Reliability And Validity Of A Survey To Analyze Job-Related Stress And Self-Efficacy In Early Childhood Education Workforce Professional Identity Development

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RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF A SURVEY TO ANALYZE JOB-RELATED STRESS AND SELF-EFFICACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

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THESIS

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Approved by:

__________________________________

Advisor

__________________________________

Date
DEDICATION

To early childhood professionals everywhere whose passion and commitment to the growing minds, bodies, and spirits of our youngest and most vulnerable learners creates a brighter future for the world.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Research Problem

The concept of developing a professional identity among early childhood educators has garnered a fair amount of attention in recent years. Several studies have been conducted to better understand how early childhood educators view themselves as professionals based on their self-perceptions, the perceptions of society, and increased demands for accountability in education (American Foundation of State, County and Municipal Employees et al., 2020; Arndt et al., 2018; Bradbury, 2012; Chong & Lu, 2019; Egert et al., 2018; Fairchild, 2017; Gibson, 2013; Harwood et al., 2013; Huss-Keeler, 2020; Masnan et al., 2021; McMullen et al., 2020; Moloney, 2010; Mowrey, 2020; Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020). When early childhood educators have a unifying professional identity, it may yield stronger commitments to the field and various benefits such as greater teacher retention, strengthened compensation, and improved experiences and outcomes for young children.

The benefits of high-quality early learning experiences for young children have been well established over the last few decades. Numerous studies have shown that young children who receive such learning experiences have greater academic outcomes and increased social-emotional skills (Ansari, 2018; M. R. Burchinal et al., 1996; Camilli et al., 2010; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Additionally, results of longitudinal studies (such as the Brookline Early Education Project (BEEP), Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS), Perry Preschool Project and North Carolina Abecedarian Project) and follow-on analytical reports have shown that high-quality early learning experiences yield larger societal benefits in the form of increased health outcomes, decreased government expenditures on social welfare programs, reduced costs for crime prevention, and increased earnings once these children enter the workforce. The greater educational attainment and higher earning potential from these learning experiences continues into teen and young-adult years as well as middle-aged adulthood (Campbell et al., 2012; Heckman et al., 2010; Palfrey et al., 2005; Reynolds et al., 2001; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).
The primary economic driver of out of home childcare and early learning in the United States is parental demand (Helburn & Howes, 1996). There are various agencies and organizations that track data related to the number of children in the United States engaged in some form of non-parental care arrangement. The number of families seeking non-parental and non-familial care for their children has increased over time. According to the U.S. Census data from 2011, nearly one-quarter of the nation’s children between the ages of three and five received care in non-relative, center-based settings (Laughlin, 2013). In 2019, The National Center for Education Statistics reported that the proportion of children between birth and age five enrolled in non-parental care was 59% with the majority of those children (62%) receiving care in center-based settings (Cui & Natzke, 2021). A survey conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) in the Spring of 2021 found that preschool participation had increased in the previous year, including the use of distance-learning options, but had not yet reached pre-pandemic levels (Jung & Barnett, 2021).

While the demand for non-parental childcare has increased, the impact of COVID-19 on family- and center-based childcare has been devastating to the supply. The National Association for the Education of Young Children conducted a series of surveys of childcare programs across the nation to gauge how these programs were during the global health pandemic. According to these surveys in April of 2020, nearly half of the respondents reported that their program had closed entirely. Of the ones that remained, 85% reported enrollment capacities had been lowered by 50% or more, significantly reducing the number of available child care slots available to families needing care (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

When families select a specific child care arrangement, the top three qualifications were, reliability, availability, and teaching staff qualifications, based on the findings of the 2019 Early Childhood Program Participation Survey (Cui & Natzke, 2021). When focused on center-based care specifically, the families were asked to rate which factors they considered very important when choosing the specific program for their children. The top factors based on proportion of
family rankings were reliability (87%), learning activities (76%), availability (72%), staff qualifications (71%), and location (60%). The other factors that were reported as very important by 50% or less of respondents included cost, socialization time with other children, number of children per class, online ratings, recommendations from family or friends, and religious affiliation. Beyond the availability and need of childcare, the families’ top concerns were about what their children are being taught and who is teaching them – two indicators that correlate with characteristics that are commonly understood to represent high-quality early learning opportunities (Mashburn et al., 2008).

In recent years, there has been considerable research focused on the specific program characteristics that indicate high-quality early learning settings. These include characteristics include both procedural and structural characteristics. Procedural characteristics are ones that directly impact children’s development, such as using developmentally appropriate teaching practices, creating a warm and welcoming learning environment where children can explore a variety of social groupings and learning experiences, and providing numerous opportunities to acquire and develop pro-social behaviors and emotional regulation skills (Bassok, Markowitz, et al., 2021; Cryer, 1999; Helburn, 1995; Markowitz et al., 2021; McMullen et al., 2020; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002). Structural characteristics relate to the quality in early learning settings that benefit young children in more indirect ways, such as policies and procedures that support educators. These include such things as small class sizes and low teacher-to-child ratios, access to professional development training, compensation and benefits, adequate materials to implement the curriculum, and educator qualifications (Bassok, Markowitz, et al., 2021; Cryer, 1999; Helburn, 1995; Markowitz et al., 2021; McMullen et al., 2020; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002).

Increased attention has been paid to the specific structural quality measures related to teacher preparation and qualifications at both the state and federal level. It makes sense those teachers with higher qualifications are more likely able to deliver higher-quality teaching practices.
However, research on the subject have shown mixed results. Some studies have found a positive association between higher qualified teaching staff and higher scores on a standardized classroom quality rating tool, such as the CLASS or ECERS-R (Aikens et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2019). Early et al. (2007) analyzed seven different studies about the relationship between teacher degree attainment and classroom quality. Early et al. (2007) found the majority of studies had no significant relationships identified. A handful of them showed a positive relationship, but two of the analyses showed a negative association between higher degree attainment and classroom quality.

Despite these mixed findings, professional associations, state policy makers, and other interested stakeholders have continued to focus attention on the connection between the teacher as an individual and the quality of the teaching and learning taking place within their classrooms. Perhaps the most salient example being the development of a unified framework to define and professionalize the early childhood workforce led by Power to the Profession. This taskforce, comprised of representatives from 15 early childhood education organizations and associations across the United States, aims to ensure that all children have “the opportunity to benefit from early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce across all states and settings” (American Foundation of State, County and Municipal Employees et al., 2020). The primary goal of this task force was to establish a national, professional standard for the early childhood education workforce by setting minimum standards for teacher preparation and educational qualifications similar to those already imposed at the state level for teachers in the K-12 public school setting.

Even with the increased attention on efforts to professionalize the early childhood workforce, little has been done to understand the effect these proposed standards will have on the very workforce they are intended to benefit. A few qualitative studies suggest the implementation of professionalization standards may solidify the professional identity of early childhood educators. But they can increase work-related stress and decrease the educators’ self-confidence
regarding their abilities to meet the cognitive and social-emotional needs of the young children they teach (Bradbury, 2012; Fairchild, 2017).

This study aims to develop a valid and reliable method of measuring the strength of professional identity of early childhood teachers and assistant teachers within the context of ongoing tensions between positions of authority and vulnerability. Additional attention will be paid to early childhood teachers’ sense of self-confidence and their experiences with job-related stressors. This specific evaluation strategy would create sufficient measures by which administrators and evaluators can gauge professional cohesion among teaching staff at the program level to increase retention and maintain high standards in the quality of care and learning that is provided to young children.

In addition, the study will look at the differences of professional identity and work-related stress experienced by teaching staff working in programs that have adopted procedural indicators of high-quality early learning practices (i.e., programs accredited by the National Association of Education for Young Children and at the highest levels of state Quality Rating Improvement Systems). The independent variable of concern is the quality rating of the childcare programs in which early childhood teachers work. The dependent variables of interest measure the professional identity, work related stress, and sense of authority of the early childhood teachers themselves.

Stated in simple terms, the specific research questions are (1) do early childhood educators in higher-quality programs have stronger professional identities than their colleagues in lower-quality programs? (2) do early childhood educators in higher-quality programs report different work-related stress than their colleagues in lower-quality programs? And (3) do early childhood educators in higher-quality programs experience greater dissonance between feelings of authority and vulnerability in relation to their professional identities than colleagues in lower-quality programs?
Assumptions

When conducting research via internet survey, it is generally assumed that an adequate sample of the desired population will be readily attainable due to ease of access and limited investments of time and resources on the part of both the subjects and the researcher (Glasow, 2005). Additional assumptions are that the sample will yield results that are generalizable to the population of interest, that respondents will complete the survey, and that they will do so honestly.

Delimitations

The population of interest is limited by geographic location to qualifying teaching staff and early learning programs in Southeast Michigan. Further delimitations restricted participation in this study to early childhood teachers and assistant teachers working in center-based early learning settings and for whom teaching is the primary and sole responsibility. Teaching staff were selected only from programs licensed to operate by the State of Michigan at the time of the study. Participants were also asked to identify whether the program in which they were working was participating in the State of Michigan Quality Rating Improvement System, Great Start to Quality, or nationally accredited by an independent early learning accrediting body (e.g., APPLE, NAEYC, NECPA). They were asked this question so sub-group comparisons could be made between teaching staff working in licensed programs and at the lower end of the QRIS scale and those at the higher end of the QRIS scale or are nationally accredited. Qualifying individuals were invited to participate in the study by completing an online survey through the use of Qualtrics. A convenience sampling technique was chosen for reasons of practicality given the lack of funding and scope of the study.

Limitations

A prominent concern regarding the limitations of this study is one of history as an internal validity threat. Since early 2020 the COVID-19 global health pandemic has had a profound impact on the field of early childhood education. The high numbers of program
closures, difficulties in hiring staff for the programs that survived, and classroom closures have become commonplace as both teaching staff and children grapple with high rates of infection (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). These events may also increase feelings of vulnerability and stress along with decreased sense of control (authority) in a way that could confound the results.

With concern to external validity threats, there is the main issue of generalizability given that non-probability convenience sampling has been used. A review of the Michigan childcare licensing and Great Start to Quality (Michigan’s quality rating improvement system, QRIS) databases as well as public information from the prominent early childhood program accreditation bodies allows for the analysis of demographic information provided by respondents to evaluate for adequate representation among the sample to the population. Future replication of this study and evaluation tool will also reveal additional insights as to this specific threat to external validity.

**Significant Terms Defined**

For the purpose of clarity, the following terms have been defined:

**Early childhood education (ECE):** refers to the period of development, care, and learning for young children from birth through eight years. For the purposes of this study, specifically such care and learning that takes place in state licensed, center-based, group settings outside of the home environment.

**Early childhood educators:** individuals whose primary and only role is to implement and/or support planned curriculum activities and routine care to young children ages birth through 8 years. Early childhood educators may hold such titles as teacher, head teacher, co-teacher, assistant teacher, teacher-aide, caregiver, among others.

**High-quality early learning settings:** Early childhood education programs that are documented as meeting star level 4 or 5 in the Michigan Quality Rating Improvement System, Great Start to Quality, or are nationally accredited by a recognized early childhood accrediting
body such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, National Accreditation Commission, Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment, or American Montessori Society.

**Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS):** a systematic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, n.d.).
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review is organized in four sections, based on pertinent research, theory, and practice related to the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce. The first section presents fundamental ideas regarding what constitutes high-quality ECE experiences and environments, including specific characteristics of the individuals carrying out this important work. The second section provides contextual information on the current state of the ECE workforce and the vision for the future professional development of the workforce. The third section introduces the theoretical background of professional identity development and the results of limited studies exploring the topic within the ECE workforce. The fourth section considers the effect efforts to professionalize the ECE workforce may have on an individual's work-related stress, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy.

Characteristics of Quality

Generally, the literature in early childhood care and education categorizes indicators of quality into two distinct, but interrelated areas of quality: process-oriented characteristics and structural-oriented characteristics. Process-oriented characteristics reflect the feeling of the classroom and learning experiences. These characteristics include a sense of belonging, warmth in interactions, mutual respect among and between teachers and children, teacher responsiveness and attentiveness to the needs and desires of the children, the placement and use of curricular materials and classroom equipment, and developmentally appropriate teaching practices (M. Burchinal et al., 2016; Helburn, 1995; Helburn & Howes, 1996; McMullen et al., 2020; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

Structural-oriented characteristics provide the framework in which the process-oriented practices take place. These characteristics include teacher education and ongoing training, class sizes and teacher-child ratios, employment and enrollment policies, and specified health and safety procedures (Bowen et al., 2017; Helburn, 1995; Helburn & Howes, 1996; McMullen et al., 2020; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). They allow for more quantitative data collection processes, which
permit more flexibility and result in more objective measures. For these reasons, structural-oriented characteristics are commonly utilized in state licensing, regulatory, or accreditation standards and are more often used to develop local, state, and federal policies regarding early learning program guidelines and funding streams (Bowne et al., 2017; Helburn, 1995; Manning et al., 2019; McMullen et al., 2020; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002).

Numerous studies and reports have addressed structural-oriented characteristics of quality to better understand how these kinds of measures relate to child outcomes and academic preparedness (Bowne et al., 2017; Lin & Magnuson, 2018; Manning et al., 2019; Mashburn et al., 2008). In recent years, scholars have focused on structural indicators related to teacher education, pre-employment preparation, and on-going professional development. Their studies agree that higher trained and qualified staff in the early learning setting improves child outcomes despite mixed results in empirical studies looking at a direct relationship between highly-qualified teachers and long-term academic outcomes for young children (Mashburn et al., 2008). In some studies, early childhood classrooms with higher qualified teaching staff (those with ECE specific degrees and/or advanced training) have provided higher quality care and learning experiences than classrooms with lesser qualified teachers (M. Burchinal et al., 2016; Helburn, 1995; Helburn & Howes, 1996; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

**Current State of ECE workforce**

The early childhood teacher has historically been undervalued, overworked, and underpaid (Ackerman, 2006; Bassok, Hall, et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2018). The effects of job-related stressors appear to affect early learning teachers beyond the classroom. One recent study conducted in Great Britain found that early childhood teachers reported more feelings of ongoing stress than workers in other professions (Jerrim, 2021). These stressors could be driving these teachers out of the field and into other professions despite reporting higher satisfaction with their lives overall. Jerrim (2021) suggested that it is the structural framework of their work, and not the
job itself that leads early childhood teachers to leave the field (e.g., poor wages, long hours, lack of professional respect).

Exacerbating these already difficult conditions is the impact of the COVID-19 global health pandemic, which has led to center closures and staffing shortages driven by low wages in the sector (Frank et al., 2021). Frank et al. (2021) identified low wages as a primary reason that 81% of surveyed early childhood education teachers were leaving the field. Furthermore, over one-third of respondents reported they were considering leaving their positions within a year. Early childhood education is among the lowest compensated occupations in the United States, with median wages nearly half what is found in the country overall (McLean et al., 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Low compensation in relation to the training and educational qualifications held by early childhood teachers has been shown to influence their perceptions of themselves as professionals who are respected and valued (McDonald et al., 2018). Wages and benefits have been shown to be among the top reasons that ECE teachers change positions in the ECE workforce frequently or leave the field for jobs with higher pay or better working hours, responsibilities, and working conditions (Ackerman, 2006; Bassok, Hall, et al., 2021; Bassok, Markowitz, et al., 2021; Gable et al., 2007; Helburn & Howes, 1996; McDonald et al., 2018; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). Whitebook and Sakai (2003) found that early childhood teachers who received higher wages were more likely to stay in their positions. However, those who left the field for other work ultimately out earned their colleagues who remained in the field four years later.

Turnover in the early learning sector may have deleterious effects on the quality of the learning experiences young children receive in those settings, although research on the topic is not unanimous. One argument is that the quality of early learning and childcare is negatively impacted by high rates of turnover as continuity of caregiving and the established relationships between the children and their teachers are severed (Bassok, Hall, et al., 2021; Helburn & Howes, 1996). Tran and Winsler (2011) demonstrated that for low-income populations, pre-school aged children who experienced a change in their primary caregiver performed worse on school
readiness measures related to fine-motor, cognitive, and language skills. Alternatively, Bassok, Markowitz, et al. (2021) conducted a review of early childhood workforce data from the Louisiana Department of Education which explored the relationship between early childhood teacher turnover and classroom quality as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Bassok, Markowitz, et al. found that those who left their positions had CLASS scores that were lower than those who remained which runs counter to the hypothesis that turnover negatively impacts quality.

Given that higher qualified teachers are shown to deliver higher quality early learning experiences and the inconclusive results linking process-oriented measures of quality to turnover in the early learning classroom, it is advantageous to understand what factors keep highly qualified teachers in their classrooms and within the early learning field. McMullen et al. (2020) found that early childhood teachers who reported greater professional satisfaction had a lower risk for turnover and strong structural supports such as the availability of necessary resources, workplace policies and procedures, and licensing or regulatory authority requirements.

Professional Identity Development

The way professional identities link to personal identities is dynamic, multifaceted, and fluid instead of rigid and fixed (Chong & Lu, 2019; Fairchild, 2017; Masnan et al., 2021; Mowrey, 2020; Richardson & Watt, 2018). “Professional identity is defined as the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). Ibarra (1999) summarized the literature around professional identity development as a process that takes place over time and influenced by a number of factors, but it is most malleable in newer entrants into the workforce. Ibarra (1999) indicated that while all ECE workers may benefit, these efforts may be most fruitful with those who are newly entering the field.

Previous research on professional identity development in the K-12 sector of education has established the interconnected nature of the elements that, when considered as a whole,
form teachers’ construction of their professional journeys. These elements are shaped by both internal and external influences such as teachers’ own beliefs about education and learning, their values and motivations, their perceptions of their own pedagogical abilities, their expectations regarding interpersonal relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators, and their recognition by others as members in the profession (Richardson & Watt, 2018; Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020). The sense of being a professional is more complex than a binary choice where one either does or does not identify as belonging in the profession.

Despite this complexity, some researchers have identified overarching concepts that appear to influence professional identity development. Alsup (2018) characterized professional identity development within the context of agency, authority, and vulnerability. The first of these, agency, refers to an individual’s ability to make choices and act according to their own beliefs, motivations, and desires. This definition exemplifies the tension between the self and other as relates to professional identity development. “Agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural influences…people are producers as well as products of social systems” (Bandura, 1999, p. 27). In terms of professional identity development for the ECE workforce, agency, or the ability of ECE teachers to act in accordance with their beliefs and pedagogical skill sets conflicts with the demands of administrators, licensing, and regulatory authorities and the expectations of parents. “Authority and vulnerability on first glance represent two seemingly opposite poles of agency…total authority being the ability to make choices without hesitation or repercussion, and vulnerability being anxiety or fear that one’s decisions might be incorrect, dangerous, or self-defeating (Alsup, 2018, pp. 14–15).

Alsup (2018) suggested that professional identity development be considered within the context of agency as a spectrum in which there is constant tension and movement between authority and vulnerability with the individual continuously seeking balance between the two. Similar conceptualizations of professional identity development have been described and expanded by other scholars and researchers. Wang (2021) and Siswanto (2020) addressed
educator identities as they relate to a sense of autonomy (closely related to authority as described by Alsup). Autonomy is developed through reflective practices that consider past experiences, supportive and positive work environments, and collegial relationships with others in the profession. Other studies have also examined professional culture in the lower-elementary and early learning setting and found that teachers reported lower feelings of autonomy and higher vulnerability as demands for increased accountability measures grew, which highlights the tension experienced by educators when agency, or self-efficacy is greatest (Arndt et al., 2018; Bradbury, 2012; Mowrey, 2020; Richardson & Watt, 2018). This particular conceptualization of professional identity development implies that statutes, regulations, procedures and policies designed to elevate the professional standard of the ECE workforce should provide an adequate allowance for these educators to maneuver in order to adjust and re-balance their sense of agency, or self-efficacy as needed.

**Current Professionalization Efforts**

Rhodes & Huston (2012) articulated a number of challenges and barriers that have so far thwarted attempts to build and strengthen the professional identity and recognition of the ECE workforce. These include siloed characterizations of what ECE entails (care vs. education), fragmented definitions of the workforce (e.g., babysitter, teacher, educator, daycare provider), disconnected professional development and career pathways, and a lack of recognition (low wages and compensation). Efforts to increase the professional identity of the ECE workforce must take a multi-pronged approach to promote advancements across these factors rather than focus solely on professional qualifications and educational attainment alone. Rhodes & Huston (2012) posited that a well-educated workforce is but one part of an assemblage of program features that increase the professional status of the field overall. Drawing on data examining high-quality preschool programs, these programs were shown to “not only have well-educated teachers, but also offer adequate compensation, strong curricula, professional development, small classes and
reasonable ratios, strong supervision, mentoring and review, high standards and continuous improvement” (Rhodes & Huston, 2012, p. 7).

Masnan et al.’s (2021) results supported the theory of professional identity development as a multi-faceted construct with interdependent characteristics. Teachers with greater formal education specific to ECE demonstrated greater curricular knowledge than those with training certificates or none at all. Teachers with higher educational qualifications and more years of experience underperformed teachers with fewer years of experience. On-going professional development through training and continuing education is critical to a teacher’s ability to understand and implement curriculum and learning activities (Masnan et al., 2021).

It is important to note that attention to ongoing professional development opportunities is necessary to establish that highly educated teaching staff alone is not a satisfactory way in which to improve the professional status of the ECE workforce. There is not consensus across localities and states regarding professional development topics, instructional methods, and methods of delivery and little research has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these professional development and training programs (Egert et al., 2018). Egert et al. (2018) found through meta-analysis of quasi-experimental studies that professional development opportunities that include ongoing coaching are more effective than single-dose workshops or courses.

Further complexity is added to the conversation around professional development and coaching when the impact of high turnover is considered. Bassok, Markowitz, et al. (2021) found that high attrition rates in the field severely impedes the effectiveness of high quality professional development investments. Programs cannot reap the benefits of investments in professional development and coaching opportunities for their staff without simultaneously addressing issues that drive staff turnover. When ECE teachers end up leaving the field altogether, these investments in professional development and coaching are lost to the profession overall.

In summation, the existing literature establishes the early childhood workforce as one that has historically been undervalued and continues to face challenges in elevating the status of the
field overall. While the benefits of high-quality early learning experiences have been established, scholars are not in complete agreement as to the specific factors that directly contribute to improved outcomes for both individual children and society at large. However, many early childhood advocacy organizations and policymakers have identified certain characteristics as being desirable for advancing the early childhood workforce as a profession. Among these characteristics are having a highly-qualified teaching staff, advanced quality measures beyond those existing in state licensing requirements, and increased accountability measures tied to student outcomes.

A small number of recent studies have shown that the introduction of such accountability measures creates a tension between autonomy and vulnerability that must be negotiated by early childhood teachers if they are to develop a solid professional identity. Therefore, it is worth exploring these tensions in more detail. Greater understanding of professional identity development for the early childhood teacher will allow for the development of early childhood standards, policies, practices, and evaluation methods that will lead to the development of a strong profession that is able to attract and retain highly qualified educators and create the greatest impact on our youngest and most vulnerable learners.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Early learning program administrators may benefit from a tool that effectively evaluates the professional identity development of new and existing early childhood teachers and assistant teachers. As previous research has demonstrated, teachers who view themselves as professionals have stronger commitment to their work (Lamote & Engels, 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2018) and remain in the classroom and the field of early childhood education for longer periods of time (Zhang et al., 2016). Researchers have also found that professional identity is a construct that is dynamic and increases and decreases over time (Day, 2018; Lamote & Engels, Tan et al., 2017). Having an easily administered scale to measure the current strength of professional identity among teaching staff can help administrators understand the dynamics of their teaching staff overall and respond to increases or decreases in factors that influence professional identity to create strong, more cohesive teaching teams that lead to higher quality interactions and teaching practices and decreases the risk of turnover.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey was administered to collect data on factors associated with professional identity development from teachers and assistant teachers who were working in center-based childcare facilities in specified counties in Southeast Michigan. Participants were recruited utilizing the Qualtrics on-line survey tool through convenience sampling methods using social media platforms with the aid of the Michigan affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The survey presented for the purposes of this study did not request any personally identifiable information, although demographic characteristics were collected about the participants and their current workplace to allow for the exploration of analytical differences between sub-groups.
Research Hypotheses

There are three hypotheses which have been explored through this study:

1. Early childhood teachers from accredited and higher rated QRIS programs will have stronger professional identities.
2. Early childhood teachers from accredited and higher rated QRIS programs will report different stress levels than those in non-accredited/lower quality programs.
3. Early childhood teachers from accredited and higher-rated QRIS programs will report greater professional identity dissonance than their non-accredited/lower quality program counterparts.

H01: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$

H02: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$

H03: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$

Hα1: $\mu_1 > \mu_2$

Hα2: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

Hα3: $\mu_1 > \mu_2$

Research Protocol

The survey was developed using Qualtrics and pre-tested by Early Learning Program Accreditation staff members at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to identify any problems with the survey and item content. Minor adjustments were made to the survey prior to distribution of the survey to the population of interest. With the assistance of the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MIAEYC), the link to the research information sheet and survey was posted to the Facebook pages for the Eastern, Southeastern, and Southern chapters. The survey link went live March 17th 2022 and remained active through April 17th 2022. Once the survey data had been collected, analysis of descriptive statistics related to demographic information as well as performance on the Likert scale results.

Responses were exported from Qualtrics as a CVS file. Total non-response cases were removed, and item non-response cases were removed only when the entire Likert scale was not completed. Cleaned data was then imported into IBM SPSS Version 27. Likert scale items responses were recoded into numerical values ($1 = \text{Strongly Disagree}, 2 = \text{Somewhat Disagree},$
3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) for all items except scale questions 6, 8, and 15 which were reversed (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Somewhat Agree, 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree). Additionally, a new variable was derived from the responses on questions related to accreditation status and Great Start to Quality star ratings. Responses that indicated current accreditation status and/or Great Start to Quality star ratings of 4 or 5 were coded as high quality in the derived variable. Responses that indicated no current accreditation status and/or Great Start to Quality star ratings of unsure, 0, 1, 2, or 3 were coded as low quality in the derived variable.

**Sample Discussion**

The population of interest was limited by geographic location to early childhood teaching staff working in early learning programs in 9 specific counties in Southeast Michigan. These included the counties of Genesee, Lapeer, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, Saint Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age to participate and working in a state-licensed center-based early learning program as a teacher or assistant teacher. Individuals younger than 18 years of age, those working in roles other than as a teacher or assistant teacher (e.g., center directors, administrators, kitchen staff, volunteers, bus drivers), those working in family childcare homes or unlicensed center-based early learning programs, and those who work in center-based early learning programs outside of the specified counties were screened out of the survey.

The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs reports a total of 11,706 licensed childcare centers in the state of Michigan as of February 2022 (Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, n.d.). 41% of these licensed centers are located within the counties of interest for this study. The Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives reports 24,260 childcare workers and preschool teachers in the state of Michigan as of May 2020 (Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, n.d.). If the number of early learning teachers working in licensed childcare centers in the counties of interest
is proportionate to the number of licensed childcare centers within the counties of interest provides an estimate of 9,927 early learning teachers and assistant teachers within the population. Assuming a confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%, the ideal sample size for this study is 370.

The feasibility of executing a random sample of the population was low due to the population of interest, limits of time, and available resources. For these reasons, a convenience sampling method was used to obtain participants. Survey research with convenience sampling methods through online recruitment have notoriously low response rates and issues with total non-response and item non-response (Fraenkel et al., 2019, Chapter 17). Total non-response and item non-response will be managed by removing these responses from the analysis. Given the likelihood that small sample size may be a concern, careful attention has been made to ensure that detailed demographic information on the sample is captured to allow for future replicability of the study.

**Instrument**

Participants completed the Survey of Early Childhood Education Workforce Professional Identity Development. The survey did not collect any personally identifiable information about the participants and questions were carefully constructed to avoid potentially sensitive topics that might influence respondents to answer untruthfully. The questionnaire was developed into two main sections. The first section collected demographic information about the participants and the early learning programs in which they were employed. The second section consisted of 19 questions which measured the participants professional identity through the context of vulnerability, authority, work-related stress, knowledge, experience, and personal preference. Internal consistency of the instrument was measured using Cronbach’s Alpha (18 items; $\alpha = .722$).
Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. Descriptive statistics were used to report frequencies of demographic variables (nominal variables) and the medians of scale responses (ordinal variables). Aside from the variables present on the survey itself, additional variables were computed after data collection to allow for comprehensive analysis. An overall scale score and median scale score was computed for each participant by summing scores across all items. A quality status variable was derived to represent overall program quality based on responses to questions about QRIS and accreditation status. Additionally, a professional identity dissonance score was computed by calculating the median absolute difference of combined scores for sub-scale items related to vulnerability and authority.

The intended statistical plan was to compare median scores between sub-groups based on quality rating to compare responses between early childhood educators working in higher-quality programs (accredited programs and/or programs with a star rating of 4 or 5 in Great Start to Quality) and those working in lower-quality programs (state licensed only or a star rating of 3 or lower in Great Start to Quality). The Mann-Whitney U-test, was selected for analysis given the ordinal nature of Likert scale items.

These nonparametric alternatives may be employed if the assumptions of parametric tests such as the Independent Samples t Test or ANOVA cannot be met. Although the statistical power of such tests are not as robust as their parametric counterparts, attempts can be made to decrease sampling error by ensuring there is a large enough sample, controlling for compounding variables, and using one-tailed tests to detect differences as appropriate (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 235). Additional statistical analysis planned for this study included the use of correlations and chi-square tests to analyze for relationships between Years of Experience and Education Level with scale item variables. The nominal alpha for hypothesis testing in analysis for this study was .05, which is a generally accepted alpha in education research (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 236).
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was also conducted to attempt to identify latent variables within the early childhood educator professional identity scale. The goal of such analysis is to better understand the relatedness of subscale items and identify scale items that may or may not be contributing unique information to the overall instrument, are cross-loading with more than one factor, or items that do not fit conceptionally with other high-loading items on the scale. Identification of these issues through EFA may inform future revision and refinement of the instrument itself.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Demographics

A total of 33 responses were received between March 17, 2022, and April 17, 2022, of which 20 yielded complete and valid data. Thirteen responses were removed from the dataset for reasons of ineligibility to participate (n = 8), total non-response (n = 4), and near total non-response (n = 1). Figure 1 depicts the role of respondents within the county of employment.

Figure 1

Participant Role by County of Employment

The entirety of the valid responses was comprised of participants who described themselves as female. No participants identified as male, non-binary, or other gender. The majority (40%) of participants were between the ages of 35 and 44, followed by 30% between the ages of 25 and 34, 15% between the ages of 45 and 54, and 15% between the ages of 55 and 64. The years of experience reported by participants ranged from 1 to 40 (M = 13.35, SD = 9.79). The majority (45%) of participants hold a master’s degree, followed by 30% holding a bachelor’s degree, 15% having completed some college credits without completing a degree, and 10%
having completed an associate degree. Most (45%) participants indicated that they plan to stay in the field of early childhood education for more than 10 years, followed by 20% planning to stay for 1 to 2 more years, 15% planning to stay for 3 to 5 more years, 10% planning to stay for 6 to 10 more years, and 10% planning to stay for less than one more year. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of participants by role.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics by Role*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Assistant Teacher Count</th>
<th>Teacher Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;= 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Education Level</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college credit, no degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to the quality of the early learning programs in which participants worked, the majority (60%) reported that their program participates in Michigan’s QRIS, Great Start to Quality (GSQ). Most (60%) respondents indicated that the early learning program they work at is
accredited through a national accreditation body for early learning programs. Table 2 summarizes the quality indicators of the programs in which participants were currently working.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Program Quality Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Count</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GSQ Participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GSQ Rating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accreditation Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional Identity Scale

The median professional identity score across all participants was 76 and ranged from 54 to 83. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test if there were differences in overall professional identity score between educators working in high quality early learning settings (Mdn = 75) and those working in lower quality early learning settings (Mdn = 79). No significance was detected, $U = 11$, $z = -1.540$, $p > .05$.

With respect to scale items related to work-place stress, comparison was made between educators working in high- and low-quality early learning settings. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test are found in Table 3. Results were not significant for all three items indicating no difference was detected between educators working in programs at the high and low end of quality scales.
Table 3

Summary of Differences for Stress-Related Scale Items on Mann-Whitney U Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Item</th>
<th>Mean Rank (High-Quality, n = 17)</th>
<th>Mean Rank (Low-Quality, n = 3)</th>
<th>Z-Value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time I feel like I have control over my work as an early childhood educator.</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>-1.459</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have enough time to do everything I need to do in my job (R).</td>
<td>10.94</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>- .827</td>
<td>.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My workplace is a pleasant and enjoyable place to be.</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>-.413</td>
<td>.680</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The professional identity dissonance score for respondents is shown in Figure 2. The majority (75%) of respondents were shown to equal median scores on subscale items related to perceptions of authority and vulnerability, resulting in a professional identity dissonance score of zero. Twenty percent of respondents had a professional identity dissonance score of 1 and 5% had a score of 2. Table 4 summarizes the median scores on the subscales related to authority and vulnerability and the professional identity dissonance scores of respondents. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to detect differences of professional identity dissonance scores of educators working in high- and low-quality early learning settings with no significance found $U = 18$, $z = -1.050$, $p > .05$.

A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine whether Years of Experience and Interest Group Participation data is normally distributed. The results indicated that the Years of Experience data ($p = .048$) is not normally distributed. Conversely, the distribution of responses related to Interest Group Participation is normally distributed ($p = .053$). Figures 3 and 4 depict the distributions of these variables with the normality curve displayed. Spearman’s rank correlation was computed to assess the relationship between Years of Experience and Interest Group Participation. No relationship was detected between these variables, $r_s = .050$, $p = .418$, $N = 20$. 
Figure 2

Histogram of Professional Identity Dissonance Scores

Table 4

Authority-Vulnerability Sub-scale Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quality Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority Sub-Scale Median Score</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability Sub-Scale Median Score</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Identity Dissonance Score</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3
Distribution of Years of Experience

Figure 4
Distribution of Interest Group Participation
Figure 5 is a scatterplot depicting the relationship between the variable Highest Education Level with the scale item variable Professional Perception. Spearman’s rank correlation was computed to determine whether a relationship existed between Highest Education Level and Professional Perception. No significant relationship was detected, $r_s = -.033$, $p = .444$, $N = 20$.

**Figure 5**

*Scatterplot of Highest Education Level and Professional Perception*

![Scatterplot](image)

I feel that I am seen as an early childhood professional by others

Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted using principal component analysis as the extraction method. Orthogonal rotation was selected (varimax) as factor correlation was not assumed. Eigenvalues were set at 1 to retain any detected item groupings as a factor. Factors within the component matrix with $r > 0.40$ were considered to be significant. Six components were identified through this exploratory factor analysis. Four of the 18 items in the scale were found to be cross-loaded with more than one component (factor loading > 0.40). The scale had a Cronbach $\alpha$ of $r = .722$. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value for the scale was .413 with a significant Bartlett test
of sphericity ($\chi^2_{153} = 301.50, p < .001$). The means and standard deviations of all scale items are reported in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Early Childhood Professional Identity Scale Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable sharing ideas and discussing early childhood related issues with my colleagues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am open to receiving feedback from my colleagues and supervisors.</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>1.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleagues and supervisors are supportive when I make a mistake at work.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can freely implement curriculum in a manner that is consistent with what I know about young child development.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ideas are welcomed and valued by my supervisor.</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have little authority over how my classroom is run (R)</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time I feel like I have control over my work as an early childhood educator.</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have enough time to do everything I need to do in my job (R).</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My workplace is a pleasant and enjoyable place to be.</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the common rules and regulations in the early childhood education field.</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the day-to-day responsibilities of my role as an early childhood educator.</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actively participate in early childhood related interest groups or forums.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended an early childhood conference at a regional, state, or national level.</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am seen as an early childhood professional by others.</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not believe the work I do as an early childhood educator is valued (R).</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my abilities to carry out my work as an early childhood educator.</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am successfully meeting the needs of the children in my class.</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in the early childhood field is my choice.</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviation: R, reversed score
Table 6  
Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Scale Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
<th>Factor 5</th>
<th>Factor 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable sharing ideas and discussing early childhood</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>-.278</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>-.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related issues with my colleagues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am open to receiving feedback from my colleagues and</td>
<td>.881</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.145</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleagues and supervisors are supportive when I make a</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.506</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>-.149</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>-.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mistake at work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can freely implement curriculum in a manner that is consistent</td>
<td>.851</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with what I know about young child development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ideas are welcomed and valued by my supervisor.</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>-.207</td>
<td>-.269</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have little authority over how my classroom is run (R)</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time I feel like I have control over my work as an</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early childhood educator.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have enough time to do everything I need to do in my job</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>-.539</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My workplace is a pleasant and enjoyable place to be.</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td>-.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the common rules and regulations in</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>-.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the early childhood education field.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the day-to-day responsibilities of</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my role as an early childhood educator.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actively participate in early childhood related interest groups</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>-.152</td>
<td>.891</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>-.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or forums.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended an early childhood conference at a regional, state,</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.898</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>-.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or national level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am seen as an early childhood professional by others.</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>-.375</td>
<td>.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not believe the work I do as an early childhood educator is</td>
<td>-.341</td>
<td>.408</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>-.628</td>
<td>-.308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>valued (R).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my abilities to carry out my work as an early</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>-.105</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childhood educator.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am successfully meeting the needs of the children in</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in the early childhood field is my choice.</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>-.302</td>
<td>-.172</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviation: R, reversed score. Loadings larger than .40 are in bold.  
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The results yielded no signs that the quality status of early learning program settings has any relationship to the professional identity development of early childhood educators. These findings are contrary to the literature which suggests that as early childhood educators have increased demands and expectations of accountability placed on them, their identities as professionals is compromised. With regard to the specific hypotheses examined in this study, the results are 1) the median scores of early childhood educators in high- and low-quality early learning settings did not significantly differ from one another, 2) the median scores of the work-related stress subscale did not significantly differ between educators at high- and low-quality early learning settings, and 3) the professional identity dissonance scores of educators working in high- and low-quality early learning settings did not significantly differ.

Additional correlational analysis to explore the relationship between Years of Experience and Interest Group Participation was conducted. Results were insignificant and indicated no relationship \((r_s = .050)\), meaning that as early childhood educators gain more experience in the field they are not any more likely to engage in interest group work or participate in professional forums. The potential for a relationship was also explored between the Highest Education Level achieved and the Professional Perception of others. Again, no relationship exists between these variables of interest. Although it is interesting to note that as level of education increases there was a very slight negative correlation \((r_s = -.033)\) with how educators reported feeling seen as a professional by others, but again no significance can be attributed to this finding.

The results of the exploratory factor analysis suggest that there are 6 latent variables being measured within the scale. In development of the scale there were eight concepts of professional identity development (vulnerability, authority, work-related stress, professional knowledge, professional experience, professional role models, self-efficacy, and personal preference) embedded in the instrument based on relevant literature of professional identities of educators.
and other professionals. This finding suggests that the concepts initially laid out in the scale may be too nuanced or interrelated to yield any unique information to the discussion on professional identity development of early childhood educators. Additionally, there were a number of items on the scale which cross-loaded with more than one factor which strengthens the argument that the concepts are too closely related to detect any significant meaning.

**Recommendations**

Small sample size is a considerable barrier to generalizability of these findings. The computational power of the statistical tests that were employed in this analysis are limited in this regard. Further research in this area should attempt to increase sample size significantly in order to yield more generalizable data and increase the power of the nonparametric tests used. The risk of bias in the analysis is also high given that the majority (85%) of participants in the study were working in high-quality early learning settings. Future research should ensure that not only is a sufficient sample obtained, but that the sample also reflects adequate representation of the population across programs of varying quality.

The small sample also compromised the usefulness of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in this study as indicated by the low Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO = .413). Increasing sample size significantly would be advantageous for further analysis. Despite the issues with low KMO due to insufficient sampling, the exploratory factor analysis did provide some indication of further improvements to the instrument by identifying cross-loading items (loading of .40 or higher on more than one factor) as well as isolated pairs of items that do not strongly correlate to other items on the scale. Further studies may benefit from revising this initial instrument to measure early childhood educator professional identity development given the results of EFA in this study.

Given the importance of attracting and retaining highly qualified early learning educators to the field of early childhood education, further research in what bolsters these individuals’ sense of professional identity and belonging is worthwhile. Although the findings of this study were not consistent with those of previous qualitative studies, the analysis conducted here did yield useful
information as to how some early childhood educators experience their own professional identities. Much can be gleaned from this study as future research is developed and continued efforts to better understand the early childhood profession are undertaken.
APPENDIX A

CONCURRENCE OF EXEMPTION
IRB-21-12-4263-83 Expedited/Exempt EXEMPT

DATE: March 10, 2022

TO: Batts, Amanda, Admin & Organizational Studies
Hill, William, Administration & Organization Studies

FROM: Mills, Scott, Professor, BJ
Expedited/Exempt

PROTOCOL TITLE: Self-Efficacy in Early Childhood Education Workforce Professional Identity Development

FUNDING SOURCE: None

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-21-12-4263
Approval Date: March 09, 2022

The above referenced protocol has been reviewed and found to qualify for Exemption according to category 2.

Note to PI: This IRB approval does not replace administrative or department/college/division approvals that may be required. Before initiating research activities, contact the Associate Vice Dean for Research in your school or college for established parameters for site access to the facility where the study will be conducted.

NOTE TO PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, the resumption of human participant research is occurring in measured phases which incorporate institutional, state, and federal regulations and best practices.

Currently the following research activities are ongoing:

(i) Human participant research that can maintain remote study interventions/visits as per IRB approval.

(ii) In-person research with a direct benefit and in-person research that has no potential for direct benefit conducted at Wayne State University and/or established health care facilities.

(iii) In-person research without potential for direct benefit to participants conducted at non-affiliated WSU sites must include the non-affiliated study sites' approval letter of support to conduct in-person research activities.

(iv) Effective September 1, 2021: For research conducted at WSU campus sites: Participants must complete the WSU Campus Guest Screener. The WSU campus vaccine mandate is not required for research participants who are visiting campus to participate in a research study. However, mitigation plans as indicated for Appendix N must be followed. The research participant must be contacted before the study visit to inform them of the WSU campus screening and safety precautions.
Information on restarting WSU research operations can be found at research.wayne.edu/irb/coronavirus.

In-person research activities require additional precautions to protect both the participant and the research staff. Mitigation procedures indicated for Appendix N must be followed.

For more information regarding Appendix N and IRB resumption of research requirements visit: research.wayne.edu/irb/coronavirus.

When clinical research is conducted in a standard medical care/hospital setting, please follow that site's COVID-10 precautionary standard operating procedures Appendix N is not required.

For more information regarding IRB submission requirements and instructions visit the IRB Forms and Submissions Requirements website: research.wayne.edu/irb/forms-requirements-categories.

If you have questions please contact the IRB Administration Office, email: irbquestions@wayne.edu or telephone: 313-577-1629.
The following attachments and consent/assent documents have been reviewed and approved by the IRB.

Notes:
NOTE TO PI. This project has been given a Status Check-In Date. The Status Check-In Date is 03/08/2024. The Minimal Risk Status Update Form should be used to provide a status report to the IRB. Please submit the status update at least 6 weeks before this date. The Minimal Risk Status Update Form is available on the IRB's Forms and Submissions website (www.irb.wayne.edu). The Minimal Risk Status Update should be submitted as an expedited amendment via eProtocol with the Minimal Risk Status Update Form. Include the Minimal Risk Status Update Form as an Attachment using the label: Minimal Risk Status Update.

Protocol/Proposal/Dissertation (received 02/17/2022)

Research Information Sheet (dated 03/03/2022)

Social Media Post

The following data collection materials have been reviewed and approved and does not require a WSU IRB stamp for use. These documents are approved and noted in the IRB file (1): Survey.

Medical records are not being accessed therefore HIPAA does not apply.

A waiver of written documentation of consent has been granted according to 45CFR46.117(c). This waiver satisfies: 1) risk is no more than minimal, 2) the waiver does not adversely affect the rights and welfare of research participants, 3) the research could not be practically carried out without the waiver, and 4) the participants will be given information.

* Exempt protocols do not require annual review by the IRB, however you may have been granted a Status Check-In Date. Projects granted a Status Check-In date must submit a Minimal Risk Status Update Report at least 6 weeks before the check-In date. If research activities are complete a Final
Report/Closure must be submitted by the Status Check-In date.

* All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the IRB BEFORE implementation.

* Adverse Reactions/Unanticipated Problems AR/UP must be submitted on the appropriate form within the time frame specified in the IRB. In the event of an unanticipated problem use the Unanticipated Problem Report Form located on the IRB's Forms and Submissions Requirements website.

Note: Studies conducted at DMC sites or DMC medical record used for affiliate review Authorized DMC personnel have been added to this submission under Personnel Information "Other".

Administration Office Policy www.irb.wayne.edu/policies-human-research

NOTE: Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, hold notification, and/or external audit the IRB Administration Office must be contacted immediately. Also Notify the IRB of any changes to the funding status of the above-referenced protocol.

Attachments
Letter of Support - MIAEYC
Information sheet-04-2015
Research Proposal_IRB
protocol waiver_requests_revised_4_2020
Social Media Post
APPROVED information-sheet-04-2015, IRB-21-12-4203, Batts
Survey Draft V2
APPROVED Social Media Post, IRB-21-12-4203, Batts
Resume_A_Batts
information-sheet-04-2015 - Revised
Social Media Post - Revised

To view stamped documents associated with this approval, please see the Protocol Information- Attachments section-IRB Initial Approval Stamped Documents.

Review Type: EXEMPT
IRB Number: B3 Expedited/Exempt Review
Survey of Early Childhood Education Professional Identity Development

Q1 Research Information Sheet
Title of Study: Reliability and Validity of a Survey to Analyze Job-Related Stress and Self-Efficacy in Early Childhood Education Workforce Professional Identity Development

Principal Investigator (PI): Amanda Tinelle Batts, Administrative & Organizational Studies, 703-340-6564

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study of early learning/childcare teacher and assistant teacher professional identity development because you are an early learning/childcare teachers or assistant teacher working in center-based early learning settings in South-East Michigan. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete and should only be completed one time. The survey will first ask questions related to your age, county of employment, work role, and employment setting. These questions are intended to screen for participants that are eligible to complete the survey based on the population of interest. Anonymous demographic information will also be collected pertaining to your age, gender identity, years of experience, and highest level of education attained. The remainder of the survey will ask you to answer a series of questions related to job-related stressors, self-efficacy, and professional identity. Other than the screening questions to determine eligibility to participate, you may choose not to answer any questions within the remainder of the survey. As this is an anonymous survey and no personally identifiable information will be collected, your identity will be protected.

Benefits
As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Risks
There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

Costs
There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.
Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality
All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept without any identifiers.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions
If you have any questions about this survey now or in the future you may contact Amanda T. Batts at the following phone number 703-340-6564. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

Participation
By completing the survey, you are agreeing to participate in this study. Additionally, participation in this research is for residents of the United States over the age of 18; if you are not a resident of the United States and/or under the age of 18, please do not complete this survey.

Q2 What is your age?

- 17 or younger
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or older
Q3 Do you currently work in a center-based early learning setting such as a daycare facility or preschool?

- Yes
- No

Q4 What is your primary work role?

- Teacher
- Assistant Teacher
- Administrator
- Other

Q5 In what county is your place of employment located?

- Genesee (1) ...
- Other (10)

Q6 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q7 Is your childcare facility participating in Great Start to Quality?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
Q8 What star level does your childcare facility currently hold in Great Start to Quality?

- [ ] Empty Star
- [ ] 1 Star
- [ ] 2 Stars
- [ ] 3 Stars
- [ ] 4 Stars
- [ ] 5 Stars
- [ ] Unsure

Q9 Is your program currently accredited (i.e., NAEYC, NECPA, AMS, NAC, APPLE)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Q10 How many total years of experience do you have as an early childhood teacher or assistant teacher?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60

Total Years of ECE Experience ( )
Q11 What is your highest level of education received?

- High school graduate, diploma, or the equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade, technical, or vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

Q12 Is the level of education selected Early Childhood Education related?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q13-30 Please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements using the scale provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am comfortable sharing ideas and discussing early childhood related issues with my colleagues. (1)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am open to receiving feedback from my colleagues and supervisors. (2)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My colleagues and supervisors are supportive when I make a mistake at work. (3)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can freely implement curriculum in a manner that is consistent with what I know about young child development. (4)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ideas are welcomed and valued by my supervisor. 5)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have little authority over how my classroom is run. (6)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time I feel like I have control over my work as an early childhood educator. (7)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have enough time to do everything I need to do in my job. (8)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My workplace is a pleasant and enjoyable place to be. (9)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the common rules and regulations in the early childhood education field. (10)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the day-to-day responsibilities of my role as an early childhood educator. (11)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actively participate in early childhood related interest groups or forums. (12)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to attend early childhood conferences at a regional, state, or national level. (13)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am seen as an early childhood professional by others. (14)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not believe the work I do as an early childhood educator is valued. (15)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q31 How many additional years do you see yourself remaining in the early childhood workforce?

- Less than 1 year (1)
- 1 - 2 more years (2)
- 3 - 5 more years (3)
- 6 - 10 more years (4)
- More than 10 years (5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in my abilities to carry out my work as an early childhood educator. (16)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am successfully meeting the needs of the children in my class. (17)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in the early childhood field is my choice. (18)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


American Foundation of State, County and Municipal Employees, American Federation of Teachers, Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators, Child Care Aware of America, Council for Professional Recognition, Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, Early Care and Education Consortium, National Association for Family Child Care, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association, National Head Start Association, Service Employees International Union, & ZERO TO THREE. (2020). *Unifying framework for the early childhood education profession*. 50.


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Vandell, D., & Wolfe, B. (2000). *Child care quality: Does it matter and does it need to be improved?*


ABSTRACT

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF A SURVEY TO ANALYZE JOB-RELATED STRESS AND SELF-EFFICACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

AMANDA T. BATTs

May 2022

Advisor: Dr. Kevin Carroll

Major: Education Evaluation and Research

Degree: Master of Education

The field of early childhood education is one of high stress and low compensation. Yet, little is known about how the increased demands for accountability and professionalization within the field impact the workforce. This study examines whether educators in high- and low-quality early learning settings experience differences in professional identity development, work-related stress, and professional dissonance between feelings of authority and vulnerability. Previous research on these issues has been limited to small qualitative studies that have shown that educators may experience more stress and professional dissonance in conjunction with increases in their professional experience and demands on their time to document accountability measures. This study intends to examine this issue within the context of robust quantitative methods and develop an early childhood professional identity scale, which researchers and early learning program administrators can use to evaluate the well-being and professional commitment of early childhood educators. However, the findings of this study are not consistent with those found in previous research, indicating that there is little difference in the professional identity of educators regardless of the quality of the program in which they work. The results of this study should be considered with some caution due to small sample size. The study concludes with recommendations for further development of an early childhood professional identity scale.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Amanda T. Batts attended Michigan State University and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Family and Community Services in 2005. During her time at Michigan State University, she discovered her love for Early Childhood Education while completing coursework at the university lab pre-school. After graduating, she took a position as a toddler teacher in a small daycare center in south-east Michigan.

In 2006 Amanda relocated to the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C. where she worked for a large suburban school district in Northern Virginia, before eventually accepting a position in 2008 with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) based in Washington, D.C.

Amanda has maintained employment with NAEYC the past 13 years working in various roles within the Early Learning Programs department which serves as an accreditation body for early learning programs serving children aged birth through eight years on a national level. Under the guidance and mentorship of her colleague, Dr. Susan M. Hedges, Amanda has developed a great deal of respect for data and analytical thinking, especially with regards to continuous quality improvement efforts that are informed by data. Over time she has transitioned into roles of increasing responsibility and scope and now primarily works in the maintenance of the accreditation content, test items, assessment tools and protocols, scoring, rater training, and reliability metrics.

Amanda was accepted in the Education Evaluation and Research Master’s program in the Winter of 2020. Upon completion of her Master of Education degree, Amanda would like to continue pursuing opportunities where her passion for early childhood education and love for data intersect, working toward increasing access for all young children to high quality early learning experiences using ethical and equitable data-informed processes and policy development.