

Confident teachers help preschoolers more with language and literacy skills

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New research suggests that pre-school students may gain more language and literacy skills if they have teachers with higher levels of confidence in their abilities.

However, in some cases [students](#) only saw gains when their teachers also had classrooms that emphasized [emotional support](#) for the children.

"Emotionally responsive relationships between teachers and children may be the way by which the self-efficacy of teachers can have a positive influence on children's literacy," said Ying Guo, co-author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher in education at Ohio State University.

The new study was published in a recent issue of the journal *Teaching and [Teacher Education](#)*. Guo and her co-authors examined how teachers' [confidence](#) in their teaching abilities - what researchers refer to as "self-efficacy" - affected children's learning progression in language and literacy skills.

The research involved a large, multi-state study that included 67 teachers and 328 of their students. Participants were followed over the course of 30 weeks.

Teachers were given a short questionnaire that measured their self-efficacy on a scale from one to five. The survey asked questions like "How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?"

and "How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments?"

The level of emotional support in the classrooms was measured by trained coders who coded how teachers and students interact with each other from videotapes collected during an approximately two-hour standardized classroom observation. The coders rated the quality as low, mid, or high based on a numbering scale from one to seven.

Students were given tests of language and literacy skills at the beginning and end of the 30 week period to assess improvement.

Results indicated that students whose teachers had high self-efficacy showed gains in one measure of early literary skills called print awareness, in which students were asked questions like "Show me just one letter on this page."

However, children only showed gains in vocabulary knowledge skills when they had a classroom that offered emotional support in addition to having a teacher with high self-efficacy.

"Classroom quality is important, and students seem to learn more when they have emotional support in the classroom," Guo said.

The study found that some of the factors that affected teachers' self-efficacy were certification degree and years of experience. Teachers who possessed an elementary certification had higher levels of self-efficacy than those who possessed a pre-school certification.

While the data from this study can't explain why, the researchers speculate that the additional training needed for an elementary certificate may have led these teachers to be more confident in their teaching abilities than those with pre-school certification.

An interesting result showed that teachers who had more years of pre-school teaching experience also had lower levels of self-efficacy.

"It is not that uncommon," explained Laura Justice, co-author of the study and a professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at Ohio State.

"Fresh teachers who are straight out of training think that they can change the world. Then, when they get into the work place they realize how serious and difficult their jobs really are. This is why we think self-efficacy may decline among some pre-school teachers through the years," she added.

Some of the research Justice works on involves analyzing the factors that determine the quality of teacher instruction. One of her studies found that teachers' self-efficacy was one of the few variables that affected instructional quality. "This study looks more in depth at how teacher efficacy may contribute to classroom quality, which may contribute to children's academic achievement. This paper is bringing everything together."

Provided by The Ohio State University

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