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In-Service Prekindergarten Educators' Perspectives on Characteristics of Professional Development That Influence Their Self-Efficacy and Performance

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Walden University
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Abstract

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EdS, University of Phoenix, 2011

MA, Bowie State University, 2007

BA, Lincoln University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Research on how professional development has influenced teacher self-efficacy revealed that properly executed professional development promoted effective teacher practices and positive student outcomes. Bandura's and Tschannen-Moran's social learning theories were used in this basic qualitative study to address the problem of the lack of current investigations related to prekindergarten (pre-k) educators' perspectives regarding professional development that influenced their teacher self-efficacy. The research questions focused on pre-k educators' perceived characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their ability to be effective in the area of curriculum, classroom management, and motivating and engaging students. Findings from coding analysis of the data collected through online interviews with 10 pre-k educators revealed four themes: (a) effective professional development includes relevant implementation strategies, (b) effective professional development is presented by knowledgeable experts, (c) ineffective professional development lacks relevant and sufficient implementation strategies, and (d) ineffective professional development relies on redundant requirements. This study contributes to social change by augmenting the professional literature on this topic and possibly improving professional development implementation processes for school districts.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors and my legacy. To the Claytons and Poteats, I am proud to be a part of the realization of the dreams of both families. To my parents, Henry and Dolly Poteat, my siblings, godparents, god-siblings, friends who became my brothers and sisters, and my inner circle, I love you more than words can articulate. Thank you for never letting me settle or quit. To My Big Cousin/Brother Dennis, thank you for showing me how to be, so, and have everything I want, while never forgetting my roots. To my children, proof that my heart beats outside of my body, thank you for encouraging Mommy to be great. It is my hope that you, Jevian, Jodi-Symone, Sankofa, and Sa'Alim, know that everything I do is for you, and you now have my permission to outrun, outshine, and outperform me in every aspect of life. To Jodi-Symone, my only daughter, please know that you inspire me to be a better woman because I know you are watching. To Julian, the love of my life, thank you for always being in my corner and allowing me space within yours. Even when those corners were no longer in the same home, you continued to be my very best friend and for this, I am grateful.

And finally, to my grandmother, Mariah Love Poteat, for telling me that if anyone gets in my way, I had her permission to "KNOCK THE FIRE OUT OF THEM!"

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I Am Graced for This…

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Much research has been dedicated to teacher self-efficacy, professional development, and improving teacher performance. This research revealed a positive link between teacher participation in professional development teaching practices, and student outcomes (Macias, 2017). In hopes for improved student outcomes, lawmakers regulated the implementation of professional development within school districts (Martin et al., 2019). The most effective professional development is based on teachers' needs, which include social and active learning opportunities, collaboration, sustainable tasks and outcomes for student learning, augmentation of pedagogical skills and content knowledge, and objective facilitation (K. Patton et al., 2015). Furthermore, bottom-up structures in which the teacher is the main stakeholder empower teachers because the ideas represent their needs (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

The need for continuous teacher training in promoting and sustaining high-quality early childhood education (ECE) has been recognized (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). For this reason, many districts invested in and implemented various methods of professional development to improve teacher efficacy and the quality of prekindergarten (pre-k) education. Scholars have asserted that the most effective professional development has been aligned with and responsive to teachers' perceived needs (Bautista & Ortega-Ruíz, 2015). Because most teachers perceived professional development as a mandated set of trainings developed in a one-size-fits-all approach not focused on their personal growth, those who implemented effective professional development have committed to fighting these preconceived notions and

fostering environments conducive to impactful learning among teachers to improve their self-efficacy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The concept of self-efficacy was derived from Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's confidence in completing a goal; in education, those with high self-efficacy work harder, show greater interest in learning, and achieve higher levels of success (Bandura, 1986). Teacher self-efficacy is based on an educator's ability to develop strong self-efficacy in students and is enhanced through professional development (Epstein & Willhite, 2017). However, little was known about what in-service pre-k educators perceived about the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance. I sought to add to the literature by exploring teachers' perspectives regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance.

Chapter 1 includes background information on the topic of study, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study. The research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, and definitions for terms are also included. Finally, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary of the information are contained within the chapter.

Background

Bandura (1993) identified essential elements that impact teacher self-efficacy, including mastery experiences, physiological and emotional cues, vicarious experiences, and verbal feedback. After a person completes a task successfully, mastery is developed, self-efficacy is augmented, and future expectations of success are established (Bandura,

1993; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). According to von Suchodoletz et al. (2018), Matherson and Windle (2017), and Troia and Graham (2016), novice and experienced teachers believe that professional development must be targeted toward the needs of educators to be effective in augmenting their self-efficacy. According to von Suchodoletz et al., targeted individualized coaching, an effective method of developing educators and other professionals, showed a significant increase in teacher self-efficacy.

Furthermore, Roberts et al. (n.d.) asserted that pre-k teacher beliefs and their readiness to change should be considered when developing professional development programs. In addition, Sandilos et al. (2018) stated that school leadership should survey their teachers to ascertain their needs regarding instructional and social emotional learning to be sure that the professional development augments their performance and teacher self-efficacy as a means of reducing teacher stress. Moreover, Buettner et al. (2016) asserted that professional development needs to be ongoing and responsive to the current needs of early learning professionals and that research on the efficacy of its delivery as well as any teacher self-efficacy changes promoted by the professional development should be conducted to ensure that the best possible training is being provided to these educators.

Although studies indicated that professional development had to be responsive to teacher needs and promote change in teacher self-efficacy to be deemed effective, there was little research on the participants' perspectives regarding the impact of professional development on their self-efficacy. The missing component in the literature was pre-k teacher perspectives regarding the influence of professional development on their self-

efficacy and performance. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the participants' perspectives of professional development training and their impact on their professional growth.

Problem Statement

Research on how professional development has influenced teacher self-efficacy revealed that properly executed professional development promoted effective teacher practices and positive student outcomes (Infurna et al., 2018; Nolan & Molla, 2017; Sibert & Rieg, 2016). Furthermore, professional development enhanced teacher competence in instruction, behavior management, and student motivation and engagement, thereby increasing teacher self-efficacy in those areas (Infurna et al., 2018). In their study of job-embedded mentorship for new preschool teachers, Nolan and Molla (2017) demonstrated that participants' gains in self-efficacy were often aligned with their gains in knowledge of what and how to instruct students and manage their behavior. Finally, Sibert and Rieg (2016) conducted a study with preservice teachers in a professional development school and revealed these educators connected self-efficacy in their individual professional development to student engagement and behavioral outcomes.

Despite the volume of current research on the benefits of professional development, there were few recent studies pertaining to the perspectives that teachers hold regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance (Yoo, 2016). Yoo's (2016) study revealed that professional development positively influenced teacher self-efficacy in instruction and student

motivation, which led to increased student achievement. Yoo suggested that future research is needed in the area of teacher self-reflections regarding how their self-efficacy was developed and how it evolved as a result of professional development learning opportunities. Therefore, the problem that was the focus of the current study was the lack of current investigations related to pre-k educators' perspectives regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives of the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influenced their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are pre-k educators' perspectives on the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their ability to be effective in the area of curriculum instruction?

RQ2: What are pre-k educators' perspectives on the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their ability to be effective in the area of classroom management?

RQ3: What are pre-k educators' perspectives on the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their ability to be effective in the area of student motivation and engagement?

Conceptual Framework

The concept of teacher self-efficacy used in this study was rooted in Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (SLT) and social cognitive theory (SCT), which have become influential theories of learning and development (Nabavi, 2012). Bandura (1977) asserted that people learn from one another in social settings. In the SCT, Bandura (1986) asserted that human behavior is explained in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. Bandura (1986) also asserted that learning happens as a result of focused attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. To improve SLT and SCT, Bandura (1994) defined *self-efficacy* as "people's beliefs about their capacities to produce designated levels of performance and exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). Guided by Bandura's work, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) studied teachers' perspectives regarding how professional development affected change in their self-efficacy in the areas of instruction, behavior management, and student engagement, revealing how self-efficacy judgments and beliefs are established. I applied Bandura's and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's theories of self-efficacy by evaluating the perspectives of educators regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy.

Nature of the Study

This was a basic qualitative study in which I used interviews to examine in-service pre-k educators' perspectives regarding professional development. The interviews were conducted via video conferencing, with an estimated sample of 16 to 25 teachers selected from an urban school district's pre-k teacher population of more than 400

educators. Because the school district is located in the Northeast region of the United States and is divided into four quadrants, the sample included at least four teachers from each region of the city who were certified in early childhood education and served as lead teachers in classrooms of 3- and 4-year-old students. The interviews were recorded. After the data collection phase, the data analysis included verbatim transcripts of the interviews using transcription software and thematic analysis in which the data were coded into categories and themes.

Definitions

Behavior management/classroom management: Teacher choices to maximize routine, establish expectations, engage students in observable ways, recognize appropriate behaviors, and respond to inappropriate behaviors (Sanetti et al., n.d.)

Instruction: According to Hughes et al. (2017), instruction is defined as educators performing the following student-centered actions: isolating necessary skills, modeling expected tasks, scaffolding learning goals, giving students valuable feedback, and creating meaningful experiences.

Prekindergarten (pre-k) teachers: According to the District of Columbia Public School, these are teachers of students who have not yet entered kindergarten and who are at least 3 (pre-k3) or 4 (pre-k4) years of age as of September 30.

Professional development: Learning experiences designed to support professional knowledge and the application of this knowledge. The key components of professional development include the characteristics and contexts of the learners, the content, the

organization, and facilitation of learning experiences (National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2008).

Student engagement/motivation: Educators' ability to promote students' positive approach to learning in behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects (Alrashidi et al., 2016).

Teacher self-efficacy: The teacher's perception of their ability to perform professional tasks in the process of educating students (Friedman & Kass, 2002).

Assumptions

The first assumption for this study was that the participants would provide honest, comprehensive reflections about their perspectives regarding the influence of professional development on their teacher self-efficacy and performance. Although it was possible that some participants may have been dishonest, research based on responses to interviews is common in education. Because maintenance of confidentiality was ensured, it is unlikely that participants were dishonest in their responses. The second assumption was that personal biases or influence from administrators regarding professional development would be limited. I implemented the appropriate methodology for ethical research to limit the impact of biases on the data collection and analysis.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on a sample of lead pre-k teachers in an urban public school district in the Northeast region of the United States. These teachers were certified in early childhood education and were employed in one of the 65 public elementary schools in the

district at the time of the study. Moreover, these teachers were required to be currently working in the school with students aged 3 through 5 who had not entered kindergarten.

The delimitations of the study were that pre-k teachers who were not working in the district identified, including private charter schools, would not be part of this study. In addition, co-teachers and uncertified educators assigned as lead teachers were not considered for this study. Lastly, any pre-k teachers who were not working with students aged 3 through 5 or who were on leave at the time of the study (e.g., family medical, maternity, paternity, long-term or short-term disability) were not invited to participate in this study.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study was that the sample size was small and made implications for a population level difficult to define. The perspectives from this sample may not be reflective of the larger population of educator participants or of public pre-k educators in other states. Research findings, however, were expected to yield a more substantial and deeper understanding of this phenomenon. A second limitation of this study was a lack of diverse teaching professionals with varying grade levels of experience. However, this circumstance worked to create a more focused study, and these limitations presented possibilities for future studies.

Significance

Yoo (2016) asserted that teacher self-efficacy has been studied in education because of its influence on student behavior and achievement. According to Talley (2017), novice teachers believed that administrators should provide opportunities for

relevant professional development that empowers teachers to make appropriate instructional and management choices in their classrooms. The current study may contribute to the current educational research and suggest other research directions on the professional development of pre-k educators. As a means of effecting positive social change, this study may provide a clearer understanding of the influence professional development has on teacher self-efficacy and may inform professional development providers about how teachers feel their learning communities could better serve them, thereby enhancing the classroom experience for students.

Summary

Guided by the SCT and self-efficacy work of Bandura (1977) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), I explored pre-k educators' perspectives about the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance. These perspectives had not been assessed by those designing professional development programming. The participants' perspectives were analyzed to identify emerging themes. In Chapter 2, existing research on professional development is reviewed, including the gap in research filled by the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives on the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. In school districts around the United States; millions of dollars have been spent on enhancing teachers' skills through professional development, particularly in urban areas (The New Teacher Project, 2015). Within the pre-k environment, there was a need to professionalize the occupation and make these teachers feel valued, but researchers noted a lack of leaders willing to focus on meeting the needs of the teachers they serve (Cumming, 2017). Troia and Graham (2016) found that teachers could have offered more insight into the implementation of an effective course of professional development if their perspectives had been solicited. Moreover, Cobanoglu and Capa-Aydin (2015) revealed that teachers with high self-efficacy were comfortable taking risks to reach their students and find creative ways to adhere to their curricula, whereas teachers with lower self-efficacy struggled to teach their lessons and needed more coaching to motivate and engage students. Therefore, there was a need to identify the characteristics of professional development that educators identified as necessary to help facilitate opportunities for teacher training programs to be designed with this knowledge in mind.

Despite the volume of current research about the benefits of professional development, the recent literature from 2015 to 2020 was limited at the time of the current study. Yoo (2016) addressed teacher perspectives about the characteristics of

professional development that influenced their self-efficacy and performance. Yoo's study revealed that professional development positively influenced teacher self-efficacy in the areas of instruction and student motivation, which led to increased student achievement. However, more research was needed to explore the perspective of educators regarding the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. Following the recommendation of Yoo (2016), I extended the investigation into pre-k teachers' perspectives regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance.

Literature Search Strategy

A thorough search of key terms and phrases within Walden University's library research databases proved fruitful. The following databases were accessed: EBSCOhost, Education Source, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and SAGE Journals. The search terms for this study included *prekindergarten*, *teacher self-efficacy*, *professional development*, *instruction*, *behavior management*, and *student engagement*. Subsequent searches were conducted using several combinations of the following terms: *preschool/prekindergarten educators*, *self-efficacy*, *teacher training*, *classroom management*, *student motivation*, and *confidence*. Most of the articles included in this study were published within the last 5 years, and a few older research articles were included to ground the research.

Conceptual Framework

Heavily influenced by Bandura's SLT and SCT, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2001) asserted that a "teacher's efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (p. 783). Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's study of teachers' perspectives regarding the influence of professional development on their teacher self-efficacy in these areas revealed further implications related to how self-efficacy judgments and beliefs are established. Through additional studies measuring teacher self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) discovered that teachers who experience success in the classroom increase confidence in their ability to have a positive impact on student learning.

Teacher self-efficacy, as a concept, is derived from Bandura's SLT and SCT, which have become influential theories of learning and development (Nabavi, 2012). In foundational work on SLT, Bandura (1977) postulated that people learn from one another through processes like observational learning, imitation, and modeling in social settings. Furthermore, building on social learning research, Bandura's (1986) SCT asserts that human behavior is explained in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences with a four-step pattern of observational learning consisting of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Bandura (1986) asserted that the subject must be aware of the model (attention), have the ability to store information and retrieve it later to act on it (retention), have a desire to imitate modeled behavior (reproduction), and have the desire to perform the behavior

(motivation). Improving SLT and SCT, Bandura (1994) subsequently defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capacities to produce designated levels of performance and exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). I applied Bandura's and Tschannen's theories of self-efficacy by evaluating the perspectives of pre-k educators regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy. The findings of this study revealed how and why particular professional developments were perceived to cause changes in teachers' self-efficacy.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Disadvantages of Mandated Professional Development

Educational leaders have poured millions of dollars into professional development for teachers throughout the world, yet little attention has been paid to teacher needs during the decision-making processes (The New Teacher Project, 2015). Additionally, educators have expressed a need to evaluate program effectiveness and to focus not on what is novel but rather what is native to the educator (Mendive et al., 2016). Moreover, Brownlee et al. (2015) asserted that evidence-informed decision-making is necessary to build a professional development program that addresses teacher mindset and skillset.

Rather than forcing professional development on teachers, excellent school districts allowed teachers to choose their level of engagement in learning communities to plan, choose, and participate in their skills enhancement (Fisher & Seroussi, 2018). Matherson and Windle (2017) also asserted that teachers want professional development to be personalized, targeted, and to integrate the talents of new and veteran teachers to increase the professional capacity to instruct, manage, and motivate learners. Teacher

education programs have always depended on the improvement of teacher training to improve classroom experiences for educators and students (Liou et al., 2016). In Spain, researchers explored the idea that social networking in professional development increased personal capital and investment in the teaching profession (López Solé et al., 2018). In their study of 321 preservice pre-k educators, Lopez Sole et al. revealed how the social networks built-in learning teams helped the teachers achieve academic success and augmented their teacher self-efficacy. Both outcomes were also connected to enriched classroom experiences and better schools (Lopez Sole et al., 2018).

In addition to improved classroom experiences, researchers identified psychological advantages to properly chosen professional development. In their study of 1,129 early childhood educators teaching 3- and 4-year-old students, Jeon et al. (2019) used multiple regression analysis to discover that levels of teachers' psychological well-being were more connected to self-efficacy than their personal and professional backgrounds. The results demonstrated that building teacher competence, efficacy, and preparing them to cope with work environment stressors through professional development were vital. According to McLennan et al. (2017), job satisfaction and commitment to the profession were influenced by teacher self-efficacy, and professional development should have always been focused on the development of teacher self-efficacy.

Professional Development Enhances Instructional Capacity

Many teachers have been involved in independent professional development such as inquiry-based learning communities in efforts to improve their practice and increase

their instructional confidence (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). Donohoo and Katz also asserted that in these sessions, the focus was not only on student learning; as teachers monitored student progress, they assessed their growth as educators. In their survey of 482 teachers about their understanding of the intended implementation of common core standards for reading and writing, Troia and Graham (2016) revealed that teachers believed that professional development should augment their capacity to instruct the prescribed curricula. Bruggink et al. (2016) studied the perspectives of 108 primary teachers regarding their confidence in meeting student needs compared to their actual ability. This qualitative study's findings revealed that school-based training augmented a teacher's perceived capacity to meet the instructional and developmental needs of their students.

Another method of professional development often used in many school districts is coaching. Coaching, in which a teacher as an adult learner works with a school-based master teacher to plan, model, and conference regarding practice, has proven to be effective in enhancing teacher efficacy and increasing student achievement (Akhavan & Tracz, 2016). In their mixed-methods study, Akhavan and Tracz measured student achievement before and after coaching and surveyed coached and uncoached teachers, and the results revealed that the coached teachers developed more academic optimism related to their instructional practices and thereby increased student achievement. Snyder et al. (2015) used a mixed-methods approach to define a type of job-embedded, practice-based coaching focused on supporting early childhood teachers to implement evidence-based teaching practices with fidelity. Findings revealed that student outcomes and

teacher confidence were both positively influenced by the cycles of feedback and observations built into the coaching process.

Nolan and Molla (2017) concluded that teacher confidence is a function of teacher professional capital that is built through professional development, and mentoring is one kind of professional development. This study's researchers focused on the experiences of new pre-k teachers and more experienced early childhood teacher mentors in a Victorian state-wide professional mentoring program for early childhood teachers from 2011 to 2014. Nolan and Molla showed that participants' gains in confidence were aligned with their gains in knowledge of instruction, participation in networks of collaborative learning communities, and the ability to exercise professional agency as a result of their augmented self-efficacy.

Epstein and Willhite (2017) analyzed the effectiveness of professional development for pre-k educators in a professional development school. In this study, the pre and post surveys demonstrated that professional development improved the skills of all stakeholders. According to the teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES), the mentor and classroom teachers' efficacy improved, and the confidence in the classroom transferred from the teachers to the students' improved academic performance (Epstein & Willhite, 2017). In addition to this work, Anderson (2016) dedicated their research to professional development and coaching/mentoring in university and school district contexts to augment teachers' capacity regarding implementing new early learning standards and assessment practices in pre-k classrooms. The results demonstrated that the coaching/mentoring process encouraged teachers to learn, and teachers implemented

diversified teaching strategies to instruct their students and ensured more school readiness (Anderson, 2016), This study exhibited the power of common purpose and alignment when creating professional development plans.

Researchers have demonstrated that pre-k teachers receiving professional development that focused on children's developmental and learning outcomes improved student achievement when compared to the classes with teachers who were not exposed to the training (Snyder et al., 2018). Snyder et al. demonstrated that of the 36 teachers randomly chosen, those receiving targeted coaching implemented the instructional strategies taught in training and experienced improved student outcomes. Meeting teacher needs through professional development that was responsive to their demands was effective in increasing teachers' capacity and influencing their self-efficacy positively.

Australian education policies considered the connection between high-quality professional ECE and the positive mental health of ECE students. However, Askell-Williams and Murray-Harvey (2016) acknowledged that little is known about professional education for ECE professionals; therefore, in the midst of Australia's initiative to promote positive mental health among young children, they studied the perspectives of early childhood education educators regarding their participation in professional development in the area of social emotional learning. Askell-Williams and Murray-Harvey surveyed 111 early childhood education and care centers in Australia with questionnaires four times over the course of 2 years and asked the participants to rate the implementation of the initiative in each center. Their findings showed that the targeted professional development increased the early childhood educators' knowledge

about children's social emotional learning and augmented their capacity to build promote social emotional learning among their students.

Research has shown that professional development in instruction has contributed to teacher confidence and impacted student achievement. Jensen and Rasmussen (2018) studied teachers in Europe to collect data regarding the impact of professional development of pre-k educators on student outcomes. Educators in pre-k classrooms housed within formal pre-k centers in Europe were studied, and the results revealed that there was a significant positive effect on child outcomes as a result of teacher engagement in professional development. Although the results were slightly higher in Europe than had been the trend in studies based in the United States, they were still indicative of a positive connection between instruction-focused professional development on child outcomes among European pre-k educators.

Pre and post surveys often showed increased self-efficacy among teachers who participated in targeted learning opportunities and professional development programs aligned with their needs. In their study of 18 pre-k educators in Cyprus, Shiakalli et al. (2017) demonstrated that professional development based on classroom needs augmented teachers' self-efficacy. Upon entering the course, none of the teachers expressed the confidence to teach probability to pre-k students; however, when the course ended, all of the educators expressed self-efficacy in teaching the skill in their classrooms.

Knowledgeable and self-assured teachers demonstrated higher retention levels in the career, and according to Butts (2016), there was a positive correlation between effective professional development and teacher longevity as well as efficacy. In

surveying mathematics teachers about their perspectives regarding professional development, the interviews and surveys revealed that follow-up and targeted professional development was cited as impactful on teacher self-efficacy in mathematics instruction (Butts, 2016). Gropen et al. (2017) showed that pre-k teachers who were a part of targeted science instruction professional development demonstrated growth in their efficacy in that domain. These 142 teachers, with focused training, improved their instruction, student outcomes, and increased their self-efficacy. Moreover, Castro et al. (2017) demonstrated that early childhood teachers' self-efficacy can be increased for dual language learners through the Nuestros Ninos school readiness professional development program with targeted training using an integrative approach to professional development and a component aimed at promoting language, literacy, social-emotional development, and mathematics in pre-k. With 56 pre-k teachers in California, Florida, and North Carolina, the confidence of the educators improved as well as the overall effectiveness of the classroom instructional practices. Again, these studies indicated that targeted professional development that met the needs of teachers, improved their instruction and self-efficacy.

According to Herman et al. (2018), self-efficacy, in theory, predicted future behavior because when a teacher experienced success on a task, confidence in practice was built, and they were likely to believe that they would be successful again in that task. Herman et al. studied patterns of teacher adjustment in relation to stress, coping, efficacy, and burnout. By studying 121 teachers, they asserted that students in the classes where teachers experienced the lowest levels of stress and burnout performed better because

these teachers possessed more self-efficacy in meeting their students' needs because of their repeated successes in the classroom. These successes were the result of targeted professional development that improved teaching practices and enlarged their confidence (Herman et al., 2018).

According to McMaster et al. (2020), many teachers have experienced difficulty with differentiation of instruction for students who have severe academic needs in the area of writing. In their randomized control trial, McMaster et al. examined the effects of providing elementary special education teachers learning opportunities and coaching to aid in the implementation of data-based instruction (DBI) in writing. The teachers receiving these particular trainings improved their performance related to DBI in early writing compared to controls, their students showed promising early writing outcomes, and the teachers demonstrated increased job satisfaction as well as augmented interest in additional professional development (McMaster et al., 2020).

Professional Development Augments Classroom Management Ability

Conroy et al. (2019) asserted that in classrooms where early childhood teachers received focused, classroom-specific, school-based training regarding handling the emotional and behavioral disorders existent within their students, their performance in the areas of behavior management as a result of increased instructional capacity. This quantitative study, which included 186 teachers, 92 in the best-in-class training, and 94 in the comparison group with 26 coaches, showed significant gains in classroom quality, student engagement, and teacher efficacy (Conroy et al., 2019). This study indicated that

professional development that was grounded in immediate teacher and student needs was more effective and had more sustainable outcomes.

Moreover, preservice early childhood educators in teacher education programs seek the best student teaching as well as job placement after university. Sibert and Rieg's (2016) mixed methods study compared the preparedness of 23 pre-service special education teachers from professional development schools, known to effectively train pre-service teachers for student teaching experiences with undergraduates from traditional schools. This study, which used both quantitative descriptive statistics and open-ended responses, revealed that preservice teachers connected confidence in their individual preparedness as a result of student teaching in a professional development school to the achievement of students as well as behavioral outcomes (Sibert & Rieg, 2016).

Using coaching as a method of teacher training has proven to be effective in increasing the capacity of teachers to handle pre-k students with challenging behaviors and to better manage their classrooms (Brock & Beaman-Diglia, 2018). The work of Brock and Beaman-Diglia demonstrated that coaching two teachers with the use of three evidence-based management strategies improved their self-efficacy regarding classroom management. This study showed that focused professional development centered in teacher needs was most effective in augmenting teacher self-efficacy in this area.

Poulou et al. (2019) noted that teachers' perspectives of self-efficacy and actual instructional and behavior management practices using the Classroom Strategies Assessment System (CSAS), a multi-dimensional and validated classroom and teacher

observation system. In their mixed methods study, Poulou et al. had 58 Greek teachers to complete the TSES and were observed using the CSAS. The research revealed significant differences between teachers' perspectives of personal self-efficacy and observers' ratings of teacher implementation of instructional strategies, but there was a correlation between perceived teacher self-efficacy and observed classroom management.

Furthermore, Laughter (2017) noted that student referrals were lessened when teachers possessed high self-efficacy because their effective instruction and student engagement practices reduced the occurrences of behavioral issues in their classrooms. Using the TSES, the study included 98 teachers and revealed that teachers who felt more competent in instruction, engagement, and management also wrote fewer discipline referrals (Laughter, 2017). The ability to manage student behaviors without referring them to administrators for disciplinary action was connected to the development of a teacher's self-efficacy because of professional development regarding effective classroom management strategies.

Toran (2019) used a mixed methods study aimed to analyze how a teacher's sense of efficacy accounted for classroom management skills with 223 preschool teachers. The level of teachers' self-efficacy was a predictor of the classroom management skills of these pre-k teachers. Quantitative analysis showed the relation between these pre-k teachers' self-efficacy and their perspectives of classroom management skills (Toran, 2019). In addition, the findings of the teacher interviews supported the quantitative results.

Professional Development Increases Student Motivation and Engagement

Technology integration in education has been a challenge for many educators, particularly pre-k and early childhood teachers who have not always understood the range of functions for the devices but still want to expose the youngest student to the academic use of technology (Jack & Higgins, 2019). In this quantitative study conducted by Koh et al. (2017), 37 pre-k teachers in seven lesson design teams participated in a year-long training in technology integration in their classrooms showed how prolonged engagement with peers and pedagogical knowledge can influence teacher capacity. The results revealed that five of the seven teams made instructional changes toward 21st century learning, and six saw improvements in student engagement (Koh et al., 2017).

Furthermore, job-embedded professional development has proven to be more useful for in-service teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). A study conducted by Atiles et al. (2017), surveyed 90 early childhood education teachers who worked with immigrant children. The results of the study showed that teachers enhanced their efficacy in motivating culturally diverse students through training and professional development targeted directly toward teachers' specific needs. This particular study demonstrated that targeted professional development can be used to augment teacher ability.

Studies have shown that teachers' self-efficacy has enhanced their job satisfaction and confidence in reaching diverse populations (Djonko-Moore & Traum, 2015). In completing a survey that questioned how training in culturally responsive teaching aided in growing teacher capacity to engage students (Djonko-Moore & Traum, 2015), the participants proved that there was a connection between effective, targeted teacher

training and student engagement. This study showed that improved teacher self-efficacy is a natural product of effective professional development.

Professional Development Should Include Implementation Resources and Strategies

Koster et al. (2017) asserted that teacher professional development should be comprised with the necessary implementation tools provide the required instruction with fidelity. Therefore, professional development should also include time for teachers to practice the strategies taught as well as receive feedback on their implementation (Koster et al., 2017). In their quasi-experimental study, Koster et al. studied the effectiveness of Tekster, a writing intervention, with nearly 70 early elementary teachers who implemented the intervention in their own classrooms after attending professional development in a teacher-training-teacher professional development model. As teacher efficacy increased, so did student achievement in writing. Therefore, this study supported the idea that teacher efficacy is improved when training includes relevant implementation strategies, which leads to better student outcomes. Although these teachers were not assigned to pre-k classrooms, this precept could still be applied to crafting professional development opportunities for them.

Smith and Robinson (2020), in their qualitative case study, investigated teachers' perspectives regarding how they learn and gain confidence in teaching literacy. To collect data, 11 English, math, science, and social studies teachers participated in individual interviews, agreed to classroom observations, and submitted their lesson plans. The findings of the study demonstrated that the even when they perceived a lack in efficacy, teachers did implement the literacy strategies following the professional development

provided (Smith & Robinson, 2020). According to Smith and Robinson, despite the value attached to the literacy instruction, teacher perceptions of the professional development were impacted by the mandatory nature of the training and the organization of the professional development. In addition, the teachers' perspectives were also influenced by their commitment to their particular content specialty and time constraints to teach those standards. The study showed that relevant implementation strategies that bridge literacy with other content may have more positively affected the teachers' perceptions of the professional development (Smith & Robinson, 2020).

Goodale (2020) further asserted that proper implementation strategies also augment the adoption of curriculum practices following professional development. This qualitative case study focused on science professional development conducted with 13 K-12 science teachers, wherein they received a presentation of the material, lesson plans and activities linked to state and national science standards and resources to use the lessons in schools (Goodale, 2020). Goodale reported that 12 of the 13 participants (92%) used content, examples, and/or curricula associated with this particular training. This study's findings revealed that professional development that embeds necessary tools for effective and easy implementation builds teacher self-efficacy and is used in the classroom more often.

Curry et al. (2018) stated that research is full of evidence that professional development in schools should solve problems, be on-going, practical, contain teaching strategies, build community, and be aligned with school reform initiatives to be effective. Findings from this qualitative study with collaborative action research and distributed

leadership model facilitated successful professional development in both rural and alternative school settings (Curry et al., 2018). This study showed that the teachers' confidence as instructors was augmented as they studied and solved problems together. Moreover, leaders gained a better understanding of teacher perceptions of the components of effective professional development. These findings support the current study in its implication for change in the way administrators make decisions regarding educators' professional development cycles and a commitment to assessing and meeting teacher training needs.

Professional Development Should Be Enriching and Engaging

Much like their students, teachers want professional development that includes depth of interaction and experts as instructors (Yoon et al., 2020). In their mixed methods study of K-12 mathematics teachers, Luebeck et al. (2017) studied educators enrolled in online modules that sought to connect face-to-face gatherings across the school year. Data were collected on teacher performance, perceptions, and practice related to their participation in a blended learning professional development (Luebeck et al., 2017). Luebeck et al. reported that they experienced an increased knowledge of the content, used the high-quality resources more, became more knowledgeable of the curricula standards, and engaged in rewarding dialogue and interactions with colleagues. This mixed methods study demonstrated the benefit of high leverage professional development on teacher knowledge and their teacher confidence, which is in line with the purpose of the current study.

The results of this mixed-methods study by Hutchison and Woodward (2018) indicated that students performed significantly better on a digital literacy assessment because of their teachers' participation in transformative digital learning professional development, wherein they were engaged in professional learning communities and given opportunities to engage with the curriculum through reflection and practice. Hutchison and Woodward revealed that appropriate technology integration professional development relies on (a) a model in which to center discussion and application of technology integration; (b) context-driven instruction with digital tools; and (c) various ways to engage educators authentically and continuously. These characteristics made the professional development an enriching experience for these educators, thereby, encouraging them to internalize and implement the learning acquired.

What makes professional development effective is an important topic for teachers all over the world, and focused research on teacher continuing education must be undertaken in as many school systems as possible. Mohan et al. (2017) examined teachers' perceptions of the impact of professional development on learning and teaching in two Fijian secondary schools with 30 educators to collect their perspectives of how engaging professional development can impact teacher confidence and student learning. Through a qualitative research design, the researchers interviewed the teachers and surmised that novice and veteran teachers need continuous exposure to enriching professional development to sustain any change to their practice (Mohan et al., 2017). Furthermore, the results demonstrated that the needs of rural versus urban teachers are different, and the foundation of professional development for teachers should be

opportunities for them to interact and collaborate to share ideas and receive feedback

(Mohan et al., 2017). In addition, Mohan et al. asserted that this kind of professional

development improved student learning and could be applicable beyond secondary

education as well as Fiji's developing educational systems.

Professional Development Should Be Based on Teacher Needs

Universal professional development does not work to meet the needs of individual

educators in their specific teaching contexts (Derakhshan et al., 2020). Lotter et al. (2016)

investigated a professional development model designed to improve teacher self-efficacy

in inquiry teaching by engaging teachers in a professional development series focused

learning the skill, practice teaching, and reflection sessions through a year-long process.

The professional development began with a two-week summer session focused on both

inquiry pedagogy along with science curriculum knowledge to support the

implementation of the teaching methods (Lotter et al., 2016). To determine the need for

the instruction and the changes in personal confidence, an inquiry teaching efficacy

instrument was given three times to 25 middle school science teachers and to evaluate

actual practices, pre/post classroom observations of the inquiry lesson implementation

were examined using the inquiry observation protocol (Lotter et al., 2016). According to

Lotter et al., following the initial summer session, teachers reported significant increases

in their self-efficacy, with the quality of inquiry teaching also increasing after the

professional development. This research added to the body of work supporting the notion

that honoring teachers' needs within a supportive learning community improves teachers'

efficacy and classroom performance.

Özer et al. (2020) conducted research to determine the professional development needs of teachers in Turkey with the goal of creating individual professional development plan for them through a descriptive survey model and both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed through a survey, a focus group, and a literature review. The population of the research consisted of 529,412 teachers from social networking applications including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, and a sample of 507 teachers share voluntarily within these groups (Özer et al., 2020). The results showed that teachers perceived professional development as a means for self-improvement and the needs of the teachers studied included classroom communication, information technologies, and current teaching practices; teachers want to be able to design their own professional development plans in conjunction with the school administration to ensure that school and teacher goals are in alignment (Özer et al., 2020). Such research supports the current study in that it has often been asserted that professional development is not one-size-fit-all and should be tailored to individual teacher needs.

Derakhshan et al. (2020) investigated 177 Iranian teachers to examine their continuing professional development needs and their views concerning research as it pertains to how successfully they navigated their English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching assignments. The questionnaires used revealed that teacher success was related to both teachers' views of research and their perceived continuous professional development needs, which became predictors of these Iranian teachers' high perceptions of professional success; therefore, it was concluded that positive attitudes towards research and attendance to professional development needs were predictors of job success

(Derakhshan et al., 2020). Derakhshan et al. encouraged planning and re-planning of professional development programs to meet the current needs of teachers in their specific context instead of simply presenting universal programs that do not prepare them for the realities of their classrooms.

Professional Development Experiences Should Be Supported by School Culture

Hubbard et al. (2020) studied three pre-k through sixth grade United States university instructors (professors of elementary methods in literacy, science, social studies) who joined with 17 Title I elementary school teachers for a collaborative professional development focused on lesson planning and teaching within the pre-k through fifth grade school setting. Each team's goal was to create and teach cross-curricula units using English language arts common core standards combined with the standards for social studies and science (Hubbard, et al., 2020). A year-long case study was conducted to evaluate teacher perceptions of collaborative professional development and teacher perspectives about the outcomes of teaching cross-curricula units that they designed themselves and the researchers learned that a thorough needs assessment should have been conducted prior to starting the professional development to be sure that the teachers' learning needs were being met (Hubbard et. al., 2020). Hubbard et al. stated that a shared vision of the desired outcomes is not only important to teacher buy-in, but it is essential for is crucial for successful professional development, wherein educators have the dedicated time to practice lessons and strategies, receive feedback and make changes prior to teaching them to the students in their classrooms. From this study, it is noted that research from different kinds of schools and school cultures lends itself to the

development of realistic, enriching, and beneficial professional development designs that ensure that teachers have the resources to implement new strategies that will enhance teacher confidence and improve student achievement.

It is often noted that one day or short-term professional development does not allow opportunities for teachers to make connections between theory and implication. Aktekin (2019) investigated the impact of a critical friends group (CFG) on Turkish EFL teachers, an inquiry-based professional development, that encourages teachers to collaborate, solve classroom problems, teach and learn particular academic content, and build strong collegial relationships. A qualitative case study conducted at a Turkish university was aimed at exploring the impact of CFG in supporting professional teacher development. Through journals, interviews, and questionnaires, the results of the study showed that teachers who worked in a CFG felt that they were better prepared to continue engaging in their profession because they were given formal opportunities by the school administration to take the time to focus on the areas of their teaching that they believed needed attention (Aktekin, 2019).

Rahman (2019) asserted that teachers want to be supported and to engage with colleagues to build their confidence in their own teaching. However, there are cultural constraints, such as time restrictions and schedules, power status and struggles, and the lack of collegial environments in the school that do not enhance the learning environment for the educators (Rahman, 2019). Rahman used a mixed methods approach to study the digital professional development and the teachers' perceptions of support as well as their engagement in activities that support their beliefs about peer support. In fact, although the

teachers knew that peer to peer observations and feedback were essential to their instructional growth, the participation in such activities was scarce (Rahman, 2019). This study's findings revealed that teacher agency and desire to change cannot overshadow a culture that does not build a framework for successful engagement in relevant professional development, collegial collaboration, and implementation of their new learning.

Summary

The evaluation of increased teacher self-efficacy as a result of training is not just a discussion in schools within the United States. In Australia, augmenting self-efficacy through professional development has also been a topic of much research. Melhuish (2016) stated that one of the missing evaluative pieces of its study is the analysis of professional development participants' feedback and comments about their experiences. These comments would have been vital to assessing the effectiveness of the professional development for early childhood educators in Australia. Moreover, in Ghana, preservice teachers attributed their high self-efficacy to the field experiences and training provided by the early childhood education programs in which they were enrolled (Abroampa et al., 2017). Smidt et al. (2018) acknowledged that occupational self-efficacy were good predictors of career success through their qualitative study of the perspectives of 500 pre-k teachers in Germany. These researchers also acknowledged that the evaluation of pre-k teachers' perspectives regarding training represented a gap in the research (Smidt et al., 2018).

According to Infurna et al. (2018), pre-k teachers' self-efficacy was augmented by professional development, specifically when it was teacher-informed, and the sessions were chosen based on teacher needs. Additionally, professionals' self-efficacy was a stronger predictor of educational practice than attitudes, and self-efficacy facilitated the effect of content knowledge (Perren et al., 2017). In fact, the study findings revealed that the family daycare providers possessed less self-efficacy and participated in fewer student-centered professional development experiences inside and outside of their classrooms (Perren et al., 2017).

While the aforementioned literature asserted that educators' capacities to instruct, manage behavior, and motivate students would be increased through professional development, there was little research on the perspectives of teachers regarding how professional development opportunities influenced their self-efficacy. Perhaps that gap in the literature existed because with the increase in teacher capacity to perform the duties of the job, there was an assumed increase in teacher self-efficacy. Therefore, deeper analyses of teachers' perspectives of training opportunities were necessary to strategically approach professional development and create effective plans that encourage teacher growth (Hadley et al., 2015).

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter presents the research methodology for this basic qualitative study regarding pre-k educators' perspectives on the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of exploring a social or human problem in which a researcher has the task of building a comprehensive picture, analyzing words, reporting detailed views, and conducting the study in a natural setting. The applicability of the basic qualitative design in the current study is discussed in this chapter. The research plan, rationale, methodology, participants, procedures, data analysis method, and ethical concerns are also included in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The chosen research method for this study was a basic qualitative methodology because the nature of the problem and proposed research questions focused on examining beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, or meanings of or about a specific problem (see Queirós et al., 2017). The goal of qualitative research is to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences and interpretation of those experiences from the lens of the participants (Lichtman, 2010). Additionally, Lichtman explained that qualitative studies are conducted to describe a person's or persons' perspectives of an issue based on their personal beliefs and/or opinions. Because the current study addressed pre-k teachers'

perspectives of the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance, a basic qualitative design was appropriate.

Several qualitative research designs were considered for this study: phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, and ethnography. According to Yin (2009), phenomenology is a qualitative research design in which understanding of a phenomenon is sought through interviews with individuals who have a shared lived experience. Phenomenological studies address what or how a phenomenon is experienced by individuals engaged in it. The current study was focused on participant perspectives, but phenomenology is used more widely with phenomena that are ongoing, not experienced with a definite end point, such as a professional development cycle.

Case studies, which are used to conduct in-depth multifaceted examinations of people, groups, or communities, could have been used for this study (see Yin, 2013). A main tenet of a case study is that the research is conducted in the natural setting in which the phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2009). However, the current study did not focus on a localized problem, but rather addressed a gap in research.

Grounded theory is another qualitative design that was considered. The purpose of grounded theory is to gather information from research participants to develop a theory about a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory was not appropriate for the current study because there was no attempt at theory development as a result of the findings.

An ethnographic study is conducted in the participants' natural environment to understand the participants' beliefs, values, and culture (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Observations, not interviews, are the main source of data for ethnographic studies. The ethnographic design was not appropriate for the current study because the purpose was not to explore, understand, and describe cultural norms or patterns (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to be an observer and interviewer. No participant had a direct relationship with me that may have represented a conflict of interest, such as a supervisory or reporting relationship, which may have exposed the study to biases. By interviewing the participants, I had an opportunity to observe them as they responded to research questions. I also analyzed the data provided in the responses to the interview questions. Data collection includes obtaining information that might be sensitive to both parties, and an essential obligation of the researcher is to protect participants and their privacy. In the current study, the task was to interview the participants, analyze the data for themes, and protect the participants.

Prior to beginning the study, I obtained Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). I aimed to facilitate interviews in a way that elicited honest responses to the questions (see Lodico et al., 2010). For the best experience, researchers should make sure subjects are at ease about the process by establishing rapport while limiting personal interpretation of shared thoughts, which can be a challenge during the conversational exchange of an interview (Creswell, 2013). To enhance participants' comfort, I reiterated the purpose of the study and reconfirmed the confidential nature of the recorded responses and the use of the results.

Having been a teacher in the district in which the study was conducted, I may have been acquainted with some of the participants, but I had no influence or supervisory responsibility for or over them. Acknowledging personal biases about the influence of professional development on self-efficacy as a teacher was also important. In acknowledging these biases, I avoided substituting my thoughts for the subjects' answers.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The participants were chosen from the approximately 400 in-service, certified, lead pre-k teachers in the 65 elementary schools in a large urban district in the Northeast region of the United States. Purposeful sampling involved identifying and selecting individuals who were knowledgeable of or experienced with the phenomenon being studied (see Creswell et al., 2008). Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that participants met the selection criteria: (a) certified in early childhood education and (b) lead teachers in classrooms of 3- and 4-year-old students within the identified district. The original sample size for this study was 16–25 teachers (at least four teachers from each of the geographic regions of the city in which the district is located); however, changes were made to respond to the teaching scenarios created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The final sample size was 10 teachers. Further explanation of the change is found in Chapter 4.

Instrumentation

Because the intention of qualitative interviews is to obtain an understanding of the attitudes or perspectives of participants who have experience with or knowledge about

the topic, the instrument must be crafted to elicit the most honest information possible (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview protocol that I used included the main interview questions and probing questions developed based on the research questions for this study (see Appendix A). The interview protocol was based on the component factor matrix by Friedman and Kass (2002) and ensured that the interviewing process was consistent across all participants. The three components of the classroom context (instruction, behavior management, and student engagement and motivation) that had the most influence on teacher self-efficacy were used to develop the interview protocol (see Friedman & Kass, 2002). The credibility of this study's instrument was established by using the data and factors from the instrument proposed by Friedman and Kass (2002) in their quantitative study, which underwent a rigorous peer-review process before it was published.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval to conduct the study from Walden University (approval number 01-27-21-0586259), I recruited participants through public school staff directories listed on institution websites, personal references, and educator-focused social media groups (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn). I designed a flyer with all pertinent study details, including my contact information, to be posted on these sites and distributed electronically via text and email. After obtaining an informal communication of interest from prospective participants, I sent an invitation email including a description of the study, its purpose, an outline of participation criteria and expectations, sample research questions, and the informed consent document.

Once participants replied "I consent" to the invitation email, the interviews were scheduled. The interviews were conducted and recorded with Zoom video conferencing technology, which also provided separate audio files. At the beginning of each interview, the informed consent document was reviewed to reiterate the participant's knowledge of the details of the interview as well as their consent to be recorded during the interview process. Lastly, all participants were assigned a pseudonym, and the recordings of the interviews were housed in a locked file on the video conferencing online technology application and my personal computer.

Data Analysis Plan

Interview data were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to organize the data in themes revealed in the interviews to ensure a deeper understanding of the meaning of the data generated through thematic coding (see Williams & Moser, 2019). Using a deductive, semantic approach with expected themes to be revealed in the data, I coded the transcript based on the exact words used by the participants in answering the questions and their connection to the preidentified themes. For example, I assumed that many educators would identify interactive and engaging, needs-based, and easily implemented as characteristics of confidence-building professional development, so these themes were assigned colors for easy identification. The themes were then analyzed for any possible overlaps and regrouping necessities so that the final themes could be clearly and logically defined based on the information provided by the participants.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was established through member checking to ensure the credibility of the data collected from the interviews and to confirm the trustworthiness of the interpretation (see Birt et al., 2016). Interview data (transcriptions) were shared with the participants to ensure accuracy. Also, once the results were determined and the summary was prepared, it was shared with the participants for confirmation of the interpretation of the data once themes were assigned. Moreover, to conduct an ethical study, I remained reflective during data collection and analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). A trusted colleague served as a peer reviewer to review the notes taken and the findings presented in the study for accurate and unbiased transmission.

Confirmability

Conformability was established through an audit trail, which was a transparent description of a research project from the start through the reporting of findings (see M.Q. Patton, 2014). These records were kept and secured as a part of the investigation. During the coding process, alternate explanations and rationales were considered based on the audit trail of the research, not on my beliefs (see M.Q. Patton, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability was established through digitally recorded interviews that were transcribed verbatim and reviewed by the participants to ensure accuracy and consistency. Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings (Yin, 2018), which was ensured when the notes were reviewed by those interviewed. In addition,

interpretation and recommendations of the study should were consistent with the data collected (Yin, 2018). To remain reflective during interviews, I kept a reflexive journal for notetaking and data analysis. According to M.Q. Patton (2014), reflexivity requires a researcher's examination of their thinking and feeling during the phases of a study. My journal was used to capture feelings and biases as data were collected to minimize their impact on the analysis of the data because results may have been altered by my attitude (see M. Q. Patton, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability was established through interviewing at least four teachers from four geographic regions of the city in which the district is located. The information gathered may reasonably represent the perspectives of the district's pre-k teachers as well as those in other school districts, though generalizability was limited due to the small sample. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers must consider the transferability of findings to other situations. In the current study, the perspectives of the characteristics of professional development that influence self-efficacy and performance of pre-k teachers in the study site district may assist other districts in developing more impactful professional development cycles for their pre-k educators.

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Ethical Procedures

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An important ethical consideration of the study was obtaining Walden's IRB approval. Another ethical concern for me as the researcher was to ensure that participants' involvement in the study was fully voluntary study. I also maintained the confidentiality of the participants' identity. Many teachers fear reprisal or ridicule for

opinions that may not support their organization, so protecting participants' identity prior to releasing any results of the study was paramount. As a voluntary participant, each person had the right to refuse participation or to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. The transcripts of the interviews were locked and stored in my files (for which only I have access) and will remain there for 5 years following the publication of this study. All digital files will be kept on a personal password-protected computer with a password-secured backup file. Additionally, participants' names did not appear in any reports or in the final report for this research. The research documents containing any collected data will be destroyed after 5 years.

Summary

In this chapter, the research design and methodology were identified. This study, based in an urban school district located in the Northeast region of the United States, included a basic qualitative design with interviews. The sample size of 10 teachers included lead pre-k teachers from four geographic regions of the city. This basic qualitative study with interviews involved in-depth, individual interviews, and each interview was approximately 25 minutes and conducted via Zoom video conferencing. These interviews were the sole means of data collection focused on ascertaining the perspectives of the participants pertaining to the characteristics of professional development that influence their teacher self-efficacy. All interview data collected were transcribed and analyzed to provide themes for further implications. Lastly, all pertinent ethical and confidentiality issues were considered and addressed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore pre-k educators' perspectives of the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. The problem was that the pre-k teachers' perspective of what attributes of professional development are necessary to influence self-efficacy had not been thoroughly studied. The three research questions for this study were used to design interview questions that prompted the educators to describe the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their ability to effectively instruct the assigned curriculum, execute age-appropriate classroom management, and promote student motivation and engagement.

Chapter 4 contains a description of the procedures and processes undertaken during the study. First, I discuss the setting in which I conducted the study. Following the setting, I outline the data collection/interview protocol and the data analysis process, including how the codes and themes were derived from the transcripts of the interviews, as well as the results. At the end of Chapter 4, I provide evidence of trustworthiness and a chapter summary.

Setting

The research was conducted in a large urban district in the Northeast region of the United States. Within this district in the 2019–2020 school year, there were approximately 6,800 pre-k through 12th grade educators in 117 schools; 52% identified

as Black, 28% as White, 7% as Latino, 5% as Asian, and 5% were unreported. The identified genders of these educators were 74.77% female and 25.23% male. The demographics of the student body included 58% Black, 21% Hispanic, 16% White, and 5% other. Finally, 15% of students were identified as special education, 16% as English language learners, and 73% as economically disadvantaged.

Data Collection

Once participants replied "I consent" to the recruitment email, the interviews were scheduled. The interviews were conducted via recorded Zoom video conferencing technology, which also provided separate audio files. At the beginning of each interview, the informed consent document was reviewed to reiterate the participant's knowledge of the details of the interview as well as their consent to be recorded during the interview process. All participants were assigned a pseudonym, and the recordings of the interviews were housed in a locked file on both the video conferencing online technology application and my personal computer.

I used data from semi-structured interviews to learn more about participants' perspectives about the characteristics of professional development. The interviews took place over a 6-week period that began on February 19, 2021, and concluded on April 2, 2021. The interviews lasted an average of 25 minutes. I asked nine primary interview questions and, as appropriate, six probing/follow-up questions. These interview questions were open-ended and based on the components of the conceptual framework to allow for thorough responses. At the conclusion of each interview, the respondent was asked to participate in member checking to determine the accuracy of the information collected. I

also told participants that I might contact them for clarification or elaboration after I read the transcripts. Participants were also offered an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions that may have arisen during the interview.

During the interviews, the data were recorded using the voice recording software in the Zoom teleconferencing application as well as handwritten notes. I did not attempt to script the responses in real time, but I did keep a reflexive journal during the interviews to identify personal feelings or reactions to the responses. The journal also provided a place to write key words or phrases that I wanted to revisit, or to write down connections for further examination during the data analysis stage. This uninterrupted dialogue promoted continued participant engagement in the interview and the provision of in-depth answers (see Adhabi & Blash Anozie, 2017).

The research was conducted in a setting that was natural to each participant. During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual teaching video teleconferencing became a natural mode of communication for meeting as well as teaching. Participants chose which time of day best suited their schedules.

Participants

There were 10 participants in this study; all were female. The participants were part of the approximately 400 in-service, certified, lead pre-k teachers in the 65 elementary schools serving about 6,000 pre-k students. Participants were recruited through public school staff directories listed on institution websites, personal references, and educator-focused social media groups including Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. A flyer with all pertinent study details including my contact information was posted on

these sites and distributed electronically via text and email. After obtaining prospective

participants' informal communication of interest to participate in this study, I sent

an invitation email including a description of the study, its purpose, an outline of

participation criteria and expectations, sample research questions, and the informed

consent document.

Participants' experience in teaching pre-k students ranged from 6 to 20 years, and

total time teaching in this district ranged from 5 to 33 years. Table 1 contains the

respondents' demographics that were pertinent to this study. Participants were randomly

assigned numbers to protect their identity.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Region	Years in pre-k/current role	Years in district
2001ASE	SE/NE	5-pre-k4; pre-k team chair	7
2002CNE	NE	5-pre-k4; special education	7
2003ENE	NE	6-pre-k3	17
2004GNW	NW/NE	9-pre-k4	9
2005JSE	SE/NE	20-pre-k3	21
2006KNE	NE	19-pre-k4	19
2007KriNE	NE	8-pre-k4	12
2008KrNE	NE	8-pre-k3	9
2009MNE	NE	6-pre-k3-4; special education	33
2010RSE	SE	5-pre-k4	5

Recruitment Process Revision

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a change in the way education and schooling was handled during the 2020 academic year and beyond. In March 2020, many school districts transitioned to virtual learning and buildings were closed. After a year of building closures, some districts were slowly reopening their institutions at the time I was conducting this study. This situation impacted the way in which I was able to recruit, interact with, and interview teachers, and the situation decreased educators' willingness to engage. I made an adjustment to recruit participants through word of mouth, email, and social media. When schools were open, I had the option of meeting with teachers and administrators during their faculty meetings. That method was no longer an option after March 2020. I emailed over 300 teachers at least twice. From the first set of 100 emails, I was able to recruit five teachers. After posting online/social media, I recruited two more. I emailed another 100 teachers, and that yielded one additional teacher participant. The last email to 100 teachers yielded zero responses. The participants then recruited two more of their colleagues, for a total of 10 participants.

Based on the initial sample parameters in the proposal, I was aiming for 16–24 teachers who were certified, currently teaching pre-k to 3- and 4-year-old students (pre-k3 and pre-k4) and had at least 5 years of experience. The number was based on the hope of recruiting four teachers from each of the quadrants of the city. The change in the size of the sample due to the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impact on the recruitment process was approved by my committee and did not violate the approved IRB protocol.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis stage, I transcribed the interviews, organized the data,

coded the data, generated themes, reviewed the themes, named the themes, and wrote the

findings. I performed all data analysis, including coding and theme development,

manually. No technology tools were used to generate codes from the interview data.

To transcribe the interviews, I played the mp3 recording and had the Microsoft

Word application on my computer transcribe the audio files. After editing the transcripts

to separate my words from the participants and correct any misinterpretations of

language/dialect, the transcripts were sent to the participants for transcript review. Each

participant was asked to review the document and clarify any inaccuracies in the

transcript. Participants were also provided a copy of the research findings to review

my interpretation of the data to ensure credibility of the findings. No unusual

circumstances arose from the transcript review or member checking.

As recommended by Saldana (2015), the data analysis began with the simple

organization of the interview transcripts in the first cycle of coding, reading, and

rereading all of the information and organizing all of the transcripts. Each transcription

was coded for common words and phrases relating to factors that could have influence on

teacher self-efficacy, and I created a corresponding code and highlighted the data based

on those words and phrases. The initial codes were based on district-mandated, self-

selected, and school-based professional development and the influence that these

trainings had on the participants' confidence (see Appendix B). I then used pattern coding

to categorize the data to correspond to the three areas of teacher self-efficacy identified in

the conceptual framework: curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. Lastly, I organized the data into combined categories based on the attributes of the conceptual framework and derived themes to answer to the research questions.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives of the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. Four themes emerged from the data analysis regarding the characteristics of professional development that influenced teacher self-efficacy in the areas of instruction, behavior management, and student motivation and engagement. The themes revealed that professional development that increased teacher confidence contained relevant implementation strategies and was conducted by engaging and knowledgeable experts. Findings also revealed that when professional development lacked relevance or sufficient implementation strategies or was redundant, it did not increase teacher self-efficacy.

Theme 1: Relevant Implementation Strategies

Throughout the interview process, the participants made references to times when they wished their needs had been assessed prior to the creation and implementation of the district's professional development cycle. Participants repeatedly mentioned the need for all professional development to contain more than pages of information or slides of facts. The learning sessions needed to contain relevant implementation strategies that would

work for participants' students to increase their confidence. Participant 2001ASE noted

that she had not been asked about her professional development needs, but if she "voiced

her needs to the principal" they may be honored if the budget allowed. She also spoke

about the instructional professional development in which the curriculum company was

invited to the school to show her team "what it would look like in the classroom" and

how that modeling increased her confidence.

Other educators mentioned that in the realm of classroom management,

professional development effective strategies for implementation also increased their

confidence. Some participants mentioned that schoolwide discussions on race relations

and cultural biases to properly address classroom management issues and develop

appropriate classroom routines provided a place of sensitivity and understanding. Other

participants noted that these discussions were missing from their school's professional

development series, and that they were left to seek the knowledge on their own.

Participant 2009MNE mentioned,

> For me, personally, I have done a lot of Zoom webinars, conferences, and
>
> workshops to better understand pre-k children and their needs because, for me and
>
> my babies, in the population I serve, I haven't seen enough that is catered towards
>
> them.

Motivation and engagement were not identified as a big hurdle for pre-k teachers.

Most of them noted that the students were ready to learn and were excited, even in a

virtual learning environment. Participants reiterated the importance of teaching relevant

strategies for implementation of the new skills in professional development focused on

engaging and motivating their students. The participants spoke freely about learning and using the tips from a recent district-mandated professional development about "different ways to get them learning" (Participant 2010RSE). Another pre-k teacher recalled a self-selected professional development that helped her change her mindset and increase her confidence. She noted that she was hesitant about "thinking of children as citizens in the world" because she initially "did not feel confident in those settings…I did not know what any of this was." She then recalled that her attendance at this professional development "made me much more confident to bring those ideas to my classroom" (Participant 2003ENE).

Theme 2: Knowledgeable and Engaging Experts

One of the repeated needs of these educators was that the professional development be given by experts in pre-k education. Participants wanted to know that they could trust the information being relayed for instructing this population of students. Participants expressed a desire to be challenged to grow and change their practice to meet the needs of the students they serve. Often this desire led them to seek out additional professional development on their own. According to Participant 2008KrNE, "my personal professional development experiences, the topics and presenters that are in line with my own personal interest and teaching style, I find those more productive and engaging; they push my practice a bit further than district professional development." Colleagues and partner-teachers were also sources of knowledge that increased participants' confidence in teaching. "They share the strategies, so you can see the

strategies in action, so I am learning those strategies and implementing while the artist is there to support me" (Participant 2006KNE).

In the area of classroom management, the educators highlighted the many issues that must be considered. The educators who participated in this study openly discussed the trauma, socioeconomic status, and social emotional needs of their students that impacted the way they developed routines, established relationships, and addressed problematic behaviors. Participant 2005JSE said that "good training about behavior management…has reinforced…how to embrace and trust and respect and empower children." In the area of classroom management, these teachers expressed that having coaches to support their skill development was key: "They had a coach that would work with you for the whole year, to see how those strategies that you learned in those professional development sessions were being implemented in your classroom" (Participant 2006KNE). Participant 2009KrNE applauded her school's social workers and their coaching by saying "we have some amazing social workers who have provided different techniques around mindfulness, breathing, and scripts of how to address behavior in the classroom." These pre-k educators also reinforced the need to have training that is provided by experts and not just someone who "works in the central office" (Participant 2007KriNE).

When considering how to engage and motivate students, these educators repeatedly discussed how the professional development also needed to motivate them as well. They desired to be introduced to new ideas on how to keep their students attentive during class. One participant said she wanted professional development that would help

her "spark interest" and that would make this educator "confident that [she is] reaching them more" (Participant #2006KNE). One other point that was reinforced was that the students' voices should be honored. Participant #2004GNW has attended professional development that was about seeing "children as citizens" and "giving them voice" and she said those sessions that were focused on "motivating students and teachers."

Theme 3: Lack of Relevant and Sufficient Implementation Strategies

Just as these pre-k educators were able to concisely and clearly identify the favorable conditions wherein their teacher self-efficacy was positively influenced, conversely, they were able to quickly discuss those professional development situations where their confidence was not increased. One of the first scenarios highlighted was professional developments that lacked sufficient relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies. When the instructional training was irrelevant to their student population or the session did not clearly define how it could be used to increase student learning, confidence was not influenced. One teacher remarked, "trainings for my specific teaching content…I can't really think of any that influenced my confidence" (Participant 2005JSE). Other participants also recounted how the professional development focused on the new learning platforms was "not the most effective" in boosting their curricula confidence (Participant 2001ASE). "I honestly can't say that the district's professional development has motivated me." She went on to discuss the "one size fit all" approach and the lack of specific consideration for what pre-k teachers need to be successful instructors (Participant 2009MNE).

When they discussed their experience with classroom management professional development, the educators commented on the wealth of information given, but also identified issues with lack of clear processes for implementation. Participant 2006KNE said, "… sometimes when you go in many professional development opportunities… you learn so many strategies you come back with awesome ideas, but then you know, you don't know that implementation part." Repeatedly, the participants noted times where important topics were addressed, but there was no way for the educator to leave fully confident in their ability to use the strategies. One teacher recounted a session by stating, "…the district has trauma-informed teaching professional development. That's a really important topic. They botch it every time. They cause more trauma. There is no follow up" (Participant 2007KriNE).

When discussing student engagement and motivation, the participants recalled professional development that was lacking in relevancy and clear strategies to implement the skills learned. For instance, Participant 2010RSE noted that the training was good and necessary, but it did not help her identify students who needed additional social-emotional support in the virtual learning environment. She stated, "… it's hard to pinpoint those students that need that social emotional piece online. So, it hasn't really been as helpful." It was noted that relationship building was paramount for pre-k educators to keep students engaged. However, Participant 2003ENE did not notice how the trainings offered impacted her confidence in building relationships with her student. These professional development offerings seemed to be missing the relevancy necessary to make an impact. One participant went on to reiterate that the professional

developments given by the central office staff are not the best. "There's plenty of times where the district has done the professional development and you know that they're not an expert… you know that they just…need a job" (Participant 2007KriNE).

Theme 4: Redundant Requirements

Redundancy of the required curriculum professional development topics was a recurring trend in the conversations. The participants could not grasp why the schools and the school district had not found a better way to ensure that their educators were being trained in the skills necessary to build their teacher self-efficacy in instruction. From Participant 2001ASE's recollections of being forced weekly "to go over something we already know" and Participant 2005JSE's memory of the trainings "being at best a review," it was ascertained that redundancy of the professional development requirements have been an issue for a long time.

As for classroom management, several of the educators opted for self-selected professional development options. After being mandated to take the yearly courses, regardless of their high evaluation scores, both participants 2008KriNE and 2009MNE were forced to attend the same professional development year after year. In addition, both educators noted that the relevancy to their students' needs was also missing in the annual required classroom management training. Moreover, both participants often opted to attend additional professional development on their own time and with their own money to be sure that they confidently met the needs of their student body. For example, Participant 2009MNE said that "it's not as much emphasis put on what we need, so I've had to do in my outside professional development."

Student motivation and engagement professional development was another area where redundancy was a challenge. Although the professional development was described as "helpful" and aided in their understanding of "how to deal with the social emotional issues from a child's perspective", according to Participant 2010RSE, she and Participant 2009KrNE both used the terms "redundant" and "repetitive" to describe the trainings. There was no discussion of how their confidence levels changes because of their attendance at the same professional development series yearly.

Table 2 presents the themes and subthemes derived from the data. Tables 3, 4, and 5 present the three research questions, the themes, sub-themes, and the corresponding data collected during the interviews from the participants' responses.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Relevant implementation strategies	Professional development containing relevant implementation strategies increases teacher confidence in instruction, classroom management, and engaging and motivating students
Knowledgeable and engaging experts	Professional development given by knowledgeable and engaging experts increased teacher efficacy in instruction, classroom management, and engaging and motivating students
Lack of relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies	Professional development that lacks relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies does not increase teacher confidence in instruction, classroom management, and engaging and motivating students
Redundant requirements	Professional development that is redundant does not increase teacher confidence in instruction, classroom management, and engaging and motivating students

Table 3

Characteristics of Professional Development That Increased Teacher Self-Efficacy in Curriculum Instruction

Theme	Subtheme	Participant quote
Relevant implementation strategies	Professional development containing relevant implementation strategies increases teacher confidence in instruction	"I reached out to my administrator and asked her if she was willing hire someone from the curriculum company. She did so that was beneficial because they were able to show us what it would look like in the classroom." (2001ASE) "Sometimes I will take a day off and go observe at a private preschool, you know, just to get other ideas and talk to educators about what's working for them." (2005JSE) "I feel like the professional development has been geared towards me learning the school's way of doing things…how I am supposed to collaborate with my assistant teacher and how we're supposed to present the curriculum to our students." (2002CNE) "In my professional development, there are some things that help me. It helped me to understand what kindergarten teachers are looking for; I focus on those items when I write their IEPs. When I do their objectives, it is helpful." (2009MNE)
Knowledgeable presenters	Professional development given by knowledgeable and engaging experts increased teacher efficacy in instruction	"They share the strategies, so you can see the strategies in action, so I am learning those strategies and implementing while the artist is there to support me." (2006KNE) "I have regular meetings about project work with my colleagues and we just wrapped up our project…a lot of it is kind of built in a little bit for me, which is lucky because I am talking to my colleagues." (2007KriNE) "So, then my personal professional development experiences, the topics and presenters that are in line with my own personal interest and teaching style, I typically find those more productive and engaging; they push my practice a bit further than the district professional development experiences." (2008KrNE)
Lack of relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies	Professional development that lacks relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies does not increase teacher confidence in instruction	We've been trying to adjust, so a lot of our professional developments have been geared towards us learning new platforms to better support our students. I don't know that they are the most effective." (2001ASE) "In terms of trainings for my specific teaching content, you know, I don't know what this says about our district public schools, but I can't really think of any that influenced my confidence, you know." (2005JSE) "I honestly can't say that the district's professional development has motivated me. For one thing, one size doesn't fit all…a lot of times I've talked to other pre-k teachers. We are not always considered as much." (2009MNE)
Redundant requirements	Professional development that is redundant does not increase teacher confidence in instruction	"For example, our professional development is already pretty much decided, the content is already put into place, it's just a matter of us having to go over even something that we already know. How beneficial is this? Sometimes it is like do we really have to sit in this meeting, you know?" (2001ASE) "But in terms of the content that is given to the team leader to disseminate, I do not find that helpful. It is at best a review. But generally, not helpful professional development for me." (2005JSE)

Table 4

Characteristics of Professional Development That Increased Teacher Self-Efficacy in Classroom Management

Theme	Subtheme	Participant quote
Relevant implementation strategies	Professional development containing relevant implementation strategies increases teacher confidence in classroom management	"For me, personally, I have done a lot of Zoom webinars, conferences, and workshops for pre-k because, for me and my babies, in the population I serve, I haven't seen enough that is catered towards them." (2009MNE)
		"Cultural biases are one they focus on. We also have had social emotional learning training, so being sensitive to our students needs in that aspect." (2009MNE)
		"There have been some trainings through my school were focused on race relations and our staff here is half black and half white. And I'm very glad that our principal values that and so those trainings have been very meaningful." (2005JSE)
		I think every other good training about behavior management has been, you know, maybe has reinforced some of those concepts of how to embrace and trust and respect and empower children." (2005JSE)
Knowledgeable and engaging experts	Professional development given by knowledgeable and engaging experts increased teacher efficacy in classroom management	"Managing student behavior…I would say the conscious discipline professional developments that I attended. I like the way they give those professional developments; I think that has really helped me understand those strategies and implement them." (2006KNE)
		"They had a coach that would work with you for the whole year, to see how those strategies that you learned in those professional development sessions being implemented in your classroom." (2006KNE)
		"We have some amazing social workers who have provide different techniques around mindfulness, breathing, and scripts of how to address behavior in the classroom." (2009KriNE)
		"Some of the professional development this year was you know, exciting we had the author of *How to be an Anti-Racist Educator* and some other impressive speakers come visit the district this year, which again was exciting and different than in years past." (2008KrNE)
Lack of relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies	Professional development that lacks relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies does not increase teacher confidence in classroom management	"Other professional development, the district has had some around like COVID and around trauma-informed teaching. The district has trauma informed teaching professional development. That's a really important topic. They botch it every time. They cause more trauma. There is no follow up." (2007KriNE)
		"There's plenty of times where the district has done the professional development and you know that they're not an expert… you know that they just like need a job." (2007KriNE)
		"I was trained over a summer, and then it started working as a lead teacher. As far as professional development goes, after that professional development, I certainly felt underprepared going into a classroom." (2004GNW)
		"Because you know, sometimes when you go in many professional development opportunities you go and attend, you learn so many strategies you come back with awesome ideas, but then you know, you don't know that implementation part." (2006KNE)
Redundant requirements	Professional development that is redundant does not increase teacher confidence in classroom management	"The district uses an evaluation system and I have consistently been highly effective in teaching pre-k for several years. Yet I have to attend the same training that I attended the year before and every single year." (2008KrNE)
		"So, the professional development that is offered through my school is the same thing each year and catered to K through 12… pre-k3 and pre-k4 aren't mandatory; it's not as much emphasis put on what we need, so I've had to do in my outside professional development." (2009MNE)

Table 5

Characteristics of Professional Development That Increased Teacher Self-Efficacy in Student Motivation and Engagement

Theme	Subtheme	Participant quote
Relevant implementation strategies	Professional development containing relevant implementation strategies increases teacher confidence in motivating and engaging students	"So, a lot of the information was more along the lines of Creative Curriculum. It was also about how to get students involved, so like centers. You know, learning through centers and just different ways to get them learning." (2010RSE) "Thinking of children as citizens in the world I did not feel confident in those settings…I did not know what any of this was. I think it's made me much more confident to bring those ideas to my classroom." (2003ENE)
Knowledgeable and engaging experts	Professional development given by knowledgeable and engaging experts increased teacher efficacy in motivating and engaging students	"The PD I've taken recently helped me with new ideas that would spark interest; to engage them through movement, to identify similarities between them and their peers, and giving them a voice. I'm confident that I am reaching them more." (2006KNE) "I think it's very motivating because it was geared towards seeing children as citizen and that they have a viewpoint and they can make a difference, but the whole nature of that PD was about motivating students and the teachers." (2004GNW) "it's hard to pinpoint those students that need that social emotional piece online. So, it hasn't really been as helpful." (2010RSE)
Lack of relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies	Professional development that lacks relevancy and sufficient implementation strategies does not increase teacher confidence in motivating and engaging students	"it's hard to pinpoint those students that need that social emotional piece online. So, it hasn't really been as helpful." (2010RSE) "There is a big focus on relationship building in the professional development for early childhood teachers. I don't know that it had a huge impact on my confidence though." (2003ENE)
Redundant requirements	Professional development that is redundant does not increase teacher confidence in motivating and engaging students	"It's just been PD about how to deal with the social emotional issues from a child's perspective. Not as much content. I feel a lot of this social emotional is redundant." (2010RSE) "Some of that PD was given through outside service and it was helpful to have that as the focus of the professional development. But again, year after year, it gets a bit repetitive." (2008KrNE)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I used member checking to ensure the credibility of the data collected from the interviews and confirm the trustworthiness of the interpretation (Birt et al., 2016). Interview transcriptions were shared with the participants to check their accuracy. There were no corrections submitted. Also, once the results were finalized a summary was prepared and shared with the participants for confirmation of the interpretation of the data once themes are assigned. Again. No challenges to the themes were presented.

Confirmability

Conformability was established through an audit trail, a transparent description of a research project from the start through the reporting of findings (Amankwaa, 2016). I thoroughly and explicitly described the data collection, transcription, and analysis processes. This description demonstrated the use of an audit trail, and these records were kept and secured as a part of the investigation. Moreover, to conduct an ethical research study, I remained reflective during data collection and analysis by keeping my own journal of notes and biases to avoid tainting the data collection procedure during the interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Dependability

Dependability was established through digitally recorded interviews, which were then transcribed verbatim. In addition, interpretation and recommendations for the study were consistent with the data collected (see Yin, 2018). The procedure for evaluating data included participants' consent to participate and the conduction of face-to-face interviews

as well as the review of the transcribed interviews. These procedures led to the emergence of themes that provided a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Transferability

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers must consider the transferability of findings to other situations. Transferability was established through interviewing 10 teachers from varying regions of the city who represent the different demographics of the school district, so that the information gathered may represent the perspectives of the district's pre-k teachers as well as those in other school districts, although generalizability was limited due to the small sample. The perspectives of the characteristics of professional development that increase the teacher self-efficacy and performance of pre-k teachers in this district can influence how other districts create their own professional development cycles.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives of the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development, which increased their self-efficacy and performance. The three research questions asked the participating educators to describe the characteristics of professional development that has increased their confidence in their ability to effectively instruct the assigned curriculum, execute age-appropriate classroom management, and promote student motivation and engagement, which are the three categories that are measured when evaluating teacher self-efficacy. The identified themes showed what teachers desired from professional development to influence their confidence as well as what had

to influence on their confidence in their ability to do their jobs. These themes that corresponded to the increase in teacher self-efficacy included relevant implementation strategies, engaging knowledgeable experts, and a lack of relevancy and/or sufficient implementation strategies and redundancy were identified as reasons that the teachers did not experience increased confidence.

This chapter presented the data collection and analysis from a sample of 10 pre-k educators. This chapter also contained an explanation for the change in sample size from 16–25 to 10 educators. The interpretation of findings, limitation of study, recommendations, and implications for social change are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives on the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. Within the pre-k environment, there was a need to professionalize the occupation through relevant and rigorous training, but researchers noted a lack of school administrators' focus on assessing and meeting the needs of their teachers (Cumming, 2017). Troia and Graham (2016) asserted that the educator perspective was missing in the implementation of effective cycles of professional development. Therefore, there was a need to identify the characteristics of professional development that pre-k educators identified as necessary to increase their teacher self-efficacy.

Despite the volume of current research on the benefits of professional development, the recent literature was limited at the time of the current study to Yoo's (2016) study, which revealed that professional development positively influenced teacher self-efficacy in the areas of instruction and student motivation, which led to increased student achievement. Following the recommendation of Yoo, I extended the investigation into pre-k teacher perspectives regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence teacher self-efficacy and performance. The specific areas of influence studied were instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement, which were the identified categories of expected teacher self-efficacy found within the conceptual framework on which this study was based. The findings indicated

that these pre-k educators identified relevant implementation strategies and engaging and knowledgeable experts as necessary characteristics to increase teacher self-efficacy. Also, according to these pre-k teachers, professional development that lacked relevance and/or sufficient implementation strategies or was redundant did not increase their confidence in their ability to perform the duties of their position.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: Relevant Implementation Strategies

Professional development in schools should solve problems, be ongoing and practical, contain teaching strategies, and include practice time and feedback on implementation to increase the chances of full adoption by educators after the trainings (Curry et al., 2018; Goodale, 2020; Koster et al., 2017). Several participants made references to the need for all professional development to contain relevant implementation strategies that would work for their students. Strategies such as schoolwide discussions on race relations and cultural biases to properly address instructional and social emotional student needs from a place of sensitivity and understanding were mentioned by a few participants. Participants also acknowledged that self-selected professional development, more than district- or school-based professional development, had helped to increase their confidence in implementing new strategies to engage their students.

Theme 2: Knowledgeable and Engaging Experts

Teachers want professional development that has experts as instructors and includes depth of interaction with engaging and authentic modeling of context-driven

instruction (Hutchison & Woodward, 2018; Yoon et al., 2020). Mohan et al. (2017) asserted that the foundation of professional development for teachers should be opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and feedback, which encourage internalization and implementation of the learning. One of the repeated needs of the participating educators in the current study was that the professional development be given by experts in pre-k education so participants could trust that the information was effective for instructing this population of students. These educators openly discussed the trauma, socioeconomic status, and social emotional needs of their students that need to be considered. Also, participants mentioned that coaches should support their skill development in navigating these challenges. The educators wanted to be challenged in their practice to meet the changing needs of their students and sought additional professional development on their own or relied on colleagues as sources of knowledge that increased their confidence in teaching.

Theme 3: Lack of Relevance and Sufficient Implementation Strategies

Hubbard et al. (2020) concluded that having a shared vision of the desired outcomes between the school leadership and the teaching body is an essential component of successful professional development cycles, in which educators have the dedicated time to practice lessons and strategies, receive feedback, and make changes prior to teaching them in their classrooms. School cultures are important in the development of realistic, enriching, and beneficial professional development designs in which teachers are afforded the resources to implement new strategies that will enhance teacher self-efficacy and improve student achievement (Hubbard et al., 2020). The participating pre-k

educators in the current study discussed professional development scenarios in which their confidence was not increased because they lacked relevance and/or sufficient implementation strategies. Instructional trainings that were not relevant to their student population did not contain clearly defined strategies for use or lacked specific consideration for what pre-k teachers needed to be successful instructors. Therefore, the educators left the trainings without the confidence in their ability to use the strategies.

Theme 4: Redundant Requirements

Derakhshan et al. (2020) encouraged constant planning and replanning of teacher training to meet teachers' needs in their specific context instead of presenting universal programs that may not address the realities of their classrooms. Rahman (2019) asserted that collegial engagement increased teacher confidence in their teaching abilities; however, in some schools, there are time restrictions, power struggles, and lack of collegial engagement that do not enhance the learning environment for the educators. Redundancy of the required professional development topics seemed to be a recurring trend in the conversations in the current study because the relevance to their students' needs and their needs as educators was missing in the annual required trainings. Although the professional development may have been described as helpful, there was little discussion of how participants' confidence levels increased because of their attendance at the same professional development series yearly.

<center>**Limitations of the Study**</center>

The first limitation of this study was that the sample size was small and made implications for a population difficult to determine. The perspectives from this sample

may not have been reflective of a larger population of educator participants or of public pre-k educators in other states. The delimitations of the study were that pre-k teachers who were not working in the study site district, including private charter schools, were not part of this study. However, these educators may have faced the same professional development requirements as those in the study site district. In addition, co-teachers and uncertified educators assigned as lead teachers were not considered for this study, but they are often required to attend the same trainings as lead teachers and could have offered similar insight into the phenomenon. Lastly, any pre-k teacher who was not working with students who were 3 through 5 years old or who was currently on leave (e.g., family medical, maternity, paternity, long-term or short-term disability) was not invited to participate in this study. Many of these teachers, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic in which they may have taken leave for various reasons, could have contributed valuable data to support the research findings. However, the pandemic circumstance resulted in a more focused study, and the limitations created opportunities for future studies.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives of the characteristics of district-level, school-based, and/or teacher-selected professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. Yoo (2016) suggested that future research should be done regarding teacher self-reflections about how their self-efficacy was developed and how it evolved as a result of professional

development. The current study added to the literature by offering an in-depth understanding of pre-k educators' perspectives regarding the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance. Based on the findings from this research, I have three recommendations. First, teacher professional development needs and interests should be assessed on a semiannual basis through an educator-created tool that assesses teacher professional development interests with the intent of developing personal professional learning plans. In this model, district-mandated professional development can become customized rather than universal. In almost every interview, teachers lamented that no one asked them what they needed. Even those who said that they responded to the surveys after professional development days felt that none of their feedback was honored or put into practice. Second, I recommend the creation of district-wide and school-based professional learning communities. Teachers could be matched by grade and selected learning opportunities. For example, pre-k teachers who wanted more training in social emotional skills would be grouped in professional learning teams. These professional learning teams could meet in person, online, or in a hybrid fashion to satisfy the need for engaging professional development with relevant discourse and collaboration focused on the pre-k classrooms' specific needs. The third recommendation is that school-based professional development should be responsive to school needs. Individual school leaders could use the teacher performance evaluations to create specialized professional development sessions to address specific teacher learning needs to improve their performance. These professional development plans could be focused on growing teacher confidence and improving performance in areas where their

school administrators have identified shortcomings. These plans would likely prove more beneficial than all teachers attending the same required trainings each week.

Implications

The implications of this study are methodological and social. This study may augment the current educational research and suggest future research directions on the professional development of pre-k educators. Further research can be conducted with a larger sample of educators from different areas and professional backgrounds to increase the diversity of opinions provided. In addition, there are opportunities for researchers to compare urban and rural pre-k educators and their perspectives of their professional needs, and to study the perceived teacher efficacy needs of veteran versus novice pre-k educators. Moreover, research can be focused on comparing the pre-k teacher perspective regarding whether self-selected, school-based, or district-mandated professional development has greater influence on their teacher self-efficacy. Lastly, findings from the current study could be used to design quantitative studies that could include a comparison of pre and post professional development tasks that evaluate student achievement and teacher performance and the effectiveness of professional development cycles based on self-assessed and/or perceived teacher needs.

As a means of effecting positive social change, this study may provide a clearer understanding of the influence professional development has on teacher self-efficacy. Perhaps school leaders and district personnel will be more open to gather teacher opinions about necessary trainings, assess their instructional developmental needs, and provide the proper customized professional learning plans. Moreover, this research may

offer professional development decision makers insight into the perspective of the pre-k educator regarding the characteristics of effective professional development. Future professional development could become more engaging in presentation, employ the expertise of subject matter experts, and offer relevant implementation strategies along with time to practice their delivery and receive feedback. As a result, the classroom experience for many students and teachers could be enhanced through meaningful, confidence-enhancing, and authentic professional development opportunities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-k educators' perspectives of the characteristics of professional development that influence their self-efficacy and performance in the areas of curriculum instruction, classroom management, and student motivation and engagement. The conceptual framework for the study was based on the work of Bandura and Tschannen-Moran regarding SLT, SCT, self-efficacy, and teacher self-efficacy. This basic qualitative study addressed the perspectives of certified, lead pre-k educators with a goal of promoting positive social change by augmenting the professional literature on this topic, promoting further research, and possibly improving professional development implementation processes for numerous school districts. From this research, I made three recommendations: (a) semiannual professional development needs assessments for all teachers through an educator-created tool that gauges teacher professional development interests with the intent of developing personal professional learning plans, (b) the creation of district-wide and school-based professional learning communities, and (c) school-based professional development series that are responsive to

school needs This research has shown that investing in increasing teacher confidence is investing in student achievement.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interviews will be conducted via Zoom Teleconferencing Software and recorded to the researcher's computer and begin with a researcher introduction, review of Informed Consent, reiteration, and consent to recording, and solicitation of additional questions.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. Please describe your teaching experiences (i.e.: only early childhood, any mixture of grades or levels, and/or different subject matters taught).

3. Please describe the professional development in which you have participated within the last 12 months.

4. How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to instruct the assigned curriculum to your students?

5. How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to manage student behavior?

6. How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to engage and motivate your students?

7. How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in instructing the assigned curricula to your students?

8. How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in managing student behavior?

9. How would you describe the role that professional development has played in

    developing your confidence in engaging and motivating your students?

    Probing Questions:
a. How were your professional development needs assessed?

b. Was your professional development self-selected, school-based, or district

    mandated?

c. In what way(s) do you believe your confidence impacts your performance?

d. What was the most important element of the professional developments (i.e.:

    topic, presentation format, or instructor's delivery style)?

e. Please share why this characteristic of professional development was most

    important.

    Interview will end with another probe for additional participant inquiries and
    an expression of gratitude.

Cross-Tabulation of Interview Questions

Research questions	Interview questions
RQ1: What are prekindergarten educators' perspectives on the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their own ability to be effective in the area of curriculum instruction?	IQ #3: Please describe the professional development in which you have participated within the last 12 months. IQ #7: How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in instructing the assigned curricula to your students?
RQ 2: What are prekindergarten educators' perspectives on the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their own ability to be effective in the area of classroom management?	IQ: #3: Please describe the professional development in which you have participated within the last 12 months. IQ #8: How would you describe the role that

	professional development has played in developing your confidence in managing student behavior?
RQ #3: What are prekindergarten educators' perspectives on the characteristics of professional development that increased their confidence in their own ability to be effective in the area of student motivation and engagement?	IQ #3: Please describe the professional development in which you have participated within the last 12 months.
	IQ #9: How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in engaging and motivating students?

Self-Efficacy Factors	Interview Questions
1. SEF #1: I think I know how to tie my teaching with my students' everyday interests.	IQ #4: How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to instruct the assigned curricula to your students?
	IQ #7: How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in instructing the assigned curricula to your students?
2. SEF #2: I believe my teaching produces a positive change in my students' lives.	IQ #6: How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to engage/motivate students?
	IQ #9: How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in engaging and motivating students?
SEF #3: I feel that my students willingly comply with my requests and instructions in the classroom.	IQ #5: How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in

	your ability to manage student behavior?
	IQ #8: How would you describe the role that professional development has played in developing your confidence in managing student behavior?
SEF #4: I believe that I am a highly capable teacher.	IQ #4: How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to instruct?
	IQ #5: How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to manage student behaviors?
	IQ #6: How would you describe the level of confidence you possess in your ability to engage and motivate students?

Appendix B: Teacher Self-Efficacy Influences

Type of professional development	Sample of Responses
District-mandated Professional Development	"… it's hard to pinpoint those students that need that social emotional piece online. So, it hasn't really been as helpful."-#2010RSE
	"There is a big focus on relationship building in the professional development for early childhood teachers. I don't know that it had a huge impact on my confidence though."-#2003ENE
	"It's just been professional development about how to deal with the social emotional issues from a child's perspective. Not as much content. I feel a lot of this social emotional is redundant." -#2010RSE
	"Some of that professional development was given through outside service and it was helpful to have that as the focus of the professional development. But again, year after year, it gets a bit repetitive."-#2008KrNE "We've been trying to adjust, so a lot of our professional developments have been geared towards us learning new platforms to better support our students. I don't know that they are the most effective." -#2001ASE
	"In terms of trainings for my specific teaching content, you know, I don't know what this says about our district public schools, but I can't really think of any that influenced my confidence, you know. "-#2005JSE
	"I honestly can't say that the district's professional development has motivated me. For one thing, one size doesn't fit all…a lot of times I've talked to other pre-k teachers. We are not always considered as much." #2009MNE
	"For example, our professional development is already pretty much decided, the content is already put into place, it's just a matter of us having to go over even

	something that we already know. How beneficial is this? Sometimes it is like do we really have to sit in this meeting, you know?" -#2001ASE
Self-selected Professional Development	"So, then my personal professional development experiences, the topics and presenters that are in line with my own personal interest and teaching style, I typically find those more productive and engaging; they push my practice a bit further than the district professional development experiences." -#2008KrNE
	"Sometimes I will take a day off and go observe at a private preschool, you know, just to get other ideas and talk to educators about what's working for them."-#2005JSE
	"Thinking of children as citizens in the world I did not feel confident in those settings…I did not know what any of this was. I think it's made me much more confident to bring those ideas to my classroom." -#2003ENE
	"The professional development I've taken recently helped me with new ideas that would spark interest; to engage them through movement, to identify similarities between them and their peers, and giving them a voice. I'm confident that I am reaching them more." -#2006KNE
	"I think it's very motivating because it was geared towards seeing children as citizen and that they have a viewpoint and they can make a difference, but the whole nature of that professional development was about motivating students and the teachers." -#2004GNE
School-based Professional Development	"But in terms of the content that is given to the team leader to disseminate, I do not find that helpful. It is at best a review. But generally, not helpful professional development for me." -#2005JSE
	"I feel like the professional development has been geared towards me learning the school's way of doing things…how I am supposed to collaborate with my

assistant teacher and how we're supposed to present the curriculum to our students."-#2002CNE

"I have regular meetings about project work with my colleagues and we just wrapped up our project…a lot of it is kind of built in a little bit for me, which is lucky because I am talking to my colleagues."-#2007KriNE

"In my professional development, there are some things that help me. It helped me to understand what kindergarten teachers are looking for; I focus on those items when I write their IEPs. When I do their objectives, it is helpful." -#2009MNE

"They share the strategies, so you can see the strategies in action, so I am learning those strategies and implementing while the artist is there to support me."-#2006KNE

"I reached out to my administrator and asked her if she was willing hire someone from the curriculum company. She did so that was beneficial because they were able to show us what it would look like in the classroom." #2001ASE