

PRESERVICE CHILDCARE TEACHERS' CAREER MOTIVATIONS, COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT, AND TEACHING EFFICACY

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We investigated the effect of college adjustment and motivation for choosing a teaching career as factors that influence preservice childcare teachers' teaching efficacy. Participants were 200 preservice childcare teachers enrolled at colleges in South Korea. The results demonstrated that college adjustment had a significant mediating effect in the relationship between the active career motivation of preservice childcare teachers and their teaching efficacy. Specifically, active career motivation was positively correlated with teaching efficacy via the process of college life adjustment. It can be inferred that the choice of college major based on an active personal preference, compared to passive motivation, leads to better college life adjustment, which, in turn, correlates with higher efficacy in one's career path. This suggests the need to support students' academic and socioemotional adjustment at college as well as enhancing their course satisfaction.

Keywords: preservice childcare teachers, college adjustment, career motivation, teaching efficacy, South Korea.

Childcare in many countries has undergone a dramatic transition from being the primary responsibility of mothers to becoming the shared responsibility of parents and childcare providers in center-based programs (Park, Yang, & Wee, 2014). In South Korea, free childcare for children up to 5 years of age has been

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widely implemented since 2012. With this expansion, interest in improving the quality of care has increased. Scholars have conducted studies to investigate the influence of various factors on the performance of childcare teachers, on whom the quality of childcare largely depends. They have revealed that childcare teachers' personal creeds are a crucial factor in determining their teaching performance (E.-K. Shin, 2004; H.-Y. Shin, 2004). Especially noteworthy is teaching efficacy, which has been at the forefront of research interest since the 1990s as a predictive psychological variable (Ju, 2009; Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011).

To understand the notion of teaching efficacy, it is useful to revisit the classic concept of *self-efficacy* suggested by Bandura (1977), and characterized as the extent to which individuals believe they can organize and execute actions necessary to bring about a desired outcome. Later, Ashton (1984) expanded the concept of efficacy to include the extent to which teachers feel confident they can bring about learning outcomes. Ashton identified two dimensions of teaching efficacy: general, which is the extent to which a teacher believes that his or her students are capable of learning the material, and personal, which is the extent to which a teacher believes that his or her students can learn under his or her instruction. Ashton argued that teachers' beliefs in their ability to bring about outcomes in their classrooms and their confidence in teaching in general play a central role in their ability to serve their students effectively.

More recently, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) defined *teacher efficacy* as teachers' perceptions of their resources and strategies for bringing about student behavioral and instructional outcomes. Teachers' sense of efficacy reflects the judgments they make about their capabilities given the emotional and instrumental resources they can gather in a specific context. Previous researchers have linked higher teacher efficacy with higher job satisfaction (Y.-J. Kim, 2005; M.-Y. Lee, 2005), positive teacher-child interaction (H.-J. Kim & Na, 2006), and improved academic achievement and motivation in children (Greenwood, Olejnik, & Parkay, 1990; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Teaching efficacy directly correlates with teachers' positive role fulfillment and can, therefore, be presumed to influence the quality of childcare.

Although a wide variety of factors constitute teacher efficacy, it has been noted within motivational theory that personal interest leads to the development of expertise and, therefore, self-efficacy beliefs. Previous researchers (Poulou, 2007; Poulou, Spinthourakis, & Papoulia-Tzelepi, 2002; Song & Seo, 2011) have conducted studies with preservice teachers in early childhood education, primary education, and child studies departments, respectively, reporting that motivation for teaching was a contributory factor to teaching efficacy. Career motivation can be divided into three dimensions: active motives, passive motives, and compensatory motives. *Active motivation* encompasses internal motivations,

such as commitment, self-realization, and aptitude. *Passive motivation* pertains to instances in which individuals' career decisions are based on others' recommendations or unavoidable circumstances rather than personal preference (H.-J. Kim, 2012; Namkung, 2011). *Compensatory motivation* concerns the economic, temporal, and environmental rewards attached to the childcare profession.

Young individuals aspiring to become childcare teachers in South Korea normally enroll in childcare-related programs at a university and undergo specialized training to obtain a national childcare teaching certificate. *College adjustment*, which depends on college students' ability to comprehend the material successfully (academic adjustment), establish friendly relations with colleagues and teachers (interpersonal relationships), and find satisfaction in their discipline (specialization satisfaction), could be challenging for them. Researchers studying college students found that individuals specializing in their preferred discipline tend to adjust well to college life, which in turn leads to high self-efficacy in their careers (C.-S. Lee & Lee, 2014; J.-M. Lee, 2009). These results could be expected to apply to students who major in childcare-related courses. Once formed, teaching efficacy does not significantly change (M.-J. Kim, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze students' university life adjustment and establish the fundamentals of teaching efficacy in preservice childcare teacher training.

In summary, we inferred that the career motivations of students studying childcare teaching would have an impact on their teaching efficacy, and that how well these students adapt to university life would mediate this influence. Many researchers agree on the importance of preservice childcare teachers' teaching efficacy, but few have examined the effects of career motivation on teaching efficacy and how adjustment to university life mediates these effects. In this study we presupposed that the career motivations of preservice childcare teachers would influence their teaching efficacy and aimed to verify the mediating effect of college life adjustment in these relationships. For this purpose, we devised the following research question: Does the university life adjustment of preservice childcare teachers mediate the relationship between their motivation for choosing a career in education and their teaching efficacy?

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study were 200 undergraduates at two universities in Incheon, South Korea. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit preservice childcare teachers, who were undergraduate students majoring in Child Studies based on the curriculum for the National Certificate of Childcare Teachers in South Korea. We introduced our study to students in several large courses,

informed them of their rights, and assured them that their participation in the survey was completely voluntary. The ethical aspects of the study were properly addressed to protect the participants' rights. Once volunteers confirmed their participation, we distributed questionnaires, asked participants to answer them immediately, and collected the completed forms at that time.

All participants were women and unmarried, with a mean age of 19.66 years ($SD = 3.58$, range = 17–32). The gender of the participants reflected the make-up of the profession. There were no male students majoring in Child Studies at the two universities from which we recruited participants and the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (2016) statistics show that only 4.5% of early childhood teachers are male.

Measures

In choosing measures, we were concerned about possible cultural differences in college life and in other variables related to the teaching profession between the Korean and Western contexts. We wanted to select measures that would include the universal factors of each variable and, at the same time, consider the Korean context. The measures chosen were developed from internationally accepted scales and adapted for Korean college students.

Motivation for choosing the teaching profession. We used the Scale of Motivation for choosing the Teaching Profession (SMTP; Choi, 2006). Reliability and validity of the SMTP were confirmed in previous studies (Namkung, 2011; Oh, 2011). The scale consists of 15 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, and has three subcategories: active motivation, compensatory motivation, and passive motivation. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of the three subcategories of the SMTP were .82, .83, and .76, respectively.

College life adjustment. We measured this mediating variable using the Simple Scale of Adjustment to College Life (SS-ACL), developed and validated by K.-A. Lee, Shin, Yoo, and Lee (2008). The scale consists of 15 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, and has three subcategories: specialization satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, and academic adjustment. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of the three subcategories of the SS-ACL were = .86, .64, and .63, respectively.

Teaching efficacy. We measured this dependent variable using the Teaching Efficacy of Early Childhood Teachers (TE-ECT) scale, developed and validated by B.-R. Lee (1998). The scale consists of 25 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, and has two subcategories: general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of the two subcategories of the TE-ECT were = .69 and .84, respectively.

Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics, such as the means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients of the study variables were used to examine the data tendencies. We calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients between teaching career motivations, teaching efficacy, and college adjustment. We conducted a series of regression analyses, as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), to test the proposed mediational model in the study, and conducted Sobel's (1982) test to verify the mediating effect of college adjustment. We found a low level of multicollinearity, with the values of the variance inflation factors ranging from 1.44 to 3.68. Data analysis was conducted with SPSS version 23 software.

Results

Having calculated a simple correlation coefficient to examine the interrelation between motivation for choosing the teaching profession, college adjustment, and teaching efficacy, we found active motivation to have a statistically significant positive correlation with college adjustment ($r = .56, p < .05$) and teaching efficacy ($r = .34, p < .05$). Passive motivation, on the other hand, displayed a significant negative correlation with college adjustment ($r = -.45, p < .05$) and teaching efficacy ($r = -.30, p < .05$). Compensatory motivation showed no significant correlation. Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation ($r = .45, p < .05$) between college adjustment and teaching efficacy.

Next, by including the three types of career choice motivation and college adjustment as independent variables and teaching efficacy as a dependent variable, we conducted a multiple regression analysis. The regression model was found to be significant ($F = 13.48, p < .001$), and active motivation ($\beta = .18, t = 2.09, p < .05$) and college adjustment ($\beta = .30, t = 3.44, p < .05$) were significant predictor variables.

Per the results of this analysis, we selected active motivation as an independent variable, and conducted a series of regression analyses to verify the mediating effect of college adjustment on the influence of active motivation for choosing a teaching profession on teaching efficacy. Stage 1 demonstrated that preservice childcare teachers' active career choice motivation had a significant impact ($F = 24.16, \beta = .34, t = 4.92, p < .001$) on the dependent variable of teaching efficacy. Stage 2 demonstrated that preservice childcare teachers' active career choice motivation had a significant impact ($F = 88.29, \beta = .56, t = 9.40, p < .001$) on the mediating variable of college adjustment. In Stage 3, college adjustment was found to influence teaching efficacy significantly ($F = 47.21, \beta = .45, t = 6.87, p < .001$). Stage 4, including both preservice childcare teachers' active motivation and college adjustment as independent variables, revealed that only college adjustment had a significant influence on teaching efficacy

($F = 24.78$, $\beta = .38$, $t = 4.87$, $p < .001$). A significance test provided by Sobel (1982) for verifying the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable via the mediator yielded a result of $z = 5.59$ ($p < .001$).

Discussion

Our results demonstrated that college adjustment had a fully mediating effect on the relationship between the active career motivation of preservice childcare teachers and their teaching efficacy. From this, we inferred that the choice of college major based on active personal preference, compared to passive motivation, leads to better college life adjustment and that, in turn, better college life adjustment correlates with higher efficacy in one's career path.

Active motivation denotes personal determination with regard to career aptitude, happiness derived from the job, and the belief in self-realization through the profession. Our finding that active motivation in preservice teachers has a positive impact on teaching efficacy is generally supported by previous researchers (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Johnson, La Paro, & Crosby, 2016; Ju, 2009; H.-J. Kim, 2012). The results are also consistent with the conclusions of other scholars that, compared to passive motivation, selection of university major based on active personal preference leads to better college life adjustment (C.-S. Lee & Lee, 2014; J.-M. Lee, 2009) and that better college life adjustment correlates with higher efficacy in one's career path (Ha & Jo, 2006; S. A. Lee & Park, 2012).

While our results generally support previous findings, in our study we also integrated variables that had previously been examined only in isolation, revealing a dynamic relationship between them. In doing so, we have shown college life adjustment to be a full mediator in the relationship between active career choice motivation and teaching efficacy in preservice childcare teachers. This emphasizes the importance of providing support for college life adjustment for preservice childcare teachers, so they can realize their teaching efficacy potential. Adjusting to university life encompasses various aspects, such as understanding academic subjects, learning study methods, gaining academic success as indicated by grades, and improving specialization satisfaction in relation to aptitude and career aspirations, as well as socioemotional adjustment, including personal relationships and socializing (Komarraju, Swanson, & Nadler, 2014; Tang, Wong, & Cheng, 2016). Administrators of childcare-related programs ought to encourage students to participate in field-related extra-curricular activities to help them adjust to academic and social life at university. For example, mentor–mentee matching programs that bring together childcare teachers working in the field and students could be implemented. Through such opportunities, it is possible to provide students with experience of the

roles and responsibilities of the childcare teacher profession at an early stage, thereby improving their overall program satisfaction. It is highly likely that teaching efficacy formed through college adjustment would lead to positive role fulfillment once the preservice childcare teachers enter the field (Temiz & Topcu, 2013).

There are some limitations to this study, and further research on the subject is required. The convenience sampling method that was used raises the issue of the generalizability of the results. Another limitation involves reliance on self-reporting as the sole means of assessment. A few subscales of the measures used in the study showed Cronbach's alphas below .70, which implies that further studies using more reliable measures are needed to increase the generalizability of the findings. We suggest that future researchers try to analyze the regulating effects of relevant variables on teaching efficacy that go beyond the mediating effects of the present results. We also suggest that future researchers focus more on cross-cultural comparisons of teaching efficacy from larger samples. Despite these limitations, we have contributed to the international discourse on preservice childcare teachers' teaching efficacy, with the goal being to improve the quality of childcare.

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