


Chapter 16

Preparing Pre–Service Teachers to Work With English Learners With Special Education Needs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports a mixed methods research study with preservice teachers (PSTs) enrolled in different teacher credentialing programs at a public university in the Midwestern United States. The purpose of the study is twofold: to explore PSTs' self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs to teach and assess English Learners with special education needs and to explore the relationship between PSTs' self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs and with demographic and experiential factors. The findings of the study demonstrate that most PSTs did not feel capable or prepared to teach and assess English Learners with disabilities. The chapter ends with implications for collaborative teacher education and research.

INTRODUCTION

Under civil rights laws, American schools are obligated to ensure that English Learners have equal access to education (NCELA, 2011). English Learners¹ are children who speak a different language at home and are learning English as an additional language at school. Equal access to education is not only about attending school but also refers to these children receiving good quality education based on their strengths and needs (Ricklefs, 2021a, 2022a). This is important, considering that English Learners currently represent over 10% of the public-school K–12 population in the United States. Specifically, the percentage of students identified as English Learners increased from 9.2% (4.5 million students) in 2010 to 10.4% (5.1 million students) in 2019 (NCES, 2022a). This percentage is expected to continue growing along with global migration trends, including groups of refugees and asylum seekers. These English Learners and their families often arrive in the US, leaving behind poverty, violence, or war in their homelands. These students have faced interrupted formal schooling and traumatic experiences (Rick-

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lefs, 2019). The intersection of various factors and identity categories—culture, language, immigration status, interrupted schooling, and dis/ability—increases the vulnerability of these students, as attested by the overidentification of minorities in special education programs (Cavendish et al., 2015; Klingner et al., 2016; Umansky et al., 2017). Considering that English Learners are the fastest-growing subgroup of students in American public schools, all teachers will likely work with English Learners without and *with* disabilities throughout their professional careers (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018).

Teacher education programs² need to ensure that candidates are prepared to work effectively with English Learners with disabilities. The literature shows that teacher candidates or preservice teachers (PSTs) often feel insufficiently prepared to identify, assess, and teach these students, whether issues are related to second language acquisition, cultural differences, learning disabilities, or a combination of all these factors (Umansky et al., 2017; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

Teacher preparation needs to combine interdisciplinary considerations to train PSTs to work effectively with English Learners with disabilities and create inclusive classrooms for all students. However, institutions of higher education tend to prepare PSTs in separate parallel program tracks (e.g., special education, general education, English as a second language) and even in different departments, limiting opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches between faculty and PSTs (Martínez-Alvarez, 2020; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018).

The complex nature of teacher preparation also brings to the foreground issues about teachers' self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs to be able to cope successfully with one's tasks and challenges as a teacher) and outcome expectancy (i.e., beliefs to be able to positively influence students' learning), which can be important in student achievement (Bandura, 1997, 1999; Zimmerman, 1999). Addressing teachers' beliefs is relevant in teacher education, because overlooking the study of self-efficacy beliefs may affect PSTs' preparation as future schoolteachers (McHatton & Parker, 2013).

Teachers' self-efficacy influences their orientation toward the classroom environment, choice of instructional activities, expectations of students' performance, and discipline methods (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are less likely to view diverse students' backgrounds as limitations (Brownell & Pajares, 1999; Klingner et al., 2016). Teachers' self-efficacy can also affect students' self-evaluations, goals, and learning in school (Bandura, 1999; Klingner et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 1999).

Considering all these issues, the purpose of the current research study is twofold: (1) to explore PSTs' self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs to teach and assess English Learners with special education needs, and (2) to explore the relationship between PSTs' self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs, and with demographic and experiential factors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical perspective of self-efficacy forms the framework of this study. Albert Bandura coined the term “self-efficacy” in the late 1970s. The term was part of his psychological theory to explain human behavior and, in particular, “fearful and avoidant behavior” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). In Bandura's early work, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies were explained in a causal relationship so that peoples' beliefs about what they can do (i.e., self-efficacy) would determine the outcomes they expect to obtain (i.e., outcome expectancy) with their actions (Bandura, 1991). Years later, Bandura rejected the existence of a simple cause-effect association between the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy. Bandura (1997) posited that various patterns of efficacy beliefs and outcome ex-

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