disabilities, she also expressed concerns about her physical capability to meet certain job demands. Tasks such as sitting on the carpet with young children and getting up independently presented physical challenges, which impacted her confidence in fully engaging with students in early childhood settings. Her example highlights how internal confidence in working with diverse learners can coexist with practical concerns about one's own limitations, underscoring the importance of accommodations and physical support within inclusive environments.

Similarly, Zoe's experience illustrated the dual impact of personal exposure to disability. Having a brother with ADHD helped her appreciate his unique strengths and cultivated compassion, but it also heightened her awareness of the complexities involved in supporting students with diverse needs. This awareness, while valuable, contributed to feelings of uncertainty and perceived limitations in her own abilities. These concerns were reflected in her TEIP results, where she scored below average in managing behavior. This highlights the nuanced nature of self-efficacy in inclusive education, where personal limitations or perceived skill gaps,

rather than negative attitudes toward inclusion, can significantly influence confidence and perceived competence in the classroom. These examples underscore the importance of targeted training, supportive mentorship, and inclusive practices that recognize both the personal strengths and physical needs of pre-service teachers. Bridging the gap between personal insight and professional self-efficacy is essential to preparing confident, capable educators for inclusive classrooms.

Pre-Service Teacher Self-Efficacy, Self-Confidence, and Self-Esteem

During the interviews, some pre-service teachers appeared highly confident, evidenced by their eye contact, articulate speech, facial expressions, and posture. They also demonstrated high self-esteem by referencing prestigious private schools they attended and impressive experiences. Although self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, further investigation reveals distinct differences.

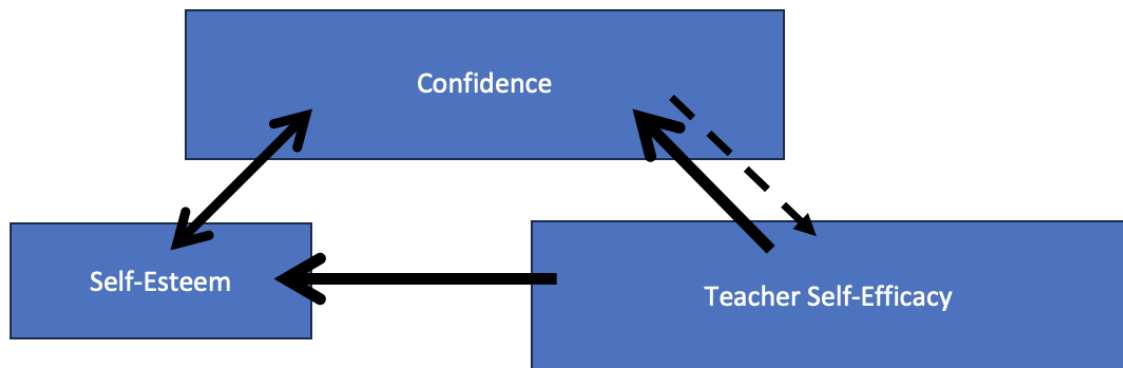
Although teacher self-efficacy enhances confidence and self-esteem, the reverse is not necessarily true. While individuals with high self-esteem often exhibit confidence, and confident individuals tend to have self-esteem, neither directly leads to teacher self-efficacy. This is because self-efficacy is domain-specific (teaching), whereas self-esteem (a sense of self-worth) and confidence (a general belief in one's abilities) are broader constructs (Kane et al., 2021). However, when pre-service teachers gain confidence through teaching-related experiences, such as coaching or leading a community project, these experiences can positively influence their self-efficacy in the classroom (Bellows, 2021).

This analysis highlights that self-esteem and self-confidence are insufficient for developing teacher self-efficacy. Figure 19 visually represents this relationship, demonstrating

that while self-esteem and self-confidence may be foundational, self-efficacy in teaching in inclusive classrooms leads to self-confidence and high self-esteem, not the other way around.

Figure 9

Teacher Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Confidence Relationship



Implications

The contrast between self-efficacy-supporting and hindering factors highlights the importance of addressing challenges and transforming them into opportunities for growth. By mitigating these obstacles, teacher preparation programs can foster more confident, capable, and well-prepared educators. This research study highlights the need for teacher preparation programs to recognize and address the diverse self-efficacy-forming experiences of pre-service teachers, particularly in inclusion settings.

Self-Efficacy-Forming Professional Experiences

High self-efficacy is linked to resilience, adaptability, job satisfaction, instructional effectiveness, and long-term success in the profession (Akman, 2021; Bellows, 2021). The key areas of support needed to enhance pre-service teachers' self-efficacy include providing tailored support for pre-service teachers' diverse backgrounds, structured field placements, mentorship, and curriculum adjustments.

Personal factors, such as age and prior experience, influence pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, highlighting the need for differentiated support in teacher preparation programs. For instance, older pre-service teachers may benefit from targeted strategies to boost their confidence in learning, while younger pre-service teachers may require increased exposure to real-world teaching experiences.

The study findings highlight the importance of intentional and well-structured field placements in teacher preparation programs. To better prepare pre-service teachers for the realities of teaching, programs should ensure they gain hands-on experience in diverse inclusion settings, particularly in early childhood settings. Field placements should be designed to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice inclusive strategies, observe skilled educators, and engage in reflective learning. This structured approach helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, allowing them to develop confidence and competence in real-world teaching scenarios.

Additionally, enriching field experiences through a variety of classroom visitations and peer observations can further enhance adaptability and deepen pre-service teachers' understanding of inclusive education. Exposure to various learning environments can equip them with the skills to effectively support all learners in inclusive settings. Strategies such as guided observations, co-teaching, and team teaching experiences can enhance self-efficacy development (Withy, 2020). Moreover, pre-service teachers sought more opportunities to engage with seasoned educators in discussions of differentiation strategies and instructional methods. These interactions were seen as crucial for enhancing their ability to meet the diverse needs of students and foster inclusive learning environments. One idea might be to implement structured meeting times with mentors, such as scheduled check-ins or collaborative planning sessions. Fostering a

culture of open communication and normalizing help-seeking can empower pre-service teachers to advocate for their needs. Prioritizing mentorship could better support the development of self-efficacy and prepare educators for inclusive teaching.

Interestingly, several participants emphasized the need for a more gradual introduction to the program, advocating for extended field placements to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student behaviors. Participants recommended that two pre-service teachers share field placements, allowing them to observe two classrooms, learn from two mentor teachers, and engage in partner-teaching in the first two semesters. Per the participant suggestions, pre-service teachers would be placed in a single classroom in the last two semesters, where they have opportunities to observe mentors and peers, team teach with mentors, and gradually transition to solo teaching. It is worth noting that two participants proposed extending the cohort program to three years instead of two years, calling for a less intense and more gradual transition into the educational environment. This adjustment would allow pre-service teachers to better acclimate to the student-teacher role and gain a more thorough understanding of classroom dynamics.

Furthermore, the study results emphasized the significant influence of social-emotional factors on pre-service teachers throughout their teacher preparation program. Many participants voiced concerns about the fear of working with challenging parents, the stress of balancing schoolwork, field placements, and personal commitments such as jobs and family responsibilities. The pressure of heavy workloads, assignments, projects, and tight deadlines contributed to their stress. Addressing these emotional challenges is crucial for their development as pre-service teachers navigate the program's demands while managing personal

and academic responsibilities. Access to resources, such as counseling or therapy without long wait times, is particularly beneficial in supporting their well-being.

Addressing these areas can enhance teacher preparation programs, enabling them to better support pre-service teachers. By graduating with strong self-efficacy, skills, and confidence, pre-service teachers will be more prepared to meet the challenges of inclusive education. This holistic approach can transform obstacles into opportunities, ensuring that future educators are equipped to address the diverse needs of their students.

The teacher preparation program recommendations reflect both increased support for social-emotional needs (e.g., emotional support, positive relationships, strategies to manage anxiety and stress) and the development of self-efficacy. See Table 14 for details.

Table 14

Teacher Preparation Program Recommendations

Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs	Source of Self-Efficacy
Many opportunities to observe in inclusive classrooms	Vicarious Experiences
Knowing strategies to work with diverse students & parents (Offer a course or workshops) challenging behavior special needs young children (Offer a job as an educational assistant or tutor on school days off)	Physiological/Emotional States
Supportive mentors Set clear expectations for supportive mentors (e.g., introduce pre-service teachers as “teachers” and not treat them as 'students’)	Various Experiences Verbal Persuasion Physiological/Emotional States

Time to converse with a mentor Face-to-face interactions and conversations after school	Verbal Persuasion Physiological/Emotional States
Empathetic cohort coordinators/counseling Be available for pre-service teachers Be a good listener	Verbal Persuasion Physiological/Emotional States
Reasonable schoolwork and projects Coordinate among course instructors so that all the deadlines do not overlap Be reasonable about the assignments (e.g., borrowing large pieces of artifacts from the museum and storing them at home - most students have limited storage space)	Physiological/Emotional States

To better support pre-service teachers, preparation programs should provide frequent observations in inclusive classrooms and practical training through workshops on topics like challenging behavior, special needs, and working with young children. Offering hands-on experience, such as tutoring or assisting on school breaks, can further enhance learning. Strong support from mentors who treat pre-service teachers as professionals, empathetic cohort coordinators, or counselors are essential. Programs should also allow time for mentor conversations, offer emotional support, and ensure reasonable, well-coordinated coursework that considers students' resources and time.

Limitations

Several limitations influenced the interpretation of the study findings. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small and specific sample of pre-service teachers who volunteered to participate in my study from a single university. While this approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of their experiences, it limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations, including pre-service teachers from other institutions or different geographical regions. All nine participants were in their second year of licensure programs (in

the third out of four semesters), which affected their perspectives and self-efficacy compared to less or more experienced pre-service teachers. The different lengths of time in the field influenced their understanding of inclusive classrooms.

Second, the modifications were made to the wording of four SACIE-R questionnaire items with the intent of improving clarity and sensitivity (See Table 2 in Chapter 3). These changes may have influenced the survey results and should be considered when interpreting the data. The adjustments were made to ensure the language used was respectful and inclusive, particularly for participants with disabilities or those who have close connections to individuals with disabilities. My goal was to preserve the original intent of the questions while fostering a more considerate tone. I also wanted to encourage participants to complete the survey without discomfort. If I, as the researcher, felt uneasy about the negative tone of certain questions, I recognized that participants might also feel the same and could choose not to continue. This was something I sought to avoid by promoting a more welcoming and respectful experience.

The third limitation of this study was its reliance solely on self-reported data, which inherently carries the risk of response bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their abilities based on personal perceptions rather than actual classroom performance. Since direct observations of pre-service teachers in practice or discussions with their mentor teachers were beyond the scope of this study, the research depended on self-reported surveys measuring teacher efficacy for inclusive practices as well as sentiment, attitudes, and concerns related to self-efficacy. In particular, while the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) Scale, developed to examine the factors influencing the success of routine classroom activities in fostering an inclusive learning environment (Sharma et al., 2011), provided valuable insights into pre-service teachers' perceived efficacy, it does not capture contextual factors such as actual

teaching behaviors, interactions with students, or real-world challenges faced in inclusive classrooms.

Moreover, all interviews were conducted entirely via Zoom, which introduced certain constraints. While this approach enabled convenience and accessibility, it also posed challenges in capturing nonverbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and emotional nuances. These nonverbal cues can be crucial for holistically understanding participants' experiences and emotions. The virtual format may have also influenced participants' comfort levels or willingness to share openly, potentially limiting the richness of the data collected. Despite these challenges, using Zoom allowed the study to proceed efficiently when in-person interviews may not have been feasible, highlighting the trade-offs inherent in such methodological decisions.

Lastly, a key limitation of this study is that the analysis may not have achieved full data saturation, as only nine participants were involved. In qualitative research, saturation is considered reached when no new themes or insights emerge, and data begin to feel redundant (Saunders et al., 2018). While some common patterns and perspectives were identified, the relatively small sample size may have limited the depth and breadth of the findings. A larger number of participants may have been needed to ensure a more comprehensive understanding and to determine whether additional perspectives would emerge.

These limitations warrant caution when interpreting the study's conclusions, but also highlight opportunities for future research. Expanding participant diversity, including observational components, and conducting interviews in person may help enhance the depth, breadth, and rigor of future investigations into the development of self-efficacy among pre-service teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the close relationship between teacher self-efficacy and classroom effectiveness (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), it is critical to have pre-service teachers complete their preparation programs with high teaching self-efficacy. Therefore, based on the results reported in this study, the following recommendations are proposed for future research in this field.

Future research should consider expanding the sample to provide an opportunity for saturation to be truly reached by including a broader range of participants across different contexts, backgrounds, or settings. Doing so would not only enhance the richness and diversity of the data but also help ensure that less common perspectives are captured. An increased sample size could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and allow researchers to more confidently identify patterns, themes, and potential outliers, ultimately strengthening the credibility and transferability of the findings.

Expanding the scope of inquiry to examine the impact of social-emotional support on self-efficacy development in pre-service teachers, particularly in inclusive classroom settings, could provide valuable insights into how psychological and emotional factors influence teacher preparedness and confidence. Such research could uncover specific types of social-emotional supports that are most effective in fostering resilience, motivation, and adaptive teaching strategies. Additionally, exploring this relationship may help identify challenges pre-service teachers face in inclusive environments and inform the design of targeted interventions or training programs that better equip them for diverse classroom demands. Ultimately, this deeper understanding could contribute to improving teacher retention and the quality of inclusive education.

Investigating how social media can be effectively leveraged to promote a more positive perception of teaching among Gen Z and Millennial pre-service students presents an opportunity for future research. This could involve exploring which platforms, messaging strategies, and content types resonate most with these digital-native cohorts to enhance their interest, motivation, and professional identity as future educators. Additionally, understanding how social media influences their attitudes toward the teaching profession could inform the development of targeted campaigns or communities that foster engagement, support, and a stronger sense of belonging within the teacher preparation pipeline.

Furthermore, exploring the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as structured mentorship programs or targeted professional development aimed at managing stress and building resilience, would provide valuable insights and further build on the work of Schelhorn et al. (2023). Investigating the role of peer relationships and cohort dynamics in fostering a supportive learning environment could also provide insights into how social connections influence pre-service teachers' growth and confidence. Lastly, further studies could assess the accessibility and impact of mental health resources, such as counseling services, and how their availability influences teacher preparedness and retention.

To enhance validity in future research, supplementing the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale with evidence-based responses could strengthen the findings. For example, TEIP question #1 states, *"I can make my expectations clear about student behavior."* Future studies could ask participants to provide reasoning or specific examples during interviews to support their responses. Additionally, interviewing mentor teachers could offer valuable validation and deeper insight into the accuracy of pre-service teachers' self-assessments. Another approach could involve asking TEIP questions during interviews and scoring them together as

participants explain their reasoning. This method could provide a more reflective and meaningful assessment of their self-efficacy. Conducting this process twice, once in the middle of the program and again at the end, would offer valuable insights into how pre-service teachers' confidence and competencies evolve over time. Additional data sources, such as classroom observations or mentor teacher evaluations, could further enhance the reliability and depth of findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' preparedness for inclusive education.

Significance of the Results

This research highlighted two key insights: the impact of social media and the importance of addressing the social-emotional needs of pre-service teachers. These findings offer a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by future educators and factors that shape their self-efficacy development.

Impact of Social Media

In today's digital age, information is instantly accessible, whether it is true or false. Smartphones have become an inseparable part of daily life for most Generation Z (Gen Z) or Millennials. Social media is similar to newspapers for Generation X (Gen X), while Gen Z and Millennials frequently use platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram to find information (Aulita et al., 2024; Nugraha, 2023). According to a McKinsey Health Institute study, 48% of Gen Z and 46% of Millennials check social media multiple times daily, compared to 39% of Gen X and 29% of Baby Boomers (Coe et al., 2023).

Despite its benefits, social media has been linked to adverse effects on mental health, particularly for younger generations. Casey's experience of watching a TikTok video in which a teacher shared a horrifying encounter with parents led to fear and anxiety about interacting with

parents. The study by Coe et al. (2023) found that Gen Z and Millennials reported higher levels of a negative impact on social media than older generations, experiencing issues such as fear of missing out (FOMO), body image concerns, low self-confidence, and self-esteem struggles, as well as challenges in social connectivity, emotional support, community building, and self-expression. Individuals who use social media without engaging or interacting (e.g., viewing other people's posts without commenting) are more susceptible to social comparison, which can further impact their mental well-being (Clark et al., 2018).

As a teacher who is over 50 years old, I am not unsettled by social media posts portraying helicopter parents who insist their child be treated specially or by comments about administrators siding with parents over teachers. Having experience as both a teacher and a parent, I understand the perspectives on both sides. I have worked with both supportive and unsupportive principals and encountered a wide range of parents—some reasonable, others more challenging. Over time, I have learned how to navigate these situations effectively, often turning potential conflicts into alliances. However, for Gen Z and Millennial pre-service teachers, these dynamics are often unfamiliar and can feel overwhelming. They are frequently exposed to social media narratives that may exaggerate challenges or create fear, leading to increased stress and anxiety. Unlike more experienced educators, they may take what they see and hear at face value, which can negatively impact their confidence and preparedness.

While we cannot control the presence or impact of such social media content, mentor teachers and teacher educators can create safe, structured spaces where pre-service teachers can share concerns and engage in guided discussions with experienced professionals.

Addressing Pre-Service Teachers' Social-Emotional Needs

Addressing the social-emotional needs of pre-service teachers is more crucial than ever in today's evolving educational landscape. Many of these future educators have grown up in a digital age characterized by constant connectivity, rapid societal change, and increased awareness of mental health (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). While this awareness can be a strength, it also contributes to greater emotional sensitivity, making them more vulnerable to stress, self-doubt, and a perceived lack of resilience when facing the demands of teaching. Supporting their well-being is not about lowering expectations but about recognizing their unique challenges and equipping them with strategies to manage anxiety, build confidence, and succeed in diverse and dynamic classrooms. Zito et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of teaching stress management techniques such as mindfulness and self-care to help pre-service teachers build emotional resilience. Their fears of being unprepared and unsupported highlight the critical need for robust teacher preparation programs that prioritize mental health, ongoing mentorship, and access to classroom resources. By fostering a compassionate and supportive environment, teacher education programs can better prepare pre-service teachers to thrive both personally and professionally.

Reflection

The findings of this research underscore the multifaceted nature of self-efficacy development in pre-service teachers, shaped by both personal experiences and the structures within teacher preparation programs. While factors such as individual background and prior experiences influence this development, the teacher preparation programs themselves serve as a pivotal place for fostering growth in self-efficacy. These programs have the opportunity to provide a balance of theoretical knowledge and practical experience, both of which are crucial

for preparing educators to meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms.

Understanding the dynamic interaction between personal and professional influences is key to enhancing self-efficacy and ensuring that future educators are equipped with the confidence and skills to navigate the complexities of inclusive education.

As inclusive practices continue to evolve, particularly in early childhood settings, it is essential to provide pre-service teachers with the tools to support a broad spectrum of learners, including children with disabilities, English language learners, and typically developing peers. As emphasized in this study, strengthening self-efficacy is vital to address the challenges posed by diverse classrooms. By building the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers, we can ensure they are prepared to meet the unique needs of all students, thereby improving the overall quality of inclusive education.

This research highlights the importance of ongoing mentorship, structured support, and reflective opportunities within teacher preparation programs. These elements help pre-service teachers build confidence and contribute to developing the skills necessary to thrive in inclusive educational settings. Ultimately, fostering strong self-efficacy in future educators will enable them to provide meaningful, inclusive, and effective learning experiences for all young learners. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing personal histories in teacher preparation programs. Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy is not formed in isolation but is deeply rooted in their lived experiences. Acknowledging both the empowering and challenging aspects of these personal and professional experiences may lead to more targeted support systems and reflective practices that strengthen self-efficacy development.

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire: Personal Information

Please choose your answer as appropriate:

A. I am teaching / training to teach in:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| a. Early Childhood | c. Secondary |
| b. Elementary | d. Special Education |

B. I am:

- | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| a. Male | c. Non-binary |
| b. Female | d. Choose not to answer |

C. What is your age?

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| a. 25 years or below | c. 36-45 years |
| b. 26-35 years | d. 46 years or above |

D. My highest level of education completed is:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| a. Secondary school or its
equivalent | c. Master's degree |
| b. Bachelor's degree or its
equivalent | d. Others, please specify |

E. I have had significant/considerable interactions with a person with a disability:

- | | |
|--------|-------|
| a. Yes | b. No |
|--------|-------|

F. I have had the following level of training on educating students with disabilities:

- | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|
| a. None | c. High (at least 40 hours) |
| b. Some | |

G. My knowledge of the local legislation or policy as it pertains to children with disabilities is:

- | | | |
|---------|------------|--------------|
| a. None | c. Average | e. Very good |
| b. Poor | d. Good | |

H. My level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities is:

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|--------------|
| a. Very low | c. Average | e. Very high |
| b. Low | d. High | |

I. My level of experience teaching a student with a disability is:

- | | |
|---------|---------------|
| a. Nil | c. High (at |
| b. Some | least 30 full |
| | days) |

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire: Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) Scale

This survey is designed to help understand the nature of factors influencing the success of routine classroom activities in creating an inclusive classroom environment. Please choose the answer that best represents your opinion about each of the statements. Please attempt to answer each question.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree

Three Factors:

EI: Efficacy to use Inclusive Instruction (6)

EC: Efficacy in Collaboration (6)

EMB: Efficacy in Managing Behavior (6)

		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1	I can make my expectations clear about student behavior (EMB)	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am able to calm a student who is disruptive or nosy (EMB)	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I can make parents feel comfortable coming to school (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I can assist families in helping their children do well in school (EI)	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I can accurately gauge student comprehension of what I have taught (EI)	1	2	3	4	5	6

6	I can provide appropriate challenges for very capable students (EI)	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I am confident in my ability to prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom before it occurs (EMB)	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I can control disruptive behavior in the classroom (EMB)	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I am confident in my ability to get parents involved in school activities of their children with disabilities (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I am confident in designing learning takes so that the individual needs of students with disabilities are accommodated (EI)	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I am able to get children to follow classroom rules (EMB)	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I can collaborate with other professionals (e.g., itinerant teachers or speech pathologists) in designing educational plans for students with disabilities (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I am able to work jointly with other professionals and staff (e.g., aids, other teachers) to teach students with disabilities in the classroom (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I am confident in my ability to get students to work together <i>in pairs</i> or <i>in small groups</i> (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I can use a variety of assessment strategies (e.g., portfolio assessment, modified tests, performance-based assessments) (EI)	1	2	3	4	5	6

16	I am confident in informing others who know little about laws and policies relating to the inclusion of students with disabilities (EC)	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I am confident when dealing with students who are physically aggressive (EMB)	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I am able to provide an alternate explanation or example when students are confused. (EI)	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix C

TEIP Scoring Sheet

TEIP Questions																			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
1																			
2																			
3																			
4																			
5																			
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Three Factors:

EI: Efficacy to use Inclusive Instruction (6)

EC: Efficacy in Collaboration (6)

EMB: Efficacy in Managing Behavior (6)

Appendix D

Survey Questionnaire: SACIE-R questions

The following statements pertain to inclusive education which involves students from a wide range of diverse backgrounds and abilities learning with their peers in regular schools that adapt and change the way they work in order to meet the needs of all.

Please circle the response which best applies to you.

	SD	D	A	SA
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	<i>I am concerned that students with disabilities will not be accepted by the rest of the class.</i>			
2	<i>I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability. I fear the possibility of experiencing a disability in the future.</i> <i>Revised: I fear the possibility of experiencing a disability in the future.</i>			
3	<i>Students who have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally should be in regular classes.</i>			
4	<i>I am concerned that it will be difficult to give appropriate attention to all students in an inclusive classroom.</i>			
5	<i>I generally try to keep my interactions with people with disabilities concise and efficient.</i>			
6	<i>Students who are inattentive should be in regular classes.</i>			
7	<i>I am concerned that my workload will increase if I have students with disabilities in my class.</i>			
8	<i>Students who require communicative technologies (e.g. Braille/sign language) should be in regular class</i>			
9	<i>I would feel terrible if I had a disability. I would find it challenging if I were to experience a disability.</i> <i>Revised: I would find it challenging if I were to experience a disability.</i>			
10	<i>I am concerned that I will be more stressed if I have students with disabilities in my class.</i>			
11	<i>I am afraid to look directly at a person with a disability. I sometimes feel apprehensive about making direct eye contact with individuals who have disabilities.</i> <i>Revised: I sometimes feel apprehensive about making direct eye contact with individuals who have disabilities.</i>			
12	<i>Students who frequently fail exams should be in regular classes.</i>			
13	<i>I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities. I initially feel surprised when meeting individuals with significant physical disabilities.</i>			

	<i>Revised: I feel surprised when meeting individuals with significant physical disabilities for the first time.</i>				
14	<i>I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills required to teach students with disabilities.</i>	SD	D	A	SA
15	<i>Students who need an individualized academic program should be in regular classes.</i>	SD	D	A	SA

Appendix E

SACIE-R Recording Sheet

Questions															Result			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Factor 1 Total	Factor 2 Total	Factor 3 Total
A																		
B																		
C																		
D																		
E																		
F																		
G																		
H																		
I																		
J																		
K																		
L																		

SD = 1

D = 2

A = 3

SA = 4

Three Factors:

Factor 1: Sentiments

Factor 2: Attitudes

Factor 3: Concerns

Appendix F

Interview Questions

“I would like to get to know you a little better”

A. “Tell me about yourself”

- A.1. Tell me about the artifact that represents you as an educator.
- A.2. Where are you originally from? How many years have you lived in Hawaii?
- A.3. Where did you go to high school?
- A.4. Were you involved in any activities?
- A.5. Who cared for you when you were a child? (learn about the family structure)
- A.6. What were your own EC experiences like? Describe your typical day as a 4-5-year-old (learn about the family structure)
- A.7. What made you decide to become an ECE teacher? (e.g., friends, community, social norms, being pressured to get a job, accessibility to the program, job security)

B. “Tell me about your family and your upbringing” (cultural background):

- B.1. Tell me about your family (siblings, household).
- B.2. What was your typical family get-together?
- B.3. Who influenced you the most (e.g., family member, teacher)? Tell me about that person.
- B.4. What life experiences influenced you? Any major life events?

“As you know, we have to work with children with behavioral issues or special needs even in the general education classroom. I am going to ask a series of questions regarding inclusion.

Inclusion simply means a classroom with children with and without disabilities. Sometimes, there are two teachers in an inclusion classroom: classroom teacher and SPED teachers, but in many preschool classrooms, there is only one teacher”

D. “Tell me your beliefs about inclusion”

D.1. In your own words, what does an inclusive early childhood classroom look like?

D.2. What advice would you give your colleagues with children with disabilities in their classrooms?

D.3. What advice would you give your colleagues with children with behavior issues?

E. “Tell me about your experience”

E.1. Did you attend preschool? If so, do you remember children with behavior issues in your preschool or kindergarten class? Tell me about the experience.

E.2. How did you feel when someone misbehaved in your preschool/kindergarten class? (or were you the one who misbehaved?)

E.3. Did you know anyone with disabilities growing up? Tell me about the experience.

E.4. Have you worked with children with disabilities or behavioral issues, or have you known someone who worked with children with disabilities or behavior issues? Please tell me about 1-2 specific experiences.

E.5. Tell me about your experience working with children ages 0-8? (Your own? Siblings? Work?)

F. “There are some challenges working in inclusive classrooms”

F.1. What concerns do preservice teachers have in working with children with behavior or special needs?

F.2. Tell me some specific examples of what causes you (or your colleagues) work-related stress?

F.3. How will you deal with disruptive or aggressive students?

F.4. Are you comfortable working with parents? Administrators? Colleagues? Why do you think that is?

F.5. Do you have any concerns, if any, about teaching in an inclusive setting?

F.6. What support do you wish to have (from your colleagues, professors, mentor, family)?

“What are some other things about working in inclusion classrooms that would be helpful for future teachers?”

“Thank you so much for your time. Once I complete the transcription, I will send it to you to make sure that I captured your answer accurately. After receiving your confirmation, I will mail you the \$15 gift card. Which gift card would you prefer? Thank you again for your time and good luck with your program.”

Appendix G

Interview Question “Crosswalk” Table

Central question: How do pre-service early childhood teachers develop their self-efficacy for inclusive practices? 1. What professional experiences influence the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices? 2. What personal experiences influenced the development of self-efficacy for inclusive practices?	Pre-service Teachers’ Self-Efficacy Development for Inclusive Education															
Interview Questions	Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) Factors	Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) Factors	Four Sources of Self-Efficacy	Six types of questions (Patton, 2002):												
A.2. Where are you originally from? How many years have you lived in Hawaii?																x
A.3 Where did you go to high school?																x
A.4. Were you involved in any activities?								x	x	x	x					x
A.5. Who cared for you when you were a child? (learn about the family structure)														x		x
A.6. What were your own EC experiences like? Describe your typical day as a 4-5 year old.										x						x
A.7. What made you decide to become an EC teacher?				x				x	x	x		x	x			
B. Tell me about your family and your upbringing (cultural background): B.1. Tell me about your family (siblings, household).																x
B.2. What was your typical family get-together?										x						x
B.3. Who influenced you the most (e.g., family member, teacher)? Tell me about that person.								x	x	x		x	x			
B.4. What life experiences influenced you? Any major life events?										x	x	x	x		x	

C. Tell me your beliefs about inclusion: C.1. In your own words, what does an inclusive early childhood classroom look like?					X	X								X		X		
C.2. What advice would you give your colleagues with children with disabilities in their classrooms?	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X				
C.3. What advice would you give your colleagues with children with behavior issues?	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X				
D. Tell me about your experience: D.1. Did you attend preschool? If so, do you remember children who misbehaved in your preschool or kindergarten class? Tell me about the experience.				X	X	X						X	X	X			X	
D.2. How did you feel when someone misbehaved in your preschool or kindergarten class? (or were you the one who misbehaved?)				X	X	X							X			X		
D.3. Did you know anyone with disabilities growing up? Tell me about the experience.					X		X	X		X	X			X	X			
D.4. Have you worked with children with disabilities or behavioral issues, or have you known someone who worked with children with disabilities or behavior issues? Please tell me about 1-2 specific experiences.				X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X		
D.5. Tell me about your experience working with childrens ages 0-8. (your own, siblings, work)	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X	X						
E. There are some challenges working in inclusive classrooms: E.1. What concerns do pre-service teachers have in working with children with behavior or special needs?	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X			X					
E.2. Tell me some specific examples of what causes you (or your colleagues) work-related stress?	X	X	X			X	X	X		X		X	X					
E.3. How will you deal with disruptive or aggressive students?			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X					
E.4. Are you comfortable working with parents? Administrators? Colleagues? Why do you think that is?		X				X		X		X	X	X	X					
E.5. Do you have any concerns, if any, about teaching in an inclusive setting?						X				X			X					
E.6. What support do you wish to have (from colleagues, professors, mentor teachers, family)?		X						X		X			X					
What are some other things about working in inclusion classrooms that would be helpful for future teachers?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X					

Self-Efficacy Factors:
 (DE) Direct Experiences
 (VE) Vicarious Experiences
 (VP) Verbal Persuasion
 (AES) Affective and Emotional State

Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice Factors:

(EI) Efficacy to use Inclusive Instruction (6)

(EC) Efficacy in Collaboration (6)

(EMB) Efficacy in Managing Behavior (6)

Six types of questions (Patton, 2002):

(EB) Experience and behavior questions - a person does or has done

(OV) Opinion and value questions - goals, intentions, expectations

(F) Feeling questions - how do you feel about ...?

(K) Knowledge questions - factual information

(S) Sensory questions - seen, heard, touched, tasted, smelled

(BD) Background and demographic questions - information

Appendix H

IRB approval



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of HAWAII®
SYSTEM

Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program

DATE: July 19, 2023
TO: Muccio, Leah, University of Hawaii at
Manoa, Institute for Teacher Education,
Elementary Program
Garcia, Akeyo, Curriculum Studies,
University of Hawaii at Manoa
FROM: Rivera, Victoria, Dir, Ofc of Rsch
Compliance, Social&Behav Exempt
PROTOCOL TITLE: PRESERVICE TEACHERS '
DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-EFFICACY
FOR TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE
EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS
FUNDING SOURCE: None
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2023-00404
APPROVAL DATE: July 19, 2023

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On July 19, 2023, the University of Hawaii (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.104(d) 2.

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the OHRP Website www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html.

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via the UH eProtocol application. The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

2425 Campus Road, Sinclair 10
Honolulu, HI 96822
Telephone: (808) 956-5007 • Fax: (808) 956-9150
An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution



Appendix I

Hawaii Teacher Standard Board Record Request Approval

NOTICE TO REQUESTER

TO: Akeyo Garcia
(Requester's name)

FROM: Felicia Villalobos-Hawaii Teacher Standards Board
(Agency, and agency contact person's name, telephone number, mailing, & email address)

DATE THAT THE RECORD REQUEST WAS RECEIVED BY AGENCY: May 9, 2024

DATE OF THIS NOTICE: May 28, 2024

GOVERNMENT RECORDS YOU REQUESTED (attach copy of request or provide brief description below):

1. See Attached
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

THIS NOTICE IS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR RECORD REQUEST:

☒ Will be granted in its entirety.

☐ **Cannot be granted. Agency is unable to disclose the requested records for the following reason:**

- ☐ Agency does not maintain the records. (HRS § 92F-3)
- ☐ Other agency that is believed to maintain records: _____
- ☐ Agency needs further clarification or description of the records requested. Please contact the agency and provide the following information: _____
- ☐ Request requires agency to create a summary or compilation from records, but requested information is not readily retrievable. (HRS § 92F-11(c))

☐ Will be granted in part and denied in part, **OR** ☐ Is denied in its entirety
Although the agency maintains the requested records, it is not disclosing all or part of them based on the exemptions provided in HRS § 92F-13 and/or § 92F-22 or other laws cited below.
(Describe the portions of records that the agency will not disclose.)

RECORDS OR
INFORMATION WITHHELD

APPLICABLE
STATUTES

AGENCY
JUSTIFICATION

REQUESTER'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

You are required to (1) pay any lawful fees and costs assessed; (2) make any necessary arrangements with the agency to inspect, copy or receive copies as instructed below; and (3) provide the agency any additional information requested. **For questions about this notice or the records being sought, please ask the agency's contact person named at the top of this form.** Also, please submit your payment, if any, to the agency at the address listed at the top of this form. **DO NOT SEND YOUR PAYMENT** to the Office of Information Practices (OIP) unless you are requesting records directly from OIP.

If you do not comply with the requirements set forth in this notice within 20 business days after the postmark date of this notice or the date the agency makes the records available, you will be presumed to have abandoned your request and the agency shall have no further duty to process your request. Once the agency begins to process your request, you

OIP (rev. Jan. 2023)

may be liable for any fees and costs incurred. If you wish to cancel or modify your request, you must advise the agency upon receipt of this notice.

Please note that the Office of Information Practices (OIP) does not maintain the records of other agencies, and a requester must seek records directly from the agency it believes maintains the records. If the agency denies or fails to respond to your written request for records or if you have other questions regarding compliance with the UIPA, then you may contact OIP at (808) 586-1400, oip@hawaii.gov, or 250 South Hotel Street, Suite 107, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96813.

METHOD & TIMING OF DISCLOSURE:

Records available for public access in their entireties must be disclosed within a reasonable time, not to exceed 10 business days from the date the request was received, or after receipt of any prepayment required. Records not available in their entireties must be disclosed within 5 business days after this notice or after receipt of any prepayment required. HAR § 2-71-13(c). If incremental disclosure is authorized by HAR § 2-71-15, the first increment must be disclosed within 5 business days of this notice or after receipt of any prepayment required.

Method of Disclosure:

- ☐ Inspection at the following location: _____
- ☐ As requested, a copy of the record(s) will be provided in the following manner:
- ☐ Available for pick-up at the following location: _____
- ☐ Will be mailed to you.
- ☒ Will be transmitted to you by other means requested: email

Timing of Disclosure: All records, or the first increment if applicable, will be made available or provided to you:

- ☒ On May 28, 2024.
- ☐ After prepayment of 50% of fees and 100% of costs, as estimated below.

For incremental disclosures, each subsequent increment will be disclosed within 20 business days after:

- ☐ The prior increment (if one prepayment of fees is required and received), or
- ☐ Receipt of each incremental prepayment, if prepayment for each increment is required.

Records will be disclosed in increments because the records are voluminous and the following extenuating circumstances exist:

- ☐ Agency must consult with another person to determine whether the record is exempt from disclosure under HRS chapter 92F.
- ☐ Request requires extensive agency efforts to search, review, or segregate the records or otherwise prepare the records for inspection or copying.
- ☐ Agency requires additional time to respond to the request in order to avoid an unreasonable interference with its other statutory duties and functions.
- ☐ A natural disaster or other situation beyond agency's control prevents agency from responding to the request within 10 business days.

ESTIMATED FEES & COSTS AND PAYMENT:

FEES: For personal record requests under Part III of chapter 92F, HRS, the agency may charge you for its costs only, and fee waivers do not apply.

For public record requests under Part II of chapter 92F, HRS, the agency is authorized to charge you fees to search for, review, and segregate your request (even if a record is subsequently found to not exist or will not be disclosed in its entirety). The agency must waive the first \$30 in fees assessed for general requesters, OR in the alternative, the first \$60 in fees when the agency finds that the request is made in the public interest. Only one waiver is provided for each request. See HAR §§ 2-71-19, -31 and -32.

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☒ Electronic ☐ Audio ☐ Other (please specify): _____

- ☐ Check this box **if you are attaching a request for waiver of fees in the public interest**
(See waiver information on next page).

FEES FOR PROCESSING PUBLIC RECORD REQUESTS

You may be charged fees for the services that the agency must perform when processing your request for public records, including fees for making photocopies and other lawful fees. **The first \$30 of fees charged for searching for a record, reviewing, and segregating will not be charged to you. Any amount over \$30 will be charged to you.** Fees are as follows:

Search for a Record	\$2.50 for 15 minutes
Review and Segregation of a Record	\$5.00 for 15 minutes

Generally, no search, review, and segregation fees may be charged if you are making a request for personal records that are about you.

WAIVER OF FEES IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

As an alternative to the \$30 fee waiver (not in addition to), the agency may waive the first \$60 of fees for searching for, reviewing and segregating records when the waiver would serve the public interest. If you wish to apply for a waiver of fees in the public interest, you must attach to this request a statement of facts, including your identity as the requester, to show how the waiver of fees would serve the public interest. The criteria for this waiver, found at section 2-71-32, Hawaii Administrative Rules, are

- (1) The requested record pertains to the operations or activities of an agency;
- (2) The record is not readily available in the public domain; and
- (3) The requester has the primary intention and the actual ability to widely disseminate information from the government record to the public at large.

COSTS

The Agency may charge you any other lawful fees and the costs to copy and deliver your personal or public record request.

AGENCY RESPONSE TO YOUR REQUEST FOR ACCESS

The agency to which you addressed your request must respond within a set time period. The agency will normally respond to you within 10 business days from the date it receives your request; however, in *extenuating circumstances*, the agency must respond within 20 business days from the date of your request. If you have questions about the response time or the records being sought, you should first contact the agency and request to consult with the agency's UIPA contact person.

Please note that the Office of Information Practices (OIP) does not maintain the records of other agencies and a requester must seek records directly from the agency. If the agency denies or fails to respond to your written request for records or if you have other questions regarding compliance with the UIPA, then you may contact OIP at 808-586-1400, oip@hawaii.gov, or 250 South Hotel Street, Suite 107, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813.

REQUESTER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

You have certain responsibilities under section 2-71-16, Hawaii Administrative Rules, which include making arrangements to inspect and copy records, providing further clarification or description of the requested record as instructed by the agency's notice, and making a prepayment of fees and costs, if assessed. The rules and additional training materials are available online at oip.hawaii.gov or from OIP.

OIP 1 (rev. 12/1/2015)

COSTS: For either personal or public record requests, the agency may charge you for the costs of copying and delivering records in response to your request, and other lawful fees and costs.

PREPAYMENT: The agency may require prepayment of 50% of the total estimated fees and 100% of the total estimated costs prior to processing your request. If a prepayment is required, the agency may wait to start any search for or review of the records until the prepayment is received by the agency. Additionally, if you have outstanding fees or costs from previous requests, including abandoned requests, the agency may require prepayment of 100% of the unpaid balance from prior requests before it begins any search or review for the records you are now seeking.

The following is an itemization of what you must pay, based on the estimated fees and costs that the agency will charge you and the applicable waiver amount that will be deducted:

For public record requests only:

Fees: Search	Estimate of time to be spent: _____ hours (\$2.50 for each 15-minute period)	\$
Review & segregation	Estimate of time to be spent: _____ hours (\$5.00 for each 15-minute period)	\$
Fees waived	☐ general (\$30), OR ☐ public interest (\$60) (Only one waiver per request)	<\$ _____>
Other	_____	\$
	(Pursuant to HAR §§ 2-71-19 & 2-71-31)	
Total Estimated Fees:		\$

For public or personal record requests:

Costs: Copying	Estimate of # of pages to be copied: _____ (@ \$ _____ per page, pursuant to HRS § 92-21)	\$
Delivery	Postage	\$
Other	_____	\$
Total Estimated Costs:		\$

TOTAL ESTIMATED FEES AND COSTS from above: \$

☐ The estimated fees and costs above are for the first incremental disclosure only. Additional fees and costs, and no further fee waivers, will apply to future incremental disclosures.

☐ **PREPAYMENT IS REQUIRED** (50% of fees + 100% of costs, as estimated above) \$

☐ **UNPAID BALANCE FROM PRIOR REQUESTS** (100% must be paid before work begins) \$

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE AT THIS TIME \$

Payment may be made by: ☐ cash
☐ personal check payable to _____
☐ other _____

Submit your payment to the agency at the address listed at the beginning of this form, including the name of the agency's contact person.

OIP (rev. Jan. 2023)

Appendix J

Interview Consent Form

Aloha! My name is Akeyo Garcia and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am doing a research project.

What am I being asked to do?

If you participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview via Zoom at a time convenient for you.

Taking part in this study is your choice.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you. Your choice to participate or not participate will not affect your rights to services at the UH Career Development and Counseling Program.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of my project is to explore pre-service teachers' development of self-efficacy for teaching in inclusive early childhood classrooms. I am asking you to participate because you are in the university's early childhood teacher preparation program.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

The interview will consist of 10-15 open-ended questions. It will take 45 minutes to an hour. The interview questions will include questions like, "Have you worked with children with disabilities or behavioral issues, or have you known someone who worked with children with disabilities or behavior issues? Please tell me about 1-2 specific experiences"

Only you and I will be present during the interview. With your permission, I will video/audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of about 12 people I will interview for this study.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may help improve the Teacher Preparation program to benefit future students.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

I will keep all study data secure in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office/encrypted on a password-protected computer. Only my University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program has the right to review research

records for this study.

After transcribing the interviews, I will erase or destroy the recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Compensation:

You will receive a \$15 gift certificate to either Starbucks, Jamba Juice, or Target for your time and effort in participating in this research project.

Future Research Studies:

Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study collected for this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at (808) 284-3985 & akeyo@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Leah Muccio, at (808) 956-4245 & lmuccio@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions, obtain information, or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date this signature page and return it to: akeyo@hawaii.edu

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission to join the research project entitled "*pre-service Teachers' Development of Self-Efficacy for Teaching in Inclusive Early Childhood Classrooms.*"

Please initial next to either "Yes" or "No" to the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Yes | I consent to be audio-recorded for the interview portion of this research. |
| ☐ No | I do not consent to be audio-recorded for the interview. |
| ☐ Yes | I consent to be video-recorded for the interview portion of this research. |
| ☐ No | I do not consent to be video-recorded for the interview. |

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Mahalo!

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