

An Investigation into the Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Primary School
Teachers and Student-Teachers

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was conducted under the direction of Patti Roche at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library at Marino may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the relationship between student-teachers' and teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and how they perceive these beliefs are influenced by, or affect areas of their profession. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy's concept of teacher self-efficacy, provided the theoretical framework for exploring this relationship. This thesis utilised both quantitative and qualitative data collections methods, supporting a two-phase sequential multi-methods study. In order to examine this relationship between perceived levels of teacher self-efficacy, 45 teachers and 68 emergent-teachers working and studying in and around the greater Dublin region completed questionnaires and some of these went on to take part in a follow-up focus-group.

The findings indicated patterns of which teacher's self-efficacy was perceived to be impacted upon by areas of teaching that lie generally beyond that of the subject areas of dispersing content knowledge. Although this pattern surfaced as a general topic across the two groups studied, the student-teachers' efficacy concerns seemed to originate more from the subject areas of teaching. The main themes that did emerge regarding issues of perceived efficacy in areas of teaching included: inadequacies in teacher-training; Special Educational Needs (SENs); English as an Additional Language learners (EAL); behavioural management, Continuous Professional Development (CPD); dealing with parents; and prioritising subject areas of teaching over non-subject areas.

Other themes did emerge throughout the study, but they were not as concrete as the ones mentioned above which came out far and above the rest. Finally, this research also aimed at examining what the participants' definitions of what makes a competent

teacher was, which revealed a mixture of skills and knowledge, coupled with previous related experiences.

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1 ʒcuimhne ΔR Shéamus Ó Conghaile ΔʒUS ΔR Pheroinsias Ó
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List of Abbreviations

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

EAL – English as an Additional Language

FG1 – Focus-Group 1 (Teachers)

FG2 - Focus-Group 2 (Student-Teachers)

INTO – Irish National Teachers’ Organisation

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

PE – Physical Education

RE – Religious Education

SENs – Special Educational Needs

An Investigation into the Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Primary School Teachers and Student-Teachers

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 An Introduction to the Study

This following dissertation will be an investigation into the self-efficacy beliefs of primary school teachers and student teachers. It is a study on the perceived self-efficacy beliefs of these two groups working and studying in Irish primary schools and teacher-training institutions respectively. Akin to other researchers, who have explored the value of Bandura's (1977, 1997) theory of self-efficacy for more than two decades in a variety of environments to understand behaviours, this researcher utilised the same theoretical framework. Specifically in relation to teacher self-efficacy, the theoretical framework that inspired the approach taken in this research comes from Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy (1998). These describe it as, "the teacher's belief in her and his ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 117).

Essentially, this theory is a person's belief in her or his own ability to perform a particular task or behaviour. Bandura (1997) emphasised that this theory is not a general quality of individuals, it is specific beliefs that an individual might possess regarding specific behaviours and tasks. An example of this might be a person with high social self-efficacy will then result in this individual having more confidence in their capacity to interact socially with others. These efficacy beliefs stem from various sources and can influence many behavioural outcomes. This research will put one of these areas under the spotlight as it investigates Bandura's (1977, 1997) theory with

respect to perceptions of competence that teachers and emergent-teachers possess. A teacher with high self-efficacy within a particular area of their profession is more likely to ‘approach, better perform, and persist at that behavior’ (DeWitz, 2004, p.8). It will have the opposite effect on one with low self-efficacy beliefs, which is not a desirable trait when working with children.

1.2 Aims of the Research

The ambition of this research project was to investigate a limited number of primary school teachers’ and student-teachers’ perceived self-efficacy beliefs regarding subject areas, as well as beyond subject areas within an Irish context. This means that it will be helpful to garner an idea of what teachers and student-teachers deem competence in teaching to be. There were two main aims of this research. The first of those was to explore the beliefs that teachers have specifically in relation to their competencies in areas of teaching and to identify which of these areas they were lacking, if any. These areas will range from disciplinary to non-disciplinary including SENs (Special Educational Needs) and behavioural management. If any patterns emerged then the next aim was to examine why teachers hold these low efficacy beliefs in these areas. Considering all teachers go through teacher-training, another aim will be to explore the impact of this process on participants’ efficacy beliefs.

1.3 Rational of the Study

In line with Bandura’s (1997) coined self-efficacy concept, and in context with this study, it can be understood as the convictions that teachers and student-teachers possess regarding their abilities to perform or learn tasks at specific levels. If these personal convictions held in relation to their capabilities are low, then the impact upon the children under their guise could be detrimental to their educational outcomes. This

study was worthwhile in order to identify whether these low-efficacy beliefs exist and if so where are they most prevalent. If these areas are recognised and understood it is only then that action can be taken to further understand and/or solve the outstanding issues in relation to low self-efficacy beliefs

1.4 Personal Reflection

I am currently undergoing teacher-training and my interest in this area was realised due to the apprehensions and concerns of my peers and I before commencing teaching practices as part of the course. My experiences and skills that I brought with me to this endeavour were in fields like maths, P.E. and history to name but a few. However, the thought of teaching music or drama to children was nerve racking to say the least, as I have never experience these subjects for myself even at primary school. I noticed also that those who were strong in these areas, were not in others and everyone had areas that they were not comfortable teaching and believed that they would be doing more bad than good to the children. This sparked my interest to investigate this phenomenon and to examine how prevalent it is, not with just student-teachers, but also teachers to determine if it is something that lasts into one's career.

1.5 Context

The context of this study was an Irish one and particularly around the urban city and county of Dublin in the year 2017. As mentioned already, it dealt with two groups of teachers, student, and qualified teachers already working in and around the Dublin area. The emergent-teachers were all in the penultimate years of study with several teaching practice experiences, and 47% of the teachers were still within their first five-years of gaining their qualifications. Therefore, the backdrop to this study is an educational one, dealing with participants from teacher-training institutions on one

side regarding the trainees, and primary schools on the other for the teachers. Both these groups captured perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs within that liminal stage straddling the worlds of pre and post qualification, and these were targeted to highlight the potential transition of self-efficacy beliefs from one realm to the other.

1.6 Methodology Outlined

The approach was a mixed method one using mostly qualitative, as the aims of this research were to gather and analyse subjective considerations of participants regarding their self-efficacy beliefs. However, there was also need for a positivist approach due to one of the methods of gathering data used. The tools used were in the form firstly of a questionnaire to be completed and submitted online, and the other method was two separate focus-groups, one for the student-teachers and the other for the qualified teachers. This study's methodological approach allowed for the exploration, description and analysis of the complex perceptions of self-efficacy, and to have them revealed and associated with particular areas in the teaching profession.

1.7 Layout

The following chapter will review the pertinent literature to explore this concept further in order to establish how Bandura's (1997) theory is related to the educational environment. Chapter 3 will deal with the methodological approach that was used in the study in greater detail and shall discuss why this stance was adopted as well as the tools used within. It will also allude to the limitation that arose while doing the study. The next chapter will concentrate on the findings that came out of the data and discuss and analyse their significance in relation to self-efficacy beliefs. The final section will conclude the research and highlight some potential recommendations.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Pertinent Literature

2.1 Introduction

Perspectives of ‘teacher competence’ will be explored in this chapter, as teacher’s perceptions of their own competence are tantamount to (Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy beliefs. Regulatory bodies will be considered including the Teaching Council of Ireland and the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) to assess their understandings of competence and what they expect. Alternatively, research by Menuey (2005) will be discussed as a view on incompetence was highlight in this work to view competence from a different perspective. It will also consider how systems of education attract teachers from different backgrounds with varying skills and/or competencies.

Teacher education will be another notable area to draw attention to when investigating teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs as all have to successfully complete this process. It will be considered from multiple perspectives including the areas that are neglected as well as the significance of this early stage in a teacher’s development which Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) attest to. Non-subject areas will be addressed including SENs and EAL learners as they are as essential to a teacher’s practice as the subject content knowledge is. Finally, it will discuss how teacher’s personal convictions, whether political and/or philosophical, might be a conflicting factor in their profession that is altering efficacy beliefs regarding the culture of the system and/or school.

2.2 Definitions of Teacher Competence

Teachers in Ireland must meet standards laid out by the Teaching Council of Ireland. The *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2012) outlines guidelines

and procedures in relation to the professional practice of teaching in Ireland. This contains a section on the 'Standards of Teaching, Knowledge, Skill, Competence and Conduct' (Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers, 2012). It states that the role of the teacher is to educate and encompasses the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct, underpinned by ethical values including respect, care, integrity and trust. However, it fails to inform the reader with any specificity as to what it means when it refers to 'competence.'

Ambiguity also exists within the body responsible for setting and maintaining standards of competence in relation to teachers acquired skills set. It may be evident from the following quote by the NCCA that they clearly make a distinction between 'expertise' and 'competence' as if they have no relation to one another. According to the NCCA, (1999, p. 21),

It is the quality of teaching more than anything else that determines the success of the child's learning and development in school. The teacher offers a wide repertoire of expertise and competences and exercises professional discretion in planning and directing the learning process.

Teachers may be aware of this ambiguity, and this may in turn affect their self-efficacy beliefs.

Akin to other professions and practices, once a teacher gains their qualification it may be assumed they possess the necessary standards and/or competencies for teaching. The concept of what is meant by a competent teacher is contentious within the literature. Liakopoulou's (2011) concentrated on the professional competence of a cohort of secondary school teachers. Her findings displayed that the majority of those

teachers surveyed, attributed their effectiveness to using a range of pedagogical skills required for effective teaching. She goes on to say that a competent teacher is one who can efficiently balance the mixture between implementing didactic and pedagogical skills on one side, with their own personal traits and aspects of pedagogical knowledge on the other.

Another approach is to look at the opposite side of the coin. Menuey (2005) researched 'teacher incompetence' and highlighted how teachers regarded certain classroom behaviours as the predominant aspects of professional incompetence. These included weak classroom management skills, as well as an inability to clearly convey content matter. Menuey (2005) also investigated how teacher incompetence can impact upon teacher/pupil relationships. The research is insightful from a legal perspective in the United States relating to the difficulties involved in dismissing incompetent teachers. Menuey (2005, p. 65) states, 'While there is no one definition of incompetence, courts have found in favour of school boards using several different understandings of what an incompetent teacher does or does not do.' These reasons range from poor classroom discipline to poor relations with parents, and displaying two or more of these has allowed courts to uphold a dismissal. It seems that teacher competence and teacher incompetence are as complex and abstract as one another and difficult to define.

2.3 Teacher Competence and "Self-Efficacy"

Difficulty in understanding competence may impact on the self-efficacy of the teacher. As it is perceptions of competence that is under investigation here, it is more suitable to use the term self-efficacy. This study defines it as the belief that specifically teachers, and emergent teachers, have in their abilities to teach. Research

conducted on teacher self-efficacy has broadly been posited within Bandura's (1994; 2002) idea of this concept. It is the extent to which a teacher is confident enough of their abilities to promote student's learning. Bandura's position on self-efficacy is that human behaviour is motivated by the interaction of two kinds of expectations. These are 'self-efficacy', which refers to one's assessment of their ability to take on and complete successfully a particular task/s within a specific context, and 'outcome expectancy', which refers to assessments about the likely consequences that their performance will bring about.

The educational systems, how they are organised, and what they expect from teachers seem to have the potential to have some impact upon a teacher's self-efficacy. Bandura's (1994) social cognitive theory asserts how efficacy beliefs are transferable between domains. If one perceives the domains to be alike then mastery in one will transfer to the other to some degree. It may be assumed that the transferable efficacy here refers to both low and high efficacy beliefs. Therefore, if a teacher does not have the expertise in certain areas expected for teaching, then this may impinge upon their self-efficacy beliefs, and become cotangent to other domains.

Pantić, Wubbels and Mainhard (2011) compared the views of teachers and teacher educators in five Western Balkan countries on teacher competence. They charted the varying educational systems in each country to determine if they impacted upon teachers' perceptions of their competence. Their findings displayed that teachers perceived competencies connected to "system understanding and development" (Pantić et al 2011, p. 181) as less important than other elements of teacher competence. They state, 'Professionals should be able to form a perspective of their profession and its changing relation with society's demands. Thus, teacher

competence should incorporate knowledge and understanding, which extend beyond teachers' being skilled in the use of particular techniques' (Pantić et al, 2011, p. 172). This position calls upon teachers to have a deep rooted understanding of the political, economic and historical concerns relating to the educational systems that they work within.

2.4 Personal Skills and Teachers' Backgrounds

Emergent teachers bring with them various transferable talents, expertise and personal skills into the profession. Unlike other professions, all applicants have already had a significant amount of experience in a school environment, although the individual experiences differ somewhat. There are currently twelve established subject areas (including R.E.) which teachers are required to have 'a wide repertoire of expertise and competences' (NCCA, 1999, p. 21). Therefore, one might expect that a suitable number of hours are dedicated to each subject area within teacher education to fully prepare emergent teachers to develop expertise in them. Some teachers may not have experienced some of the subject areas in their own education.

Although teachers bring different lifelong experiences and skills with them, some of these may be more relevant than others. Aspects such as education already attained upon commencing teacher-training may affect how self-efficacy develops. According to Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie (1987), and Hoy & Woolfolk (1993), the efficacy beliefs of teachers might generally be significantly affected by their general levels of education. Studies have shown that elementary school teachers who attended graduate school (a postgraduate school for high achieving undergraduate students awarding advanced academic degrees) were more likely to possess a strong conviction in their teaching efficacy. Tuchman and Isaacs (2011)

found that in relation to efficacy for instructional practices, formal teacher-training was more strongly connected to it, whereas the positive informal experiences were more strongly connected with efficacy for student engagement.

2.5 A Stressful Profession

Outcomes from two primary school curricular reviews highlighted how the core challenge for many teachers implementing the curriculum was that it is overloaded (NCCA, 2005; 2008). Morgan's (2015) research on behalf of the INTO (Irish National Teacher's Organisation) in relation to workload, stress and resilience indicated that teacher's work has become more stressful in the last five years. In England teaching is one of the most stressful professions, with 30-50% dropping out within the first five years of qualification (Burghes, Howson, Marenbon, O'Leary, & Woodhead, 2009). Regarding self-efficacy, Woolfolk Hoy (2000, p. 6) suggests that 'Novice teachers completing their first year of teaching who had a high sense of teacher efficacy found greater satisfaction in teaching, had a more positive reaction to teaching, and experienced less stress.'

2.6 Impact of Teacher-Training on Self-Efficacy Beliefs

When it comes to teacher-training Woolfolk Hoy (2000) states,

Student teaching provides an opportunity to gather information about one's personal capabilities for teaching. However, when it is experienced as a sudden, total immersion, sink-or-swim approach to teaching, it is likely detrimental to building a sense of teaching competence. (pp. 5-6)

The Irish teacher-training experience regarding placements is continuously shifting, varying from institution to institution. This perhaps places some emergent teachers in

a similar sink-or-swim scenario. ‘... once efficacy beliefs are established, they appear to be somewhat resistant to change’ (Woolfolk Hoy, 2000, p. 5). Much of the literature suggests that perceptions of self-efficacy are not contingent upon whether you are an emergent or experienced teacher, but instead how strongly your efficacy developed at the initial stages of teacher-training. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) attest a similar view that teachers’ self-efficacy is believed to be most malleable in the challenging early stage of a teacher’s career and then increases, becoming more firmly established with experience.

Schunk (2010) indicates how self-efficacy can alter motivation, both positively and negatively. In opposition to those with low self-efficacy, generally people with high self-efficacy will make more of an effort and persist longer to complete tasks. If emergent teachers do not perceive they are proficient in certain areas then this environment may be akin to the sink-or-swim analogy that Woolfolk Hoy (2000) professes, and may negatively affect their sense of competence. Bandura (1977) claims that those possessing stronger self-efficacy or mastery expectation, the more energetic their labours and they will be more motivated. Both Bandura (1977) and Skunk (2010) do not account for the likelihood of a person excelling in an area they once held low efficacy beliefs in.

2.7 Delegation of Time to Areas of Special Interest

The time dedicated to areas of teaching, including perhaps the availability of flexible hours to dedicate to unfamiliar areas in teacher-training, might have a contribution to emerging efficacy beliefs. Some areas may not be available for emergent teachers such as those associated with learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties or communication with students and their parents. Liakopoulou (2011)

revealed how teachers did not possess qualifications to manage these particular challenges faced in modern schools in her research. Regarding SENs, Soodak and Podell (1994) hypothesised that teachers undergoing training with children who do not possess special needs might be efficacious working in that specific environment, but believe they are inefficacious when they are confronted with pupils who have severe learning difficulties. Several studies have found that teachers of pupils with special education needs rate not having received needed in-service and pre-service training (Roll-Patterson, 2001; Werts, Wolery, Caldwell & Salisbury, 1996). Even the inclusion of pupils with a disability have been found to cause high feeling of anxiety related to low levels of self-efficacy (Soodak, Podell & Lehman, 1998).

For qualified teachers, in-service opportunities and their quality may be another significant factor as Ross (1994) claims that new knowledge presented in a professional development workshop contributes to changes in teachers' efficacy beliefs, but simple exposure to the material did not. Scribner (1999) noticed that teachers' level of efficacy influenced their response to professional development. Teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs were "opportunistic in their approach to professional learning and they sought knowledge through their involvement in activities that often were not overtly professional development opportunities" (p. 220), while low self-efficacy teachers were unable or unwilling to engage in CPD (Continuous Professional Development) because of a "perceived disconnection between the purposes of the efforts and their own needs as professionals" (p. 221).

2.8 Skills beyond the Disciplines

Beyond the direct teaching of disciplines lie other skills and tools that teachers utilise daily. Behaviour issues is said to be a principal cause for burnout and stress for

novice and experienced teachers (Blankenship, 1988; Giallo & Little, 2003; Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999; Martin, Linfoot & Stephenson, 1999; Ministry of Education, 1989; Parkay, Greenwood, Olejnik, & Proller, 1988). Martin et al, (1999) highlighted that teachers feel poorly equipped for this and point to their lack of preparation and experience. The behaviour of the children in the class may be an area that can inflict upon a teacher's efficacy beliefs. Misbehaviour can be "...any behaviour that significantly interferes with the child's own learning, other children's learning or responses, or the teacher's ability to operate effectively" (Merrett & Wheldall, 1984, p.87).

2.9 Languages

Another area that may contribute to impact upon self-efficacy beliefs is teaching English or *Gaeilge* to children who do not speak either of these as their primary language. Inquiry into this field of self-efficacy is extremely scarce (Lee, 2009; Chacón, 2002; Shim, 2001). This first five years of teaching a language to speakers of other languages has been characterised as a period of anxiety and a time of critical development (Farrell, 2009). Both behavioural management and teaching EAL (English as a Foreign Language) in the Irish context might be an area that impacts upon efficacy beliefs of teachers and will be an area to investigate.

2.10 Parent-Teacher Relationship

Teaching is one of a select few of professions that one deals with parents on a regular basis, others including paediatric positions in healthcare, child psychologists and day-care workers to name but a few, and therefore one might expect that teachers are ultimately equipped to do so. Studies have showed that parental participation in school issues has a positive outcome on teacher performance and student achievement

(Graham-Clay, 2005). An essential component of a child's education was also found with effective communication between teachers and parents (Juniu, 2009; & Kasprowicz, 2002). There are different perceptions of what a good relationship entails. Some would view it as based on shared effort and mutually valued success, while another view may judge it as a relationship void of conflicting understandings (Wilkinson, 2013). Either way, the role of the parent-teacher relationship is imperative to teachers.

Specifically regarding efficacy beliefs though, research has alluded that higher parental involvement might lead to high efficacy beliefs in teachers (Ames, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey, Jones, Walker, & Reed, 2002), as well as increased parental perceptions of teachers and the school (Ames, 1995). Hoover-Dempsey et al (2002) also suggested that teacher efficacy influenced from the parent-teacher interaction, contributes to more positive parent-teacher relationships. Similarly, Ashton, Webb and Doda (1983) linked low teacher efficacy beliefs to reduced contact with parents. Ultimately, the involvement of parents has been revealed to affect teachers' perceived efficacy of their own teaching habits; teachers' perception of parent effectiveness; and parents' ratings of schools (Ames, 1992, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman., 2007).

2.11 Teacher's Personal Value System's Effect on Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Teachers, like anyone else, possess political, social and cultural convictions and engage in interests and recreations beyond their profession. In fact, a philosophical standpoint on education may be one of a multitude of factors that attract prospective teachers into education. However, if one's educational philosophy is at odds with that of the environment they work it may impinge upon their self-efficacy

beliefs. If an educational system or culture of a school was suffering from what Freire (1968) describes as narration sicknesses (a didactic behaviourist approach to learning), then this could affect a teacher's efficacy beliefs. Especially if the teacher's epistemological stance on education is to the contrary or preferable to approaches like Steiner or the Reggio Emilia approach to early education. This can also be the case for political convictions. If a liberal minded teacher perceives that they might be contributing to the reproduction of systematic inequality in society (Lynch, 2009) through maintaining the *modus operandi* of the educational system for example, this may be a significant consideration regarding its potential impact on the teacher's self-efficacy beliefs.

Hong (2010, p. 1531) states, 'Teachers' professional identity is an important factor in understanding their professional lives and career decision making.' A challenge to this identity may lie within conformity to current educational cultures and practices which are contrary to a teacher's personal views, thus affecting perceptions of self-efficacy and motivation beliefs. Tournaki & Podell's (2005) results show how teachers with low-efficacy scores from their research not only believed they were unable to help the students, but believed that the entire system of education was not advantageous for specific students. That said, Bandura (1994) suggests how schools with staff that believe they are able to promote academic success instil a positive atmosphere for development in their schools which encourages academic accomplishments regardless of the affluent or disadvantaged pupils they may serve.

2.12 Conclusions

This review unpacks how difficult it is to define teacher competence and how both teachers and institutions associated with education have varying opinions on it.

Regardless of its subjective definitions, teachers and student-teachers can perceive that they are incompetent which can stem from, and is related to their self-efficacy beliefs. Areas that can impact upon these beliefs according to the literature include the previous related experiences that teachers bring with them or do not. Initial teacher-training and how it can shape efficacy beliefs was considered with emphasis on time dedicated to areas as well as what specific areas neglected that could give rise to high, and low efficacy beliefs. Teaching involves a broad range of skills and knowledge stretching beyond just the subject areas and some of these were addressed including SENs and EAL learners. The personal convictions and philosophical positionality of teachers was ultimately outlined as having the potential of clashing with systematic and school philosophies which in turn can impact upon efficacy beliefs.

Chapter 3: Design and Methods of the Investigation

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss how this research was planned and designed. The research design works by Cohen et al (2007) and Denscombe (2003) were pivotal to this researcher in approaching this study. Cohen et al (2007) specify a variety of methods presently employed by educational research at all phases. Plentiful and rich practical advice is offered, supported by clear theoretical grounds, research evidence and up-to-date references. Denscombe's (2003) work outlines a clear *précis* of the pertinent strategies, methods and approaches pivotal to analysing data. The research was conducted with teachers and student-teachers and how they were recruited and utilised will be highlighted and described below.

The primary aims were to seek out any potential patterns and themes that might emerge in relation to self-efficacy beliefs in specific areas of teaching. Once patterns were identified, the next aim was to interpret what meaning(s), if any, were attributed to the findings of why they exist. The tools used to extract the data from these participants will then be discussed in detail. Limitations of the study will be highlighted next before outlining some ethical considerations, and the validity and positionality to the reader. Finally, the data processing and analysis process will be briefly addressed to highlight how the data was tackled to elicit findings from it.

3.2 Design

A mixed methodology was used for the empirical data collection, using verbal and numerical data, in order to gather reliable and rounded information. It was also helpful in designing and validating the instruments. Primarily, the methodology was in the form of a constructivist qualitative research approach. This best suited this

researcher in order to investigate perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) beliefs amongst student-teachers and qualified teachers. Due to the subjective nature of the research, the design had to accommodate an approach that would allow for the generating of meaning and understanding from aspects of teachers' and emergent-teachers' input into the process. Owing to the nature of dealing within a complex social setting that is an educational environment, phenomenological and narrative approaches were explored to deal with the employees (van Manen 1990; Crotty 1996). The design also had to account for determining the frequency of perceptions and opinions, and dealt within the realm of numbers. Therefore, a form of mixed methods was implemented to facilitate this.

Authors including Cohen et al (2007) and Denscombe (2003) were used in preparation for this study. Punch (2009), favours the approach of using concrete numerical data as being a useful tool as it also deals with variables and relationships between groups. The purpose for using a mixed methodological process was to use the numerical data first in identifying trends or themes that might exist regarding efficacy beliefs in certain areas. Once these were recognised further inquiry using qualitative techniques into these areas was used to garner a less rigid and more subjective perspective. This meant firstly dealing with more people in the least time-consuming manner possible, to first locate my area(s) of interest. The next stage was to investigate these emerging topics/themes more intimately. Although Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) express how this qualitative style can be biased resulting from its subjective nature, it also allows for an *in depth* study.

3.2.1 Research Sample and Setting

This study's design was as Punch (2009) describes as being of minimal risk with no harm anticipated to come to the participants so it was decided to recruit participants from this researcher's immediate environment. 114 took part in this study ranging in ages from 21 to 60 and over; 60.2% declared they were student-teachers while 39.8% were qualified teachers; 81.4% were female while 18.6% were males. In relation to age, sex and teaching experience, Punch (2009) might suggest this was not a very fair sample. The recommended minimum number of participants to take part in a sample size according to Cohen et al (2007) is thirty although they would advise a lot more.

Circumstantially, it was more convenient for this researcher to access emergent-teachers than qualified teachers. The student-teachers contacted were mostly third and fourth year undergraduate students, and final year post-graduate students. With the exception of one of the data gathering tools used, the teachers came from a range of school settings but mostly within the greater Dublin region. Candidates were recruited by contacting them initially through e-mail, informing 271 of them that a further e-mail would follow containing a questionnaire that they could complete, if willing. Each e-mail was identical; outlining the study and the guidelines associated with partaking in (see Appendix A).

The need for a setting for gathering the numerical data was negated by implementing the choice of the online questionnaire through a Google application called *Google Forms* (see Appendix A). It facilitated participants to engage from any location using an electronic device with internet access. This option reduced the time necessary to distribute and gather the information, as well as the printing costs

involved (Cohen et al, 2007). Personalised follow-up emails, the pre-notification of the intent to survey and the use of simple formats was utilised to improve response rates (Solomon, 2001). Two focus-groups were carried out with nine participants in each, and both in different locations. One occurred in a school setting, while the other was conducted in a teacher-training institution.

3.3 Internal and External Validity

The extent to which this researcher can prove that the independent variables cause changes in the dependent variables was to keep the tool of measurement consistent for all subjects under investigation. As the majority of the participants were not confined to any one institution or setting in terms of their teaching experiences to date, the external validity is more likely to reflect to some degree what exists in the real world beyond this study, even though it only reflects views and opinions of a small sample. Conscious efforts were made to strive for a high standard of internal validity in this study where possible to achieve pronounced results.

3.4 Research Tools

There were two main lines of inquiry that I wished to pursue. The first of these was in relation to area(s), if any, that teachers and student-teachers suppose that they are not competent in. The tool that was utilised for this element of the research was a questionnaire designed by the researcher. All questionnaires were identical. This was to assist in the internal results being recorded and analysed in an objective and accurate manner (Cohen et al, 2007). The other tool used was focus-groups in order to delve into the questions on a deeper and more meaningful level.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was the most appropriate form of gathering the numerical data, recommended by Cohen et al (2007) to collect a wide range of data in a short period of time. It was also important and appropriate that the information sought was straightforward, as the data required was standardised and online without need for fact-to-face interaction (Denscombe, 2003). When constructing it, as well as hitting on subject areas, information beyond the disciplines was also considered that are essential to a teacher's daily practice, including areas such as SENs and behavioural management. It comprised of twelve questions, mostly closed with one open-ended to facilitate feedback comments at the end. There was also an option to tick if willing to volunteer for a focus-group at a later date (see Appendix F).

I used mostly a mixture of nominal and ordinal data type questions. Rating scales were utilised as they combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis (Cohen et al, 2007). To determine a frequency of beliefs and attitudes, Likert (1932) scales were used in some of the questions allowing participants choice along both a five-point, and seven-point scales. These went from 'Very Competent' to 'Not Competent' and 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. This was deemed important to highlight if patterns existed. Furthermore, questions were consciously inserted to establish previous related experience, formally and informally, in and beyond the disciplinary areas. These were to check for correlation between the competencies in areas juxtaposed to experiences. An opportunity to divulge deeper feedback was facilitated with the final question which was open-ended and this was important to assess what areas if any should have more time dedicated to them.

3.4.2 Focus-Groups

Random cohorts of participants were chosen from the questionnaires for two focus-groups. One was with teachers and the other with student-teachers and the interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder. Cohen et al (2007) attests how focus groups might be useful to utilise with other more traditional forms, such as interviewing, questionnaires, observation to name a few, as the data can be triangulated. Focus-groups allow for a richer source of data and according to Denscombe (2003) places particular value on the interaction within the group as a means for eliciting information. The questions were based off of the questionnaire structure with nuanced difference in the questions put to the two groups.

These interviews were semi-structured with the purpose of allowing the participants to interact with one another, rather than with the interviewer, ‘...in order to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic’ (Denscombe, 2003, p.169). Notes were prepared to assist the researcher to guide proceedings in both groups (see Appendix E). Nine people participated in each as advised by Morgan (1988) and questions were purposely included as a follow up to the questionnaire so that topics and themes could be pursued in greater detail and depth (Denscombe, 2003). These included teacher-training as well as the delegation of hours around the different teaching areas to elicit deeper and more meaningful responses.

3.5 Limitations

3.5.1 Ethical Considerations of Subject Matter

Arising out of consultation with this researcher’s supervisor, it was anticipated that the topic of perceived self-efficacy beliefs could give rise to ethical issues, regarding intrusive and perhaps inappropriate questions into teachers’ perceptions of

their livelihoods. Cohen et al, (2007) highlighted that the level of sensitivity and the possible invasion of privacy of questionnaires are always intrusive. Another significant limitation was the phenomenological nature of this study which can lack scientific rigour (Denscombe, 2003) leaving it vulnerable to criticism.

3.5.2 Participants Make-up and Lack of Clarity

The age range of the participants fell mostly in the 21-25 age bracket 78 (69%) and 89 (78.76%) had 0-5 years' experience teaching, which was not a wide range of participants. Also, there was a gender bias due to the majority of the participants being women. All findings must also be treated with caution and nothing conclusively can be stated due to the limited sample size. Perhaps dangerous assumptions (Cohen et al, 2007) were made that the respondents would have the information sought after, as it did not materialise as clear as anticipated at times. Questions may have been too vague at times. Also, PE was casually overlooked as an option to select on several questions.

3.5.3 Missed Opportunities, Bias and Minimal Catchment Area

It was never explicitly asked of teachers whether they felt competent in any of the areas upon completing teacher-training which might have clarified their transition of efficacy beliefs to present. On top of that, the method used to explore personal philosophies clashing, should have been clearer and was perhaps not appropriate for a questionnaire. There was bias in the teachers' focus-group as they were all working in the same environment, and there was a bias in the student-teachers' as they all study at the same institution. People may have been cautious or reserved in their answers in the focus-groups. Finally, the research was only conducted in the Irish context with a sample predominantly emanating from the greater Dublin region.

3.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity

All participants were assured that all their data from the questionnaires and focus-groups would be kept confidential and anonymous and kept stored on a password protected file as advised by Cohen et al (2007). Furthermore, in accordance with Punch's (2009) recommendation, the candidates were informed that access to the completed questionnaires and focus-groups would only be available to the researcher, the supervisor and examiners of the research thesis (see Appendix C & D). E-mail addresses were known to the researcher only, to use only to match to any potential participant(s) who might wish to withdraw from the process. The focus-group participants were assigned letters to identify them for the process of data analysis also. They were also informed that any information given would be destroyed after a period of one-year in a safe and secure and environmentally friendly fashion (see Appendix C).

3.6.1 Informed Consent

Participants were informed in plain language on the questionnaire that their consent was implied once it was completed and returned (see Appendix A). Along with this, there was further information on what the purpose of the research was (Punch, 2009), and why it was being carried out.

3.7 Positionality

Positionality describes both the researcher's world view and the position adopted by them in relation to the research they have undertaken (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Savin-Baden & Howell Major 2013). Researchers are 'inescapably part of the social world that they are researching (Cohen et al, 2007) and, indeed, that this social world is an already interpreted world by the actors, all of which undermines the notion

of objective reality (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983). Therefore, this researcher declares that it was personal experiences of undergoing low self-efficacy beliefs in areas of teacher-training, and noticing this amongst other student teachers and teachers which was the cornerstone that led to investigating this phenomenon in an attempt to overcome it through understanding it.

3.8 Data Procession and Analysis

The Google Forms application was used not just to collect the data on the questionnaires but also to interpret it by utilising internal automatic calculations which resulted in expressing the data into charts, graphs and other forms of results. This is what Cohen et al (2007) considers exploratory data analysis which is concerned with frequencies, percentage and cross-tabulations and is most closely concerned with seeing what the data suggests. It is to highlight any potential patterns or themes that might emerge across the questionnaires. The focus groups were analysed by transcribing them and listening back to them as well as comparing them with field notes taken while the interviews were in progress. The following chapter will discuss the findings and analysis in greater depth.

3.9 Conclusions

The mixed methods design and the research tools that this researcher regarded necessary to appropriately and efficiently conduct this study were discussed, as well outlining the sampling, participants and setting for the reader. The tools included questionnaires and the focus-groups and their uses were described. Limitations of the study were highlighted before outlining some ethical considerations. The validity and the positionality of the researcher were addressed before ultimately alluding to the data and analysis process which will be tackled in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings will be subjected to scrutiny in terms of what they might mean. It will focus firstly on the main themes that emerged from the overall data and highlight what initially stands out. One way this researcher will attempt to interpret the data is to adopt the stance of ‘the stranger’ (Schutz, 1962) and to bracket off any presuppositions that may exist. It will then concentrate on six main findings in relation to perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs and analyse them making reference to literature where possible. The first finding relates to participants’ perceptions of teacher competencies. Another finding related to inadequacies in teacher-training with particular reference towards areas including SENs and EAL. The next two findings relate to areas of the teaching profession including behavioural management and CPD. One other theme that was significant was in relation to dealing with parents. Finally, prioritising with respect to subject and non-subject areas also emerged as a key topic in the research.

4.2 General Themes that Emerged

4.2.1 Questionnaire Themes

Results from the questionnaire displayed that student-teachers and qualified teachers perceived they were competent in the majority of areas with the exceptions of SENs and EAL learners. Areas they did feel competent in were History, Geography, *Gaeilge* and English. A small proportion of participants believed that they were *Not Competent*, but it was noticeably higher again for SENs 19 (16.81%) and EAL 21 (18.58%) than the others. The questionnaire also revealed that teachers’ competencies were perceived to have increased somewhat by about two-thirds in categories relating

to disciplinary areas with the exception of a few. The areas of competence with significant perceptions of improvement were with SENs, Behavioural Management, communicating with parents, English, Maths and Visual Arts. *Gaeilge* was an exception displaying a small number of decreased competencies.

A finding from the questionnaires suggests that the majority of participants believe teacher-training does not supply emergent-teachers with the expertise required for teaching. Also, participants do not generally consider being currently in possession of these skills either. There is a trend in the data signifying how both teachers and emergent-teachers do not believe that they are currently competent in their profession and that teacher-training did not contribute much in this area either. Another finding indicates that the vast majority of the candidates believe not enough hours were dedicated to all areas of teaching in teacher-training. There were mixed views however on whether participants believed they are competent teaching in all subject areas.

4.2.2 Open-Ended Commentary Themes

Regarding more time that the participants believe should have been dedicated to other areas of teaching, the most frequent areas that emerged in the open-ended section of the questionnaire were mined (see Figure 4.1). The top four areas related to SENs, EAL learners, behavioural management issues, and concerns of dealing with parents. This data correlates with what emerged elsewhere in the study indicating that these areas are of particular interest to this research.

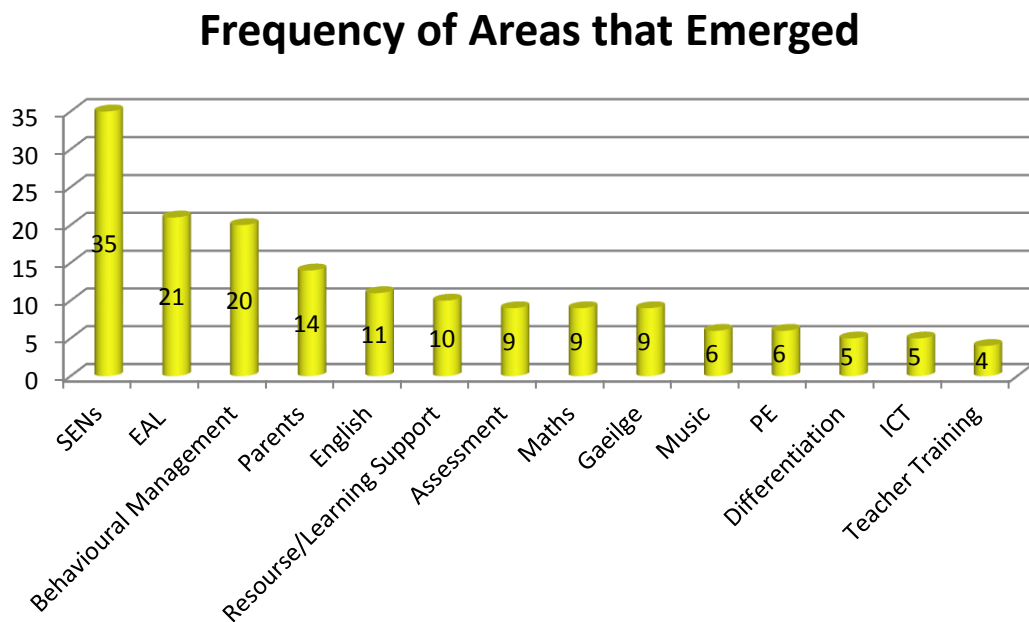


Figure 4. 1: Frequency of Areas that Emerged

4.2.3 Focus-Group Themes

The main themes were extracted from both focus-groups and a topic regarding ‘inadequacies within teacher-training’ surfaced most frequently as a feature (see Figure 4.2) with the teachers [FG1]. There were similar themes discussed by the student-teachers including teacher-training for hours that could have been better spent elsewhere. An educational culture existing within schools was also a finding that impacted upon efficacy beliefs with the teachers. The teachers also discussed CPD as significant coming out of the inadequacies of teacher-training and little incentive to rectify this. The student-teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs appear to be affected more in relation to disciplinary areas, unlike the qualified teachers. The students frequently expressed how a strong background and/or experiences in areas prior to commencing teacher-training were vital for success and perceptions of high self-efficacy beliefs.

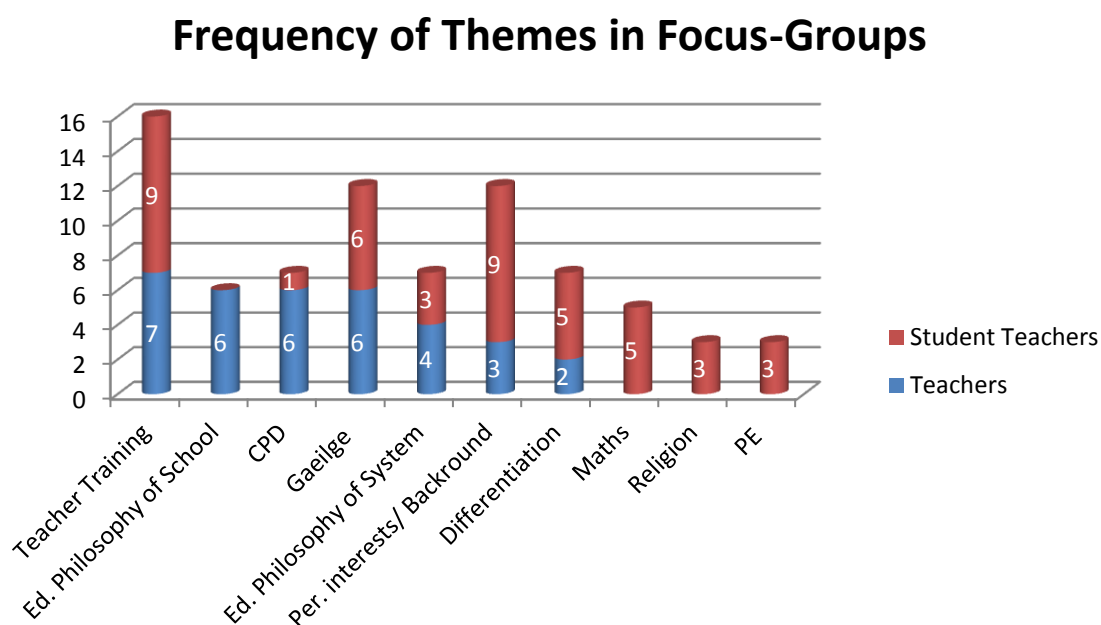


Figure 4. 2: Frequency of Themes/Topics from Focus-Groups

4.3 Perception of a Competent Teacher

4.3.1 Previous Related Experience is Essential to Teacher Competence

From the overall themes that stood out, I have extracted six of these to concentrate on. An aim of this research was to figure out what the participants believed a competent teacher to be. Therefore the first finding that came out of this research was that previous related experience was essential to teacher competence. This shone through strongly and agreement was almost unanimous in the student-teachers' focus-group that previously related experiences were significant for what it takes to be a competent teacher. Participants gave several examples of why they possess perceived high self-efficacy beliefs. Participant G [FG2, 2017] proclaimed that, "... any of the things that I'm most confident in and going on from that, feel competent in, are the things that I had a strong background in prior to this course." Akin to these ideas, the teacher focus-group attributed personal interests and hobbies

to feeling competent in certain areas. It was also expressed by Participant B [FG1, 2017] how “*You also get a bit more (competence) like, over time as well.*”

4.3.2 The Links between Knowledge and Skills

The teachers did define a competent teacher comparable to how Liakopoulou (2011) did in her study of secondary school teachers, stating that it is “*Somebody who knows their subject knowledge well*” [Participant I, FG1, 2017], “*As well as integrating all skills of classroom management, behaviour management and everything that we do daily*” [Participant A, FG1, 2017], and “*Someone that has empathy, or sympathy for what’s going on in the class*” [Participant E, FG1, 2017]. The link between the different types of knowledge and skill that Liakopoulou (2011) outlined were evident, however the teachers recognised these links more than the students who were more concerned with just the knowledge attained from previous endeavours prior to teacher-training. The students mostly attributed competence to content knowledge of subjects and knowing how best to deliver it. The significance of difference is perhaps due to the students’ limited understandings of the real applications of teaching, coupled with their own anxieties of functioning within that environment.

Menuey’s (2005) research on ‘teacher incompetence’ is suggestive of how teachers usually associate it with certain classroom behaviours including weak classroom management skills, leading to poor discipline and relations with parents. This matches some of the themes that came out of the findings above. Whether teachers, emergent-teachers, or both are concentrated on, the findings displayed a majority believing they are lacking in competence in their profession. They display how teacher-training has inadequately prepared them in these areas at the very least.

4.4 Inadequate Teacher-Training

4.4.1 Growing Competence since Beginning Teaching

The next of these findings was participants' overwhelming perceptions of the inadequacies of teacher-training to prepare them, which came under a lot of criticism across the data. The fact that teacher-training was a common denominator to all participants; it was aimed to investigate this area to assess its impact on efficacy beliefs. This early stage in teachers' careers is fundamental to developing efficacy beliefs according to Woolfolk Hoy (2000). Woolfolk Hoy found that once efficacy beliefs were established that they were resistant to change. This research found that although there were almost no declarations of decreased competence in any areas of teaching, teachers generally did believe that their competence rose since they began teaching. However, it was only significant in areas predominantly beyond disciplines with two exceptions. This was perhaps because the majority of teachers 89 (78.8%) had five years or less experience, and were still undergoing the increasing in efficacy beliefs that Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) suggests comes with experience during the early years.

Considering their beliefs in their capabilities to teach was perceived to be growing, it may also be assumed that perceptions of it were not so high upon completion of teacher-training. The results of this study do show this to be similar to Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2007) assertion of growing competence above, but there was an anomaly however in this research. The teachers generally do not believe that they have the competence required in all areas of teaching. In Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2007) study, there was no reference to whether there is a required competence that must firstly be attained, and then it

develops. Whereas, this study seems to suggest that although competence is developing in these early stages, the required competence to teach in all areas has not yet been attained by the participants' perceptions. Although the acquired experience that teachers have over their student colleagues seems to have had a diminishing impact on their low self-efficacy concerns, it was certainly apparent that teacher-training was not perceived to have prepared them sufficiently.

4.4.2 SENs

Although perceptions of competence in general were improving across all the areas of teaching, there were specific areas that emerged with perceptions of a rapid improvement of competence when compared to others. Another finding displayed how there was a trend within the data in relation to efficacy beliefs when dealing in the realm of SENs, as well as others which will soon be addressed. As indicated above, it may be implicit that if there has been a considerable perceived leap in competence in this area, then initially teachers possessed low self-efficacy beliefs with SENs upon completion of teacher-training. It must be noted however, that the student-teachers were less concerned in this area as the teachers were.

These findings are somewhat in line with Soodak and Podell's (1994) hypothesis that teachers undergoing training with children who do not have pupils with SENs, believe they are ineffective when having to confront them. The fact that teachers claim to have some, although not enough done in college regarding special needs [Participant A, FG1, 2017], correlates with their general assertion that they only feel somewhat competent in this area, as was evident across the data. Although, Soodak, Podell and Lehman (1998) discovered a link between low levels of efficacy relating to high feelings of anxiety, this researcher did not conclusively find this. The

frequency of its occurrence within participant feedback, and the nature that it emerged in the teachers' focus-group, would lead this researcher to suggest that there was an undertone of anxiety at the very least.

4.4.3 EAL

In relation to teaching English to pupils who emanate from parents whom are speakers of a different first-language, this research found that there is certainly a perception that teacher-training again is not doing much in preparing emergent-teachers for this challenge. EAL certainly protruded through the data gathered and in various guises. Akin the link that Soodak, Podell and Lehman (1998) describe between low efficacy beliefs and anxiety, Farrell (2009) expressed how the first five-years of teaching a language to a speaker of another language is also a period of anxiety. Most of the teachers in this research fell into Farrell's (2009) timeline. However, data from the teachers' focus-group revealed concerns teachers had that were focused in an alternate direction to what Farrell noticed. These teachers believed that other areas of teaching were being neglected and suffering due to the necessary over emphasis on EAL learners in their school's diverse ethnic makeup.

The context that Farrell (2009) was describing was specifically in relation to language teachers, whereas in this researcher's field, language was not the dominant objective for the teachers, and perhaps attention to deal with other areas of teaching was not being averted elsewhere in Farrell's (2009) study. Whereas in this context, the teachers have to thinly spread their time and efforts across numerous disciplines throughout the day in primary school. One teacher stated "*I feel guilty about not teaching the language (Gaeilge)*" [Participant F, FG1, 2017]. Many voices of agreement echoed after that with Participant E [FG1, 2017] suggesting "*It has a*

knock-on effect to the whole school then.” Bandura (1994) suggests how self-efficacy beliefs contribute to motivation as someone with high self-efficacy beliefs will be more motivated than someone with low self-efficacy beliefs. It was suggested that the culture of this particular school in prioritising EAL ahead of other subjects affects motivation towards those other subjects and in turn teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs as they ‘feel guilty’.

4.5 Behavioural Management

Another significant theme that emerged out of the data was in relation to behavioural management which again is one of those areas that is significant to teaching that lies beyond the distribution of content knowledge within the subject areas. Teachers feel inadequately prepared to deal with behaviour management issues. There is some discrepancy amongst the data though. One research tool used expressed how participants believed that more time should have been dedicated to this area of behavioural management in teacher-training, so that they may be a more competent teacher. However, this was not a significant theme in the other data gathering method. One of the participants claimed how *‘behavioural management is left up to yourself to figure out which shouldn’t be the case’* on a questionnaire. Nevertheless, it is a noteworthy area protruding through the study to analyse of which there is not a significant difference between the teachers’ and the emergent-teachers’ perceptions on the matter.

Although Blankenship, (1988); Griffith et al (1999); Martin et al (1999) Ministry of Education, (1989); and Parkay et al (1988) related behaviour issues as a principal cause for burnout and stress for newly qualified and experienced teachers, this research did not find the same, as it did not account for such detail when

considering this area. The aim was merely to recognise the areas in teaching that can impact upon efficacy beliefs. Now that behavioural management has surfaced as one of these areas, it might be appropriate to follow this line of research in more depth at a later stage and using the study alluded to above as a guide. Martin's et al (1999) proposed that teacher responses to misbehaviours may be mediated by their beliefs about their ability to deal with behaviour, as well as their beliefs regarding the causes of student misbehaviour. Although participant in this study deem they are generally competent in this area, it is recognisable that they believe they could have been better prepared.

4.6 CPD

These findings also indicated that in-service opportunities, as well as their pre-service training, are not sufficiently solving this issue either. As student-teachers were less concerned with areas of teaching beyond the subjects, another significant finding came from the teacher's that revealed dissatisfactions toward the educational system which was scrutinised regarding CPD. This finding exposed how incentive is lacking to undergo CPD, even though there was considerable agreement recognising its importance amongst students and teachers. Participant F [FG1, 2017] uttered a rhetorical question regarding why one would upskill when there would not be any extra remuneration for it and further stated, "*... the Department doesn't recognise it (Masters and/or Doctorate Degrees). That's a big hit for your own self-efficacy. Like if I'm not being valued, what's the point of upskilling?*" Their levels of exposure to CPD was not stated, whether it was very comprehensive in a workshop or just skimming the surface, which Ross (1994) claims the later one was ineffective in altering efficacy beliefs.

The attitudes expressed regarding CPD may correlate to what Scribner (1999) noticed regarding how responses to professional development were influenced by efficacy levels. As their levels of efficacy are considerably low, their desire to pursue and rectify this is perhaps negated by the fact, and they feel that disconnection between the purpose and the efforts of their own needs as Scribner suggests. Scribner does not mention the element that this research also unearthed relating to dissatisfaction with the apparatus and procedure *in situ* regarding CPD. Teachers are concerned that not enough time is dedicated to beneficial things [Participant G, FG1], meaning the CPD available is unnecessary as another Participant A [FG1, 2017] claims how they daydream getting twenty-hours (CPD) done throughout the Summer. This researcher ascertains that CPD is a considerable area of teaching that affects teachers' efficacy beliefs, although further investigation in the Irish context will be necessary.

4.7 Dealing with Parents

Another significant theme to come out of this research was in relation to the parent-teacher relationship and how participants believed that this affected their efficacy as they were not even slightly prepared for this element of teaching. Participant F states,

There's so much to teaching that they don't actually teach you in college. Like it's great to be able to have command of your subjects, but nobody tells you how to do parent teacher meetings, nobody tells you how to deal with awkward parents or troublesome parents... [FG1, 2017].

Liakopoulou's (2011) highlighted this particular aspect of teachers not possessing the qualifications to manage these types of encounters (communicating with parents and students) in the modern school.

This research unearthed that teachers were adamant that they were ill prepared to be dealing with parents in their working environment which is a significant part of their duties as a teacher. However, it did not exhumate findings akin to Ashton's et al (1983) connection of how low teacher efficacy beliefs result from their reduced contact with parents. The tools used were not seeking such depth in this research, but now that a link is apparent, it will be appropriate to further investigate this area of teaching and its relation to teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Research by Ames (1992) and Hoover-Dempsey et al (2002) concentrated on the levels of parental involvement in schools impacting upon efficacy beliefs of the teacher. Whereas the data here suggests, that teachers are more concerned with their ability of effectively initiating and maintaining a parent-teacher relationship, as opposed to the levels of frequent interactions within the parent-teacher relationship.

4.8 Prioritising: Subject Areas Vs Non-Subject Areas

The pattern of low self-efficacy beliefs that tends to surface mostly throughout this research is suggestive of a systematic failure of prioritisation of hours throughout teacher-training. These participants' opinions and criticisms of how pre-service and in-service did and do not respectively, amply prepare teachers for the profession and most were not favourable towards the process. Although it was noteworthy that the inexperienced student-teachers had similar opinions regarding the delegation of time, they however express alternate concerns. The teachers were more caught up in areas beyond the disciplines, such as those discussed above like dealing with parents and

EAL learners, whereas, the student-teachers were concerned within the disciplines. Participant B [FG2, 2017] emphasised how teacher-training is almost unique as there is no flexibility in the timetable, and “*skewed*” regarding too much time dedicated to non-curricular areas which “*ate a lot of time.*”

This attitude is contrary to recommendations arising out the research carried out by Pantić et al (2011), who asserts professionals should be able to from viewpoints regarding their profession to better interpret its role with the demands of society. This difference of views might be a by-product of emergent-teachers’ inexperience within the teaching profession when compared to teachers with experience. The main subjects were synonymous with core efficacy concerns for student-teachers, and teachers to some degree, as most disciplines were alluded to throughout the research. Considering the eminence and emphasis attributed to *Gaeilge*, Maths and English in the contemporary milieu of primary education, it was perhaps no surprise these areas featured most. For whatever reasons, what is important is that this research at least signifies that perceptions of how time is allocated in teacher-training by both teachers and students, is inefficient and imbalanced.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined some findings that emerged out of the methods of the questionnaires and the two focus-groups. These main areas included perceptions of teacher competence and how teacher-training is perceived to be a contributory factor that affects self-efficacy beliefs, particularly in relation to areas including SENs and EAL. It also considered other themes that arose from the data including behavioural management and CPD. This analysis and discussion then considered how

dealing with parents was a significant factor that is intertwined with efficacy beliefs before ultimately discussing the theme of disciplinary areas versus non-disciplinary areas, and how they relate to the participants' perceived efficacy beliefs.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion of the Study

5.1 Recommendations

This study delved into the perceived self-efficacy beliefs of teachers and student-teacher. It considered this phenomenon as it pursued to examine if any common trends or patterns emerged within areas of the teaching profession. This researcher would suggest that further investigation into teacher's actual competencies, while paralleled and measured alongside their self-efficacy beliefs would be beneficial in the Irish context. This approach would then shed some light on whether a correlation between the two exists or not. If the results find that actual high standards of competence and high-efficacy beliefs correlate, then there is little need to investigate further. However, if it exposes teachers with high standards of actual competence possessing low-efficacy beliefs, then this should be explored even further.

It may also be advisable to investigate both teachers' and student-teacher' attitudes of whether more autonomy over dedicating additional time towards areas in teacher-training should be given to emergent-teachers. If teachers perceive this option to be more beneficial to them than the current structure, this in turn might lead to be more beneficial for the efficacy beliefs. Another area to consider arising out of this study is to perhaps conduct a more detailed approach to examine attitudes and impacts of CPD, curriculum changes and didactic methods of teaching on self-efficacy beliefs of teachers. It would also be a worthwhile endeavour to trace the self-efficacy beliefs of a cohort of student-teacher over a long period of perhaps five years post teacher-training to measure its longevity and persistence.

Finally, a more meticulous investigation into the perceived root causes affecting self-efficacy beliefs of teachers working in areas like SENs, EAL learners, dealing with parents and behavioural management is merited. The findings of such could elicit recommendations in helping teachers to maintain high self-efficacy beliefs or at least to understand them to manage them more effectively.

5.2 Conclusions of the Study

The findings of this research suggest that there are overall patterns that surfaced which teachers and emergent-teachers perceived as affecting their self-efficacy beliefs. They emanate from all areas of the teaching profession. However, the pattern can be associated with uncertainties attributed to areas predominantly beyond subject content knowledge and teaching and learning. Although a line of distinction can be drawn here between student-teachers and teachers, as students seem to be more concerned with the disciplinary areas and how best to deliver the content, which perhaps stems from their lack of experience in the profession. Regardless of the findings, it is reasonable not to expect all teachers to have the same levels of self-efficacy beliefs. It also cannot be reasonable to expect all emergent-teachers to be walking out after teacher-training to be an expert in everything and that low-efficacy beliefs in some areas is quite natural.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Online Google Forms Example of the Survey/Questionnaire

Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey

Dear Participant,

My name is Darren Mac Gearailt and I am a Professional Masters of Education (Primary Teaching) student at Marino Institute of Education. I am conducting research for my Masters Dissertation concentrating on teachers, and student teachers' self-efficacy beliefs within Irish primary schools. Participation in this study involves the completion of a short questionnaire comprising 12 questions about your beliefs regarding an array of areas in teacher education.

I would be very appreciative if you could complete this questionnaire. All of the information you give in this research will be stored in a secure location. After a year, the information will be disposed of in a safe, secure and environmentally friendly fashion. The details of the data obtained from the questionnaire will be stored on a password protected file on my personal laptop device for my own personal use. No other persons will have any access to this device. The information will however be made available exclusively to my supervisor and additional examiners of my Dissertation. The analysis of the data will contribute towards my Masters Dissertation only.

By completing this questionnaire you are automatically giving your consent to participate in this study. However, you are free to withdraw from this process at any stage. If you wish to withdraw from this study at any time, please keep a record of your questionnaire number (or your email address) and contact me. If you have any queries regarding the study please contact me on the number below. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. For those participants that have completed the questionnaire online, please take care that you have submitted it successfully.

Thank you for your precious time and cooperation.
Kind regards,
Darren Mac Gearailt.

Contact Details
Ph.: 0876126268
Email: dmacgearailtpme15@momail.mie.ie
darrenmacgearailt83@gmail.com

1. **Email address ***

2. **Date**

Appendix B: Questions on Questionnaire

1. Please indicate if you are a ‘teacher’ or ‘student-teacher’ - Please tic the appropriate box.

Teacher Student-teacher

2. Age – Please tic the appropriate box

21-25 Years 26-30 Years 31-34 Years
 35-40 Years 41-45 Years 46-50 Years
 51-55 Years 56 – 60 Years 61-65+ Years

3. Sex – Please tic the appropriate box.

Male Female

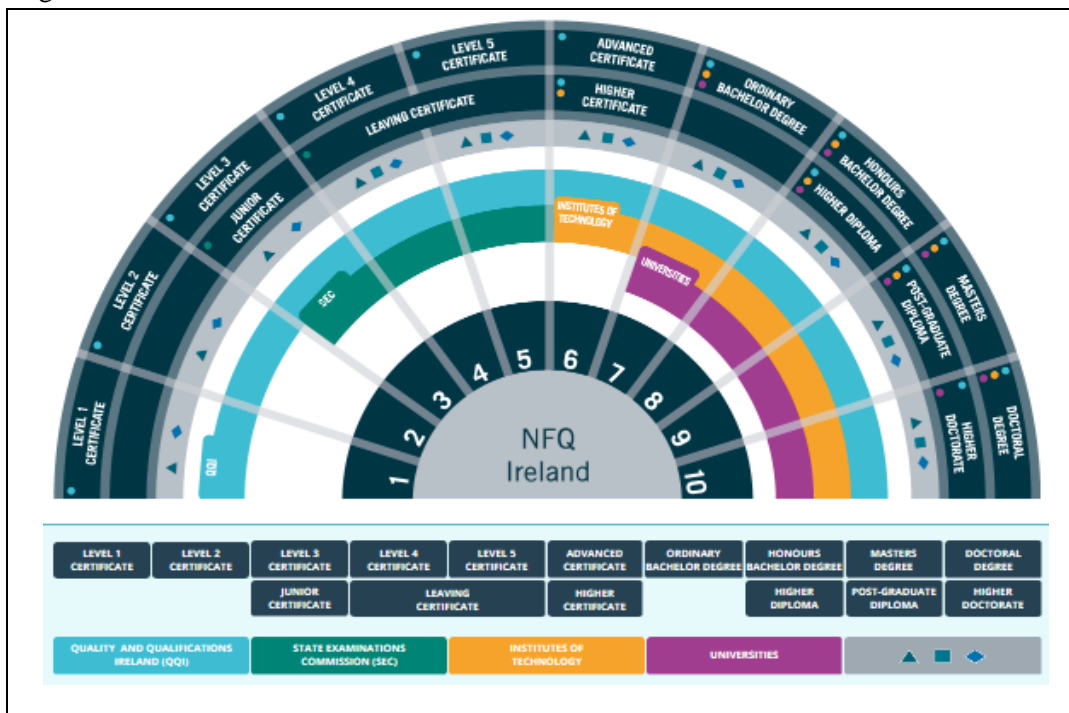
4. How many years have you been teaching?

0-5 Years 5-10 Years
 10-15 Years 15-20+ Years

5. Which route did you take to gain your teaching qualification?

Undergraduate Postgraduate

6. Please indicate your highest level of education attained to date. The graph below from the IFQ (Irish National Framework of Qualifications) will assist you. – Please tic the right box.



Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4 Level 5

Level 6 Level 7 Level 8 Level 9 Level 10

7. Which of the following subjects did you do when you were in either Primary or Secondary School? - Please tic as many boxes as necessary.

Gaeilge English Mathematics Visual Arts

Music Drama History Geography

Science S.P.H.E. P.E. Religion

8. For each area of teaching below, please circle how competent you feel you are for each, where 1 = Very Competent, 2 = Competent, 3 = Somewhat Competent, 4 Not Competent, 5 = Undecided.

		Very Competent	Competent	Somewhat Competent	Not Competent	Undecided
Special	Ed.	1	2	3	4	5
Needs						
E.A.L.		1	2	3	4	5
Learners						
I.C.T		1	2	3	4	5
Gaeilge		1	2	3	4	5
English		1	2	3	4	5
Mathematics		1	2	3	4	5
Visual Arts		1	2	3	4	5
Music		1	2	3	4	5
Drama		1	2	3	4	5
History		1	2	3	4	5
Geography		1	2	3	4	5
Science		1	2	3	4	5
S.P.H.E.		1	2	3	4	5
P.E.		1	2	3	4	5
Religion		1	2	3	4	5

9. For qualified teachers only**. Please rate how your level of competency has changed since the start of your teaching career.

		Increased Competency	Slightly Increased Competency	No Change	Slightly Decreased Competency	Decreased Competency
Special	Ed.	1	2	3	4	5
Needs						
E.A.L.		1	2	3	4	5
Learners						
I.C.T		1	2	3	4	5
Gaeilge		1	2	3	4	5

English	1	2	3	4	5
Mathematics	1	2	3	4	5
Visual Arts	1	2	3	4	5
Music	1	2	3	4	5
Drama	1	2	3	4	5
History	1	2	3	4	5
Geography	1	2	3	4	5
Science	1	2	3	4	5
S.P.H.E.	1	2	3	4	5
P.E.	1	2	3	4	5
Religion	1	2	3	4	5

10. For each of the questions below, circle the response that best characterises how you feel about the statement, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Disagree Somewhat, 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 5 = Somewhat Agree, 6 = Agree, and 7 = Strongly Agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teacher-training gives/gave me the expertise required in all areas of teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I believe I now have the expertise required in all areas of teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I believe there are still areas of teaching I am lacking in expertise.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Teacher-training gives/gave me competence needed in all areas of teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I now believe I have the competence required in all areas of teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I believe there are still areas of teaching I am lacking in	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

competence.

Enough hours were dedicated to all areas of teaching in teacher-training.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I believe that I am competent teaching in all subject areas.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My own educational philosophy clashes with that of the school I am teaching in.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My own educational philosophy clashes with that of the educational system.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. Excluding your own school experience, did you have informal experience in any of the following areas prior to teacher-training? This includes teaching, academia or recreational.

- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Gaeilge | <input type="checkbox"/> | English | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mathematics | <input type="checkbox"/> | Visual Arts | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Music | <input type="checkbox"/> | Drama | <input type="checkbox"/> | History | <input type="checkbox"/> | Geography | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Science | <input type="checkbox"/> | S.P.H.E. | <input type="checkbox"/> | P.E. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Religion | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Special Education Needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | EAL Learners | <input type="checkbox"/> | ICT | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Were there any areas of teacher-training that you believe should have had more time dedicated to them that might have helped you become a more competent teacher? If 'Yes' please describe below.

Appendix C: Letter of Consent



Letter of Consent – student-teacher/teacher consent for questionnaire/interview

A Mhúinteoir,

My name is Darren Mac Gearailt and I am currently in my final year of primary school teacher education. A requirement of this programme is to complete a dissertation in relation to educational practice. The topic that I am researching relates to ‘teachers’ and student-teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs’ and I am therefore seeking the assistance of willing student-teachers and teachers to take part in this study.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceived attitudes of both student-teachers and teachers regarding potential areas of pedagogy that they may not think they are sufficiently competent in. Participation for this will involve the completion a questionnaire. All questionnaires will be anonymous and will be stored in strict confidence. All the data from this research will be destroyed one year from its completion date.

There will also be an opportunity for willing applicants to indicate an expression of interest to participate further in an interview/focus-group. This will be conducted at a later stage and is limited to a small number of applicants of about fifteen – eighteen. It will be a group interview consisting of five-six participants that will be recorded upon a digital voice recorder. The digital recordings will be securely uploaded and password protected before being ultimately destroyed post research.

It will be the right of the participant to withdraw their information or decline the invite to take part in the research at all times throughout the duration of this project without having to offer a reason, and contact details will be provided with this form to allow participants to request a withdrawal of their data from the process if need be. All data will be gathered in a non-stressful and sensitive manner.

There is no anticipated perceived risk to the participant, the institutions that they are associated with, or employed by, as a result of participation in this research study. Confidentiality will be of the utmost importance and the data will be stored in such a manner as to have no identifiable aspects of association.

If you are willing to participate in the study proposed, please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to me by email (address below). Your participation and co-operation will be highly valued and greatly appreciated. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Le buíochas,
Darren Mac Gearailt
Ph. 087 6126268
Email: dmacgearailtpme15@momail.mie.ie



Research: Self-Efficacy

Consent Form

I have read the details of the proposed research topic on teachers' and student-teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as outlined by Darren Mac Gearailt and I am aware of the particulars involved.

I give consent to participate in the study which will be conducted by Darren Mac Gearailt.

Signed: _____

Name (print if signing hardcopy): _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Letter of Consent for Principal



A Phríomhoide, a chara,

I am a Professional Masters of Education (Primary Teaching) student at the Institute of Education Marino, Dublin. I am seeking your permission to conduct a piece of qualitative research among the staff in your school. My study is entitled ‘An Investigation into the Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Primary School Teachers and Student-Teachers.’

The aim of this study is to collect and analyse data relating to teachers’ and emergent-teachers perceived self-efficacy beliefs. I wish to carry out a questionnaire and to conduct a group interview with willing members of the teaching staff. All data collected in this study will remain fully anonymous apart from identifying email addresses, that only I will be in possession of, for the purpose of removing participant’s data at a later stage if they contact me to do so. The completed questionnaires and recordings from the focus group will be kept at all times in a secure location.

After one year, these questionnaires and recordings from the focus-groups will be destroyed. The data extracted from the Questionnaire and focus groups will be stored on a password protected computer file that only this researcher, this researcher’s supervisor and additional examiners of the dissertation will have access to. The data analysis itself will contribute towards my Professional Masters Dissertation only.

It will be the right of the participant to withdraw their information or decline the invite to take part in the research at all times throughout the duration of this project without having to offer a reason, and contact details will be provided with this form to allow participants to request a withdrawal of their data from the process. All data will be gathered in a non-stressful and sensitive manner.

I will leave a blank page in the staff-room to recruit potential participants initially to complete the Questionnaire which will have to be done online which takes about 10-12 minutes. On the Questionnaire the participants can then declare an interest to do a group interview which will consist of between 5-9 participants that will be recorded upon a digital voice recorder at a later date.

I would really appreciate your approval in allowing me to conduct my research with the staff members of your school.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Darren Mac Gearailt.

Please sign here to give permission: _____

Appendix E: Focus Group Notes

Focus Groups Notes

The aim of focus groups is to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic.

- A stimulus is usually used in a focus group to focus the discussion.
- There is a special value on a collective view rather than the aggregate view.

Procedure:

Introduction – Good afternoon everyone. Allow me introduce the purpose of this focus group which is concentrate on the self-efficacy beliefs that you all have in relation to all that encompasses being a teacher. Feel free to have a back and forth with your thoughts on the topics that may arise throughout this interview.

Icebreaker - If you could have any one skill or talent you don't already have, what would it be and why?

Schedule –I will begin by asking a question a question to the group as a whole and jump in whenever you feel appropriate.

Guidelines –It will be treated in confidence and the interview will be recorded on a digital recorder and saved on a protected file on my computer. Names will be anomalous on the transcript and the information gathered is subject to being used in my dissertation. The interview should last for a period of about 15 minutes. I will also be taking notes as the interview progresses recording minute details such as climate and atmosphere and perhaps non-verbal communication which could be deemed relevant to the interview.

Topic context – My interest in this topic originated while going through teacher-training and discussing certain experiences with fellow pupils and teachers. Noticing how other teachers came to teaching with strong backgrounds and experiences in areas including music, drama, arts and other areas was daunting and intimidating at first until I realised my own strengths that these other did not have. It got me thinking of doing research in this area to see what patterns if any may arise and are there any areas that stand out more than others. I also want to investigate where these self-efficacy beliefs may have originated for teachers who may be struggling with them either in teacher-training or in a professional capacity.

Question:

- 1) How would you define a competent teacher?
- 2) Are there any areas of the teaching profession that you are obliged to perform that you feel/believe that you are lacking competence in? If so what are these areas and why do you believe that you are not?
- 3) What do you attribute this lack of competence to and/or where did it stem from?
- 4) Does teacher-training have a role in shaping your current mind-set?
- 5) Should more time/hours be dedicated to this/these area(s)? If so at what point (regarding teacher-training or perhaps continuous professional development)? What

would you suggest to rectify this belief that you hold? Can it be rectified/do you believe a teacher can be competent in all areas?

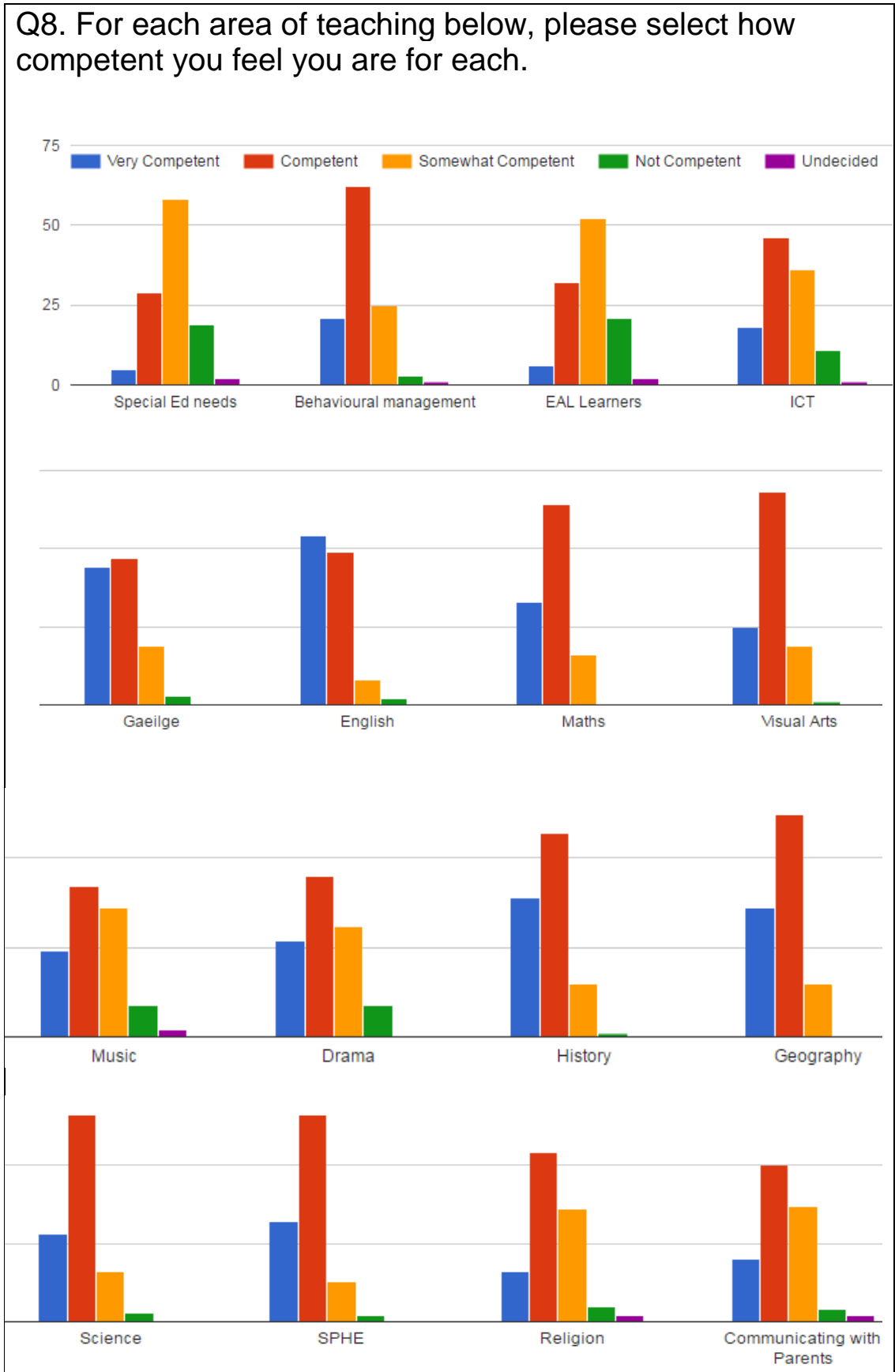
- 6) Do you think that the educational approach by either the state (in setting curriculum) or the school, or both, impact upon your belief of your competence of teaching in any way.
- 7) Regarding the areas that you believe that you are sufficiently competent in, is there any reason that for this? If so, what do you believe the reasons are?

Tactics for interviews; prompts, probes and checks

- Remain silent (prompt)
- Repeat the question (prompt)
- Repeat the last few words spoken by the informant (prompt)
- Offer some examples (prompt)
- Ask for an example (probe)
- Ask for clarification (probe)
- Ask for more details (probe)
- Summarise their thoughts ('so, if I understand you correctly ...', 'What this means, then, is that ...'). (check)

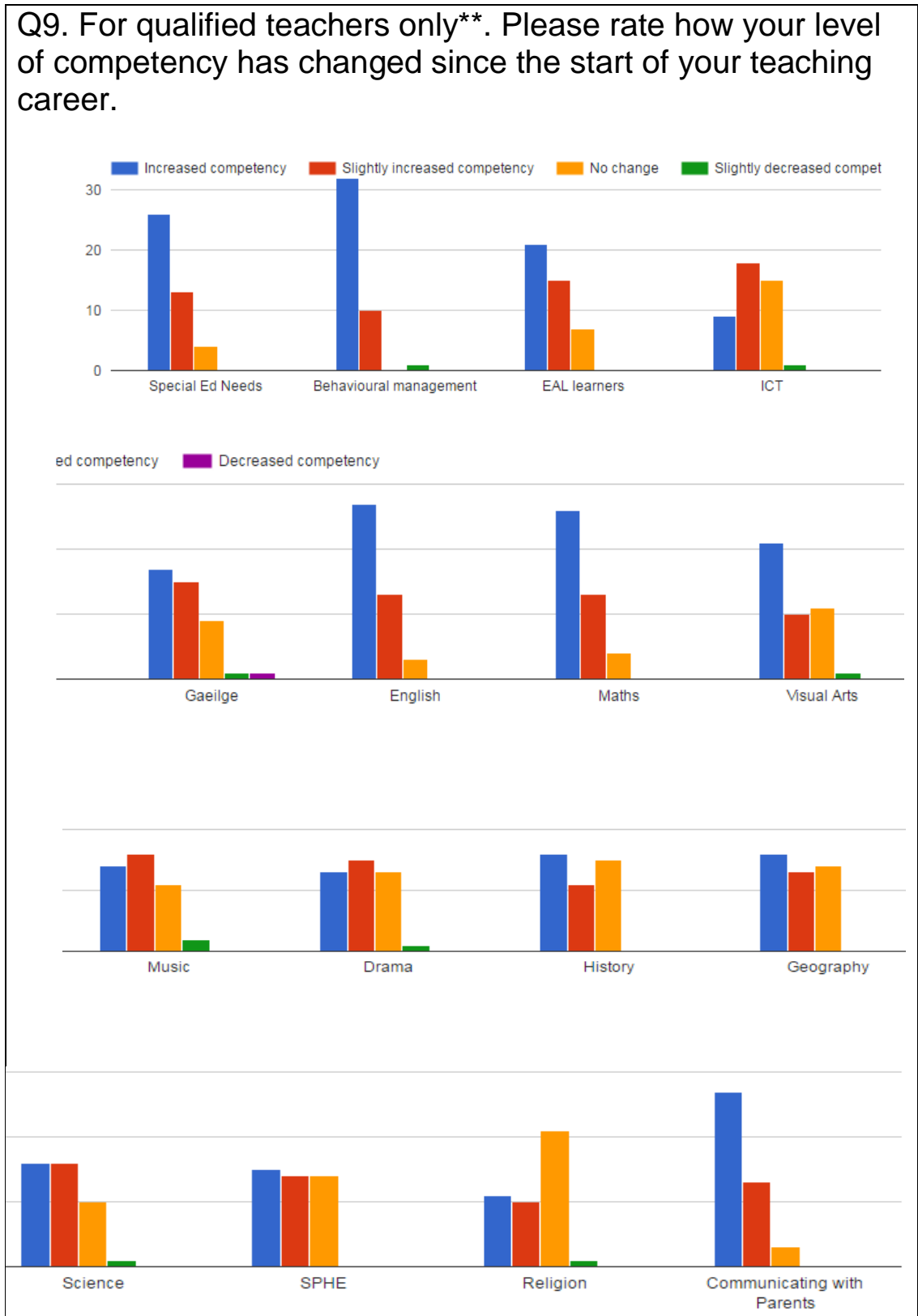
Appendix F: Option to Participate in Focus-Group on Questionnaire**3. If willing to participate in a Focus Group (group interview) please tick here.***Tick all that apply.* Tick here for Focus Group**4. 1. Please select.***Mark only one oval.* Teacher Student Teacher**5. 2. Age - Please select.***Mark only one oval.* 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 51-55 56-60+**6. 3. Sex - please select.***Mark only one oval.* Male Female Other: _____

Appendix G: Question 8 from Questionnaire



Appendix H: Question 9 from Questionnaire

Q9. For qualified teachers only**. Please rate how your level of competency has changed since the start of your teaching career.



Appendix I: Question 10 from Questionnaire

