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Current Status and Influencing Factors of Academic Self-Efficacy Among Pre-Service English Teachers

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Abstract: ***This study explores the current state of academic self-efficacy and its influencing factors among 111 second-year pre-service teachers majoring in English Education at a vocational technical college in Guangdong Province, China. The analysis shows that students' academic self-efficacy significantly varies with their academic performance and place of family residence, aligning with prior research emphasizing the role of academic achievement and socio-cultural background in shaping self-efficacy beliefs. However, findings reveal no significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and parenting styles or parental educational attainment, contradicting earlier studies that suggested these factors typically influence students' perceptions of their academic capabilities. This discrepancy indicates that parenting style and parental education may have limited relevance in this specific context. Thus, targeted interventions to enhance academic self-efficacy should consider the unique educational and social characteristics of this student population, highlighting the necessity of context-specific strategies in teacher education programs.***

Keywords: Academic self-efficacy, Pre-service teachers, Academic achievement, Family residence, Vocational education.

1. Introduction

Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully complete specific academic tasks. In the learning process of pre-service teachers, academic self-efficacy plays a crucial role, directly influencing their learning motivation, learning strategies, academic performance, and future teaching abilities. As future educators, the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers not only affects their academic performance but also influences their teaching preparation and method selection. Therefore, studying the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers is of great significance for improving the quality of teacher education and the teaching effectiveness of future educators.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and Importance of Academic Self-Efficacy

Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to achieve success in specific academic tasks or academic goals. Bandura (1997) suggested that self-efficacy is a determining factor for behavior, motivation, emotion, and cognition. Academic self-efficacy significantly impacts students' learning motivation, task selection, effort, and persistence. For pre-service teachers, higher academic self-efficacy helps them adopt more proactive coping strategies when faced with academic challenges, thereby improving academic performance and learning outcomes.

In teacher education, academic self-efficacy is even more important. Pre-service teachers need to master subject knowledge and prepare for their future teaching careers. Academic self-efficacy directly affects their teaching preparation, teaching method selection, and the implementation of teaching practices (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Research shows that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy can positively predict their professional identity, and through the mediation of professional identity, it also positively predicts their job satisfaction (Xie et al., 2019). Therefore, studying the mechanisms and influencing factors of academic self-efficacy in pre-service teachers is of profound importance for improving the teaching quality of future educators.

Academic self-efficacy not only directly impacts the academic performance of pre-service teachers but is also closely related to learning engagement and teaching practices. Research shows that academic self-efficacy has a significant positive predictive effect on learning engagement. Fang (2024) found that pre-service teachers with higher academic self-efficacy exhibited higher learning engagement and stronger classroom participation, which laid a solid foundation for their academic achievements and future teaching practices.

2.2 Influencing Factors of Academic Self-Efficacy in Pre-service Teachers

Research shows that the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers is influenced by various factors, which can be divided into internal and external factors.

2.2.1 Internal Factors

Internal factors affecting academic self-efficacy mainly include learning motivation, classroom engagement, learning strategies, and more. Fang (2024) conducted a survey and in-depth interviews to explore the relationship between pre-service teachers' perceptions of the classroom environment and their academic self-efficacy, finding that a positive classroom environment significantly enhances academic self-efficacy. Additionally, learning motivation and learning engagement have a significant impact on academic self-efficacy. Pre-service teachers with higher academic self-efficacy typically demonstrate stronger learning motivation and more active engagement in learning, which, in turn, promotes academic achievement.

Factors such as gender and grade level also influence academic self-efficacy. Li & Yang (2016) found that students from urban areas tended to report slightly higher self-efficacy compared to those from rural areas, but no significant gender differences were observed. Pre-service teachers in higher grade levels generally exhibited better self-efficacy, as they had accumulated more experience and confidence during their studies.

2.2.2 External Factors

External factors influencing academic self-efficacy include educational environment, social support, teacher-student relationships, and more. Pei & Zhang (2020) found that information technology use experience significantly impacted the self-efficacy of English pre-service teachers. In a digital educational environment, the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers showed a positive correlation with their attitudes toward online teaching, indicating that the use of modern educational technology can effectively enhance academic self-efficacy.

Moreover, social support and teacher-student relationships are important external factors influencing academic self-efficacy. Yu et al. (2018) demonstrated that social support positively promoted the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers, especially in high-pressure academic situations. Social support can effectively alleviate anxiety and enhance academic confidence.

2.2.3 Family and Socioeconomic Factors

Family influences, particularly parental education level and occupation, can have an indirect impact on children's academic self-efficacy. Studies have shown that educated parents often set higher educational expectations, which can positively affect their children's self-efficacy (Fan & Williams, 2010). The involvement of parents, especially those in high-status occupations, can provide children with more educational support, which in turn can enhance self-efficacy (Xing & Rojewski, 2018). Furthermore, the socioeconomic status (SES) linked with parental occupation affects the educational resources and opportunities available to children, indirectly influencing their self-efficacy (Shı & Ko, 2023).

Additionally, studies suggest that children in urban areas tend to have higher academic self-efficacy than those in rural areas due to better access to educational resources and extracurricular opportunities (He et al., 2023). These socioeconomic factors are crucial in shaping pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy, providing a foundation for their academic and professional success.

2.3 Strategies for Enhancing Academic Self-Efficacy of Pre-service Teachers

Enhancing the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers is a crucial way to improve the quality of teacher education. Firstly, optimizing the teaching environment and classroom atmosphere is key to enhancing academic self-efficacy. Teachers can encourage pre-service teachers to actively participate in classroom activities, provide timely feedback, and offer support to strengthen their self-efficacy. Secondly, cultivating pre-service teachers' learning motivation and learning strategies is also essential for improving academic self-efficacy. By offering effective learning strategy training and psychological counseling, pre-service teachers can build confidence and enhance their sense of control over academic tasks.

Additionally, the establishment of a social support system is also crucial. Strong social support can effectively enhance the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers. Schools can provide more psychological support and academic guidance by establishing platforms for teacher-student interaction and offering academic support services, thereby helping pre-service teachers increase their self-efficacy.

To sum up, academic self-efficacy plays a vital role in the academic development and teaching practices of pre-service teachers. The factors influencing academic self-efficacy are diverse, including both internal factors, such as learning motivation and engagement, and external factors, such as educational environment and social support. Improving the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers is not only beneficial to their academic growth but also contributes to the enhancement of their teaching quality in the future.

3. Research Method

Based on the literature review discussed above, this study aims to explore the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers by specifically examining a sample of 111 second-year students majoring in English Education from a three-year vocational and technical college located in Guangdong Province, China. The following section describes the research methods used to investigate students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy, the factors influencing their efficacy beliefs, and how these variables interrelate. This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of the dynamics discussed in the literature and help inform targeted educational strategies and practices.

In this study, the research tool employed for measuring academic self-efficacy was designed by Liang (2000) for college students based on both domestic and international academic motivation scales. The tool divides academic self-efficacy into two independent dimensions: learning ability self-efficacy and learning behavior self-efficacy. The learning ability self-efficacy assesses an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully complete academic tasks, achieve good grades, and avoid academic failure. On the other hand, learning behavior self-efficacy measures an individual's judgment and confidence in their ability to adopt effective learning methods to achieve their academic goals. The scale consists of 22 items altogether and 11 items for each dimension, with each item rated on a five-point Likert scale, where higher scores reflect greater self-efficacy.

Reliability analysis indicated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of .87 for the Learning Ability subscale and .86 for the Learning Behavior subscale. The overall internal consistency of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale was also high (Cronbach's α = .89). Moreover, confirmatory factor analysis provided evidence supporting the structural validity of the scale, with each item demonstrating

strong factor loadings on their respective factors. Thus, this scale is validated and reliable, effectively capturing college students' perceptions of their academic capabilities and learning behaviors in the Chinese higher education context, making it an appropriate tool for assessing academic self-efficacy among university students.

4. Research Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Based on the valid questionnaires of 111 second-year students majoring in English Education, the reliability analysis of the Learning Self-Efficacy scale (see Table 1) indicates excellent internal consistency across its dimensions and the total scale. The Cronbach's α for the Learning Ability dimension (Items 1-11) is .93, suggesting that this dimension reliably measures learning ability self-efficacy with a high degree of consistency. The Cronbach's α for the Learning Behavior dimension (Items 12-22) is .88, which is slightly lower but still indicates strong reliability in measuring learning behavior self-efficacy. The overall Learning Self-Efficacy scale (Items 1-22) shows a Cronbach's α of .94, reflecting excellent reliability for the entire scale. These high reliability values suggest that the scale and its individual dimensions are highly consistent and valid measures of learning self-efficacy.

Table 1: The reliability analysis of the Learning Self-Efficacy scale

Dimension	Items	N	Cronbach's α
Learning Ability	1-11	11	.93
Learning Behavior	12-22	11	.88
Total: Leraning Self-Efficacy	1-22	22	.94

4.2 Demographic Data

The demographic data reveals that the majority of participants are female, accounting for 93.7%, and most students have a "good" score in their English major, comprising 52.3%, followed by those with an "average" score at 36%. Nearly half of the participants, 46.8%, come from rural areas, while smaller proportions are from towns (15.3%), county towns (18.9%), and cities (18.9%). In terms of parenting styles, 66.7% of students were raised with a democratic approach, 20.7% with a permissive style, and 12.6% with an authoritative style. Regarding educational attainment, a significant number of fathers (70.3%) have completed junior high school or less, and most mothers (73.9%) also have a similar level of education. As for occupations, fathers predominantly work in commerce and service industries (44.1%) or in agricultural sectors (27.9%), while mothers are primarily employed in commerce and service industries (48.6%) or in agriculture (27%).

4.3 Current Status of Academic Self-Efficacy of English Pre-service Teachers

The descriptive statistics (See Table 2) indicate that the overall academic self-efficacy level among English pre-service teachers is moderately high, with a mean score of 3.18 (SD = .56). Specifically, students reported a mean of 3.16 (SD=.65) for learning ability, suggesting a generally positive perception of their academic capabilities; however, considerable variation exists, as scores ranged from 1.18 to 4.91. For learning behavior, the mean score was slightly higher at 3.20 (SD=.54), indicating that most students feel relatively confident about their ability to adopt effective learning methods, with scores spanning from 1.73 to 4.64. Overall, these results suggest that pre-service English teachers possess moderately high academic self-efficacy.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Learning Self-Efficacy

	N	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*
Learning Ability	111	1.18	4.91	3.16	.65
Learning Behavior	111	1.73	4.64	3.20	.54
Learning Self-Efficacy	111	1.91	4.59	3.18	.56

4.4 Correlation Analysis

4.4.1 The ANOVA Results on Academic Performance on Learning Self-Efficacy

The ANOVA results (see Table 3) reveal significant differences in the level of learning self-efficacy among students based on their academic performances in the English major. Overall, students who achieved higher academic scores reported higher learning self-efficacy ($F=8.01$, $p< .01$). Specifically, students classified as "Excellent" (M=3.86, SD=.57) exhibited notably greater overall learning self-efficacy compared to students who were categorized as "Good" (M=3.27, SD=.51), "Average" (M=3.06, SD=.52), and "Pass" (M=2.58, SD=.44).

Regarding sub-dimensions, the learning ability dimension demonstrated significant differences across groups ($F=9.67$, $p< .01$). Students with "Excellent" performance (M=3.91, SD=.63) had significantly higher scores compared to the other groups, particularly when compared to those in the "Pass" category who scored lowest. This result suggests that students with higher academic achievement possess significantly greater confidence in their academic capabilities.

Similarly, significant group differences were observed in the learning behavior dimension ($F=4.67$, $p< .01$). Students in the "Excellent" category reported the highest mean scores (M=3.82, SD=.55), followed by "Good" (M=3.25, SD=.51), "Average" (M=3.11, SD=.55), and the lowest for the "Pass" group (M=2.58, SD=.44). This indicates that higher-achieving students also perceive themselves to be more effective in adopting positive learning behaviors compared to their lower-performing counterparts.

Table 3: The ANOVA Test on Academic Performance on Learning Self-Efficacy

	Academic Performance	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*p*
Learning Self-Efficacy	Excellent (≥90)	6	3.86	.57	8.01**	.00
	Good (80-89)	58	3.27	.51		
	Average (70-79)	40	3.06	.52		
	Pass (60-69)	7	2.58	.44		
	Total	111	3.18	.56		
1) Learning Ability	Excellent (≥90)	6	3.91	.63	9.67**	.00
	Good (80-89)	58	3.28	.59		
	Average (70-79)	40	3.01	.55		
	Pass (60-69)	7	2.34	.64		
	Total	111	3.16	.65		
2) Learning Behavior	Excellent (≥90)	6	3.82	.55	4.67**	.00
	Good (80-89)	58	3.25	.51		
	Average (70-79)	40	3.11	.55		
	Pass (60-69)	7	2.83	.34		
	Total	111	3.20	.54		

Note: **p<.01

According to the post-hoc test results, in the dimension of Learning Ability, significant differences were found between students with varying academic performance levels. Specifically, students with "Excellent" performance (scores ≥90) demonstrated significantly higher learning ability self-efficacy compared to those classified as "Average" (scores =70-79) (MD=.90, p< .01) and "Pass" (scores =60-69) (MD=1.57, p< .01). Similarly, students with "Good" performance (scores =80-89) had significantly higher self-efficacy than students in "Average" (MD= .27, p< .05) and "Pass" (MD= .95, p< .01) categories.

In terms of learning behavior self-efficacy, significant differences were also observed. Students classified as "Excellent" reported significantly higher learning behavior self-efficacy than those categorized as "Average" (MD=.71, p< .05) and "Pass" (MD=.99, p< .01). Additionally, "Good" students showed significantly higher self-efficacy scores than those in the "Pass" category (MD=.57, p< .05). These results suggest a strong association between higher academic achievement and enhanced self-efficacy in both learning abilities and behaviors.

Overall, these results indicate that students with higher academic performance perceive significantly greater academic self-efficacy across both learning ability and behavior dimensions. Particularly, the most substantial differences emerged between the highest-performing ("Excellent") and lowest-performing ("Pass") groups, highlighting that stronger academic outcomes correlate closely with elevated confidence in both personal academic capabilities and effective learning behaviors.

4.4.2 The ANOVA Results on Place of Family Residence on Learning Self-Efficacy

Table 4: The Anova Test on Place of Family Residence on Learning Self-Efficacy

		N	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*p*
Learning Self-Efficacy	rural area	52	3.17	.54	2.89*	0.04
	towns	17	3.31	.56		
	county town	21	2.92	.58		
	cities	21	3.38	.52		
	Total	111	3.18	.56		
1) Learning Ability	rural area	52	3.11	.58	2.67	0.05
	towns	17	3.35	.60		
	county town	21	2.91	.84		
	cities	21	3.39	.55		
	Total	111	3.16	.65		
2) Learning Behavior	rural area	52	3.23	.54	2.73*	0.04
	towns	17	3.26	.55		
	county town	21	2.93	.46		
	cities	21	3.37	.55		
	Total	111	3.20	.54		

Note: *p<.05

The ANOVA analysis (see Table 4) reveals significant differences in learning self-efficacy among students from different family residences. Students from cities reported the highest overall learning self-efficacy (M=3.38, SD=.52), followed closely by those from towns (M=3.31, SD=.56), with rural area students slightly lower (M=3.17, SD=.54), and students from county towns reporting the lowest scores (M=2.92, SD=.58); this difference was statistically significant (F=2.89, p<.05).

Similar patterns emerged in the two sub-dimensions: students from cities exhibited the highest learning ability self-efficacy (M=3.39, SD=.55), whereas those from county towns showed the lowest scores (M=2.91, SD=.84), with significant group differences observed (F=2.67, p=.05). For learning behavior self-efficacy, city students again reported higher scores (M=3.37, SD=.55) compared to students from county towns (M=2.93, SD=.46), rural areas (M=3.23, SD=.54), and towns (M=3.26, SD=.55), with these differences being significant (F=2.73, p<.05). These findings suggest that place of family residence is a meaningful factor associated with pre-service teachers' perceived academic self-efficacy, with urban students generally showing higher confidence in their academic abilities and behaviors.

The Post-hoc test results indicates significant differences in learning self-efficacy based on participants' place of family residence. Specifically, students from cities showed significantly higher overall learning self-efficacy compared to those from county towns (MD = .46, p<.05). Within the learning behavior dimension, students from cities also scored significantly higher than those from county towns (MD = .45, p<.05).

However, no statistically significant differences emerged among other residential groups. Although differences were observed in the learning ability dimension, these differences were not statistically significant, suggesting that family residence might have a stronger influence on behavior-related aspects of academic self-efficacy compared to learning ability. Overall, students from urban environments (cities) tend to exhibit higher self-efficacy, particularly regarding learning behaviors, compared to students from smaller residential areas, such as county towns.

4.4.3 Results in other aspects

Based on the ANOVA results, no statistically significant differences were found in learning self-efficacy among students grouped according to their parents' occupations. Specifically, the dimension of learning ability showed no significant difference among occupation groups (p>.05). Similarly, the learning behavior dimension revealed no significant differences across groups (p>.05). Additionally, the overall learning self-efficacy measure did not show significant differences across occupational groups (p>.05). These results indicate that parental occupation, as categorized in this analysis, does not appear to have a significant influence on pre-service teachers' perceived academic self-efficacy.

The data analysis also indicates that there are no significant correlations between students' academic self-efficacy and their parents' parenting styles or their parents' educational attainment levels. Specifically, the different parenting styles (democratic, authoritative, permissive) adopted by parents did not significantly influence students' reported academic self-efficacy. Additionally, the analysis revealed that parents' educational attainment, including varying levels from junior high school or below to bachelor's degree or higher, also showed no statistically significant relationship with the students' perceived academic self-efficacy. This finding suggests that within this specific student group, parenting styles and parental education levels might not substantially

affect their self-perceptions related to academic abilities and behaviors.

5. Discussion

The current study investigated the relationship between pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy and various demographic and educational factors, aligning findings with previous literature. Overall, the study affirmed the importance of academic achievement and family residence as significant factors impacting academic self-efficacy, while parental occupation did not demonstrate significant effects.

Firstly, consistent with previous research (Li & Yang, 2016; Fang, 2024), students with higher academic achievement levels reported significantly higher academic self-efficacy scores. Specifically, students classified as "Excellent" demonstrated substantially greater self-efficacy in both learning ability and learning behavior dimensions compared to lower-achieving students, particularly those categorized as "Pass." This finding confirms the theoretical expectation proposed by Bandura (1997), that successful academic experiences strengthen individuals' confidence in their capabilities, thereby positively influencing future learning motivation and behaviors.

Regarding place of family residence, significant differences emerged in the academic self-efficacy of students from varying residential backgrounds. Consistent with prior research (He et al., 2023), urban students reported higher overall academic self-efficacy and notably higher confidence in learning behaviors compared to those from smaller residential locations, particularly county towns. Such differences likely reflect disparities in educational resources and socio-cultural opportunities, as urban areas typically provide students with broader academic and extracurricular resources that facilitate higher academic self-confidence.

Interestingly, the analysis indicated no statistically significant differences in academic self-efficacy associated with parental occupation, contrary to previous findings suggesting parental occupation as a relevant influencing factor (Fan & Williams, 2010). Despite minor descriptive variations in self-efficacy scores among groups based on parental occupation, such differences were not statistically significant. This result may suggest that, within this particular population, parental occupation is less influential compared to individual academic achievements or family residence.

Furthermore, the descriptive statistics revealed that the sample largely consists of students from rural or towns backgrounds, with most parents holding lower educational attainments and engaging predominantly in commerce, service industries, or agricultural sectors. Previous studies (Dubow et al., 2009; Shi & Ko, 2023) have demonstrated that family educational background and socio-economic conditions can indirectly influence students' academic self-efficacy through parental expectations and available support. Thus, the relatively homogeneous lower socio-economic and educational background among this study's participants might explain the limited significant influence observed regarding parental occupation.

Conclusively, the findings reinforce the critical role of academic achievement and place of residence in shaping pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy. The results align with existing literature highlighting academic achievement as one of the strongest predictors of academic self-efficacy. The significant relationship between family residence and academic self-efficacy further underscores the importance of equitable resource allocation across rural and urban educational settings to narrow disparities in students' self-efficacy perceptions.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

6.1 Conclusion

This study supports the view that enhancing pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy requires targeted educational interventions, emphasizing academic support and psychological counseling, especially for students from less advantaged areas. Efforts should be made to improve classroom environments, learning motivation, and engagement strategies, particularly targeting students with lower academic achievements and those from disadvantaged residential backgrounds. Future research might further explore additional nuanced family-related factors and longitudinal effects on academic self-efficacy to inform more targeted educational interventions.

6.2 Suggestion

Based on the above analysis and previous literature, several practical strategies can be recommended to enhance pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy.

Firstly, educational institutions should create a supportive and stimulating learning environment, given the significant association found between academic self-efficacy and students' place of family residence. Students from urban environments generally reported higher self-efficacy, particularly in learning behaviors, compared to their counterparts from county towns and rural areas; thus, enhancing educational resources, facilities, and support for students from rural and county areas is important to reduce these discrepancies, aligning with previous studies indicating socioeconomic factors significantly influence students' academic self-efficacy.

Secondly, the current findings showing significant differences in academic self-efficacy based on academic achievement are consistent with previous research. Students classified with "Excellent" and "Good" academic performances reported higher learning ability and behavior self-efficacy compared to their peers with lower academic performance. This consistency with existing literature reinforces the importance of fostering learning strategies and study habits that lead to higher academic achievements, as such achievements boost students' perceived academic competence and confidence.

However, interestingly, parental occupation in this study did not significantly influence students' academic self-efficacy, which differs somewhat from prior research suggesting that parental occupational status and related socioeconomic status positively impact students' academic self-efficacy. This

inconsistency may be attributed to the specific occupational categories or the limited representation of certain categories. Further research with a more balanced distribution across occupational categories is needed to better elucidate the relationship between parental occupation and pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy.

In conclusion, these findings contribute important insights into the influencing factors of pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy. Consistent with previous research, students' academic achievement levels and family residence significantly affect their perceptions of academic capability and behavior. However, the non-significant results regarding parental occupation suggest the need for further exploration of the nuanced roles played by socioeconomic factors. Thus, enhancing academic self-efficacy in teacher education programs requires comprehensive consideration of individual and contextual factors, especially creating supportive academic environments and addressing regional disparities to ensure equitable educational opportunities and resources for all students.

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