

# PROCEEDINGS

Cultures, Practices,  
and Change 02



third international conference  
of the journal *Scuola Democratica*

**education**  
and/or  
**social justice**  
University of Cagliari  
June 3-5, 2024

Education never stands still—it moves, adapts, and transform in response to new realities, while reshaping society in turn. This collection explores some forces defining learning today: digital tools, intercultural dialogue, artistic expression, and the call for ecological responsibility.


At its core, education remains a space for negotiation and reinvention.



Published by



ASSOCIAZIONE PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA  
Via Francesco Satolli, 30  
00165 – Rome  
Italy

 Published in Open Access

APA 7<sup>th</sup> citation system:

Scuola democratica (Ed.) (2025). *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the journal Scuola democratica. Education and/or Social Justice. Vol. 2: Cultures, Practices, and Change*. Associazione Per Scuola Democratica.

Please cite your contribution as follows:

Smith, A. (2025). *Closing the Gender Gap in Education. Symmetrical Practices from a Didactical Laboratory in STEM Fields*. In Scuola democratica (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the journal Scuola democratica. Education and/or Social Justice. Vol. 2: Cultures, Practices, and Change* (pp. 72-84). Associazione Per Scuola Democratica.

This book is digitally available at:

<https://www.scuolademocratica-conference.net/conference-proceedings-iii/>

ISBN 979-12-985016-3-8

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference  
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*Education and/or Social Justice*

3-6 June 2024, Cagliari (Italy)

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Vol. 2

**Cultures,  
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Organizers and partners

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# TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH IN-SERVICE AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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The aim of this study is to investigate how teachers and trainee-teachers perceive themselves in terms of self-efficacy, with particular regard to some aspects of their professionalism linked to countering the school drop-out rate, such as the ability to involve and motivate pupils and the differentiation of teaching strategies. Secondly, the training needs of future teachers and in-service teachers are to be monitored over time in order to observe whether and how they change. In order to investigate teachers' representations, a questionnaire based on an Italian elaboration (Cardarello et al., 2016) of the Tsachennen-Moran scale, also known as the Ohio scale (TSES 2001), was used in the reduced 12-item version. Approximately 800 anonymous questionnaires were collected (315 teachers, 461 trainees). Initial descriptive analyses showed a perception of medium to medium-low efficacy, with clearer outcomes when using analysis with four factors (Pintus et al., 2021) that distinguishes student-centered and teacher-centered instructional practices. Moreover, the results highlighted a constant training need in assessment strategies for both teachers and trainee-teachers and a more positively perceived self-efficacy by teachers with more than 10 years of experience with respect to motivating pupils.

self-efficacy; in-service teacher; pre-service teacher; assessment strategies

## INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of pupils' educational needs and the promotion of everyone's educational success through appropriate pedagogical and didactic tools is a crucial aspect of professionalism of the teachers, as today they have to deal with particularly complex socio-educational contexts. In the progressive construction of professionalism, from initial teacher training to the different forms of in-service training, the evolution of the perception of self-efficacy is central (OECD, 2020) and particularly correlated with the well-being of students and their educational success (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007). For these reasons, the degree course in Primary Education Sciences, through its internship courses, can offer useful training and provide opportunities, for both trainee-teachers and teachers in the educational institutions that welcome them. In particular, during the fourth and fifth year of the internship, the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia has set up joint training

courses for students and teachers on different didactic and pedagogical areas, called 'internship projects', carried out under the scientific supervision of academic lecturers in the schools of six provinces in northern Italy. Within the framework of these pathways, the main aim of this exploratory study here reported is to investigate how teachers and trainee-teachers perceive themselves in terms of self-efficacy, with particular regard to some aspects of their professionalism linked to countering of the school drop-out rate, such as the ability to involve and motivate pupils and the differentiation of teaching strategies. Secondly, the training needs of students/trainee teachers and in-service teachers are to be monitored over time in order to observe whether and how they change. In order to investigate teachers' representations, a questionnaire based on an Italian elaboration (Cardarello et al., 2016) of the Tsachennen-Moran scale, also known as the Ohio scale (TSES 2001), was used in the reduced 12-item version. The questionnaire revealed age, educational qualification, teaching experience, and a self-assessment of teachers' effectiveness; trainee-teachers (students of the degree course) have been asked for a self-efficacy projection. Moreover, this study intends to highlight training needs and teaching strategies for both teachers and trainee-teachers, and to discuss these needs in light of perceived self-efficacy, considering the variable of years of teaching experience.

## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The teaching skills of educators, including understanding the socio-educational context and student needs, as well as adopting diverse and targeted teaching strategies, are fundamental for the educational success, because these variables have a significant impact on student outcomes. Scheerens (2020) highlighted how these competencies are essential for creating an effective learning environment and improving student performance. Teachers' professionalism directly affects students' academic success and, in turn, the equity of the educational system. Among the crucial elements of teacher professionalism that significantly influence the quality of teaching and student learning, one of the most important is the perception of self-efficacy, which is the belief that teachers have in their ability to influence student learning positively. Teachers' self-efficacy, as defined by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) based on Bandura's (1997) construct, refers to the belief in their ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities necessary to achieve specific educational goals. Studies have shown that teachers' self-efficacy positively correlates with factors predicting teaching effectiveness, such as student well-being and academic success (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007). Through a meta-analysis, Klassen and Tze (2014) found that self-efficacy is strongly associated with observed teaching performance and has a significant correlation with teaching effectiveness. Consequently, self-efficacy could be considered an indicator of teaching quality itself (Cardarello et al., 2017). The recent OECD report referred to TALIS 2018 survey (2020), highlights that the teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy tend to use more innovative teaching practices and create more inclusive learning environments. Therefore, perceived self-efficacy is crucial for promoting effective and

sustainable educational practices, as well as for teachers' professional well-being and sense of job satisfaction (Klassen and Chiu, 2010). Accordingly, investing in the development of teachers' self-efficacy through targeted training and professional support is essential for enhancing the quality of education and improving learning outcomes for all students.

Several validated instruments investigate teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Among these, the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), is widely used. It measures three distinct but related aspects of teaching: "Efficacy for Classroom Management", "Efficacy for Instructional Strategies", and "Efficacy for Student Engagement". The scale facilitates the identification of areas where teachers exhibit lower confidence, enabling the design of targeted professional development programs that address these specific needs.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. The sample**

The sample included students of the degree course (trainee teachers) and each teacher involved in the training classes. 871 anonymous questionnaires have been analysed; among them, 315 were filled by in-service teachers and 556 by students, considered here pre-service teachers. The students were mainly trainees in their 4th and 5th year (459) at the initial stage of the academic year. However, it is necessary to consider that the main part of the students (348) have already experience of work in schools, because of the lack of teachers in Northern Italy. Among the teachers, 113 have less than 10 years of experience and 215 more than 10 years of experience.

### **2.2. The analysis**

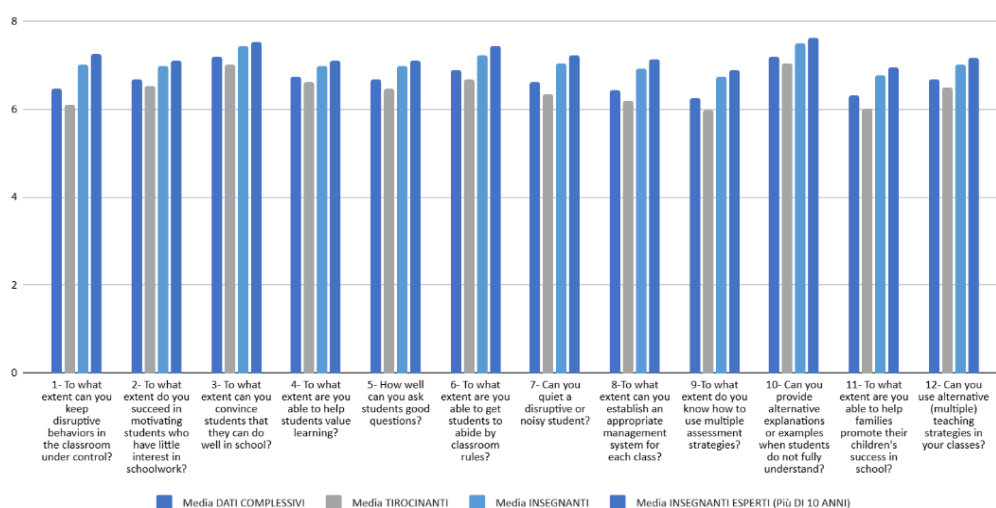
A questionnaire based on an Italian elaboration (Cardarello et al., 2016) of the Tschannen-Moran scale, also known as the Ohio scale (TSES 2001), in the reduced 12-items version, has been administered to each trainee student and each teacher involved in training classes, at the beginning and end of the academic/school year. For each item the answerer had to declare his/her self-efficacy on a 9-level Likert scale, ranging from 1 (nothing) to 9 (the best mark), to rank their perceived self-efficacy related to 12 teaching-related tasks, referred to three areas of teaching (Cardarello et al., 2016). In particular, according to Moran e Hoy (2001), self-assessment of the effectiveness of teachers and trainees can be analysed considering three aspects: classroom management (controlling classroom behaviour, setting and maintaining rules, handling difficult situations), engagement and motivation of pupils and families (motivation of pupils with low interest, motivation to learn, encouragement of educational success, promotion of educational alliance with families) and ability to use different instructional strategies to support children's understanding (ability to ask good questions, use of different teaching and assessment strategies). Nevertheless, according to Pintus and colleagues (2021), cluster analysis on the validation study showed four factors instead of the three found in

previous studies: the items related to instructional strategies should be considered separately, namely distinguishing *Inclusive and innovative instructional strategies learner-centered* (“Can you provide alternative explanations or examples when students do not fully understand” and “Can you use alternative (multiple) teaching strategies in your classes?”) and *Traditional instructional strategies teacher-centered* (“How well can you ask students good questions?”, “To what extent do you know how to use multiple assessment strategies?”)

### 3. RESULTS

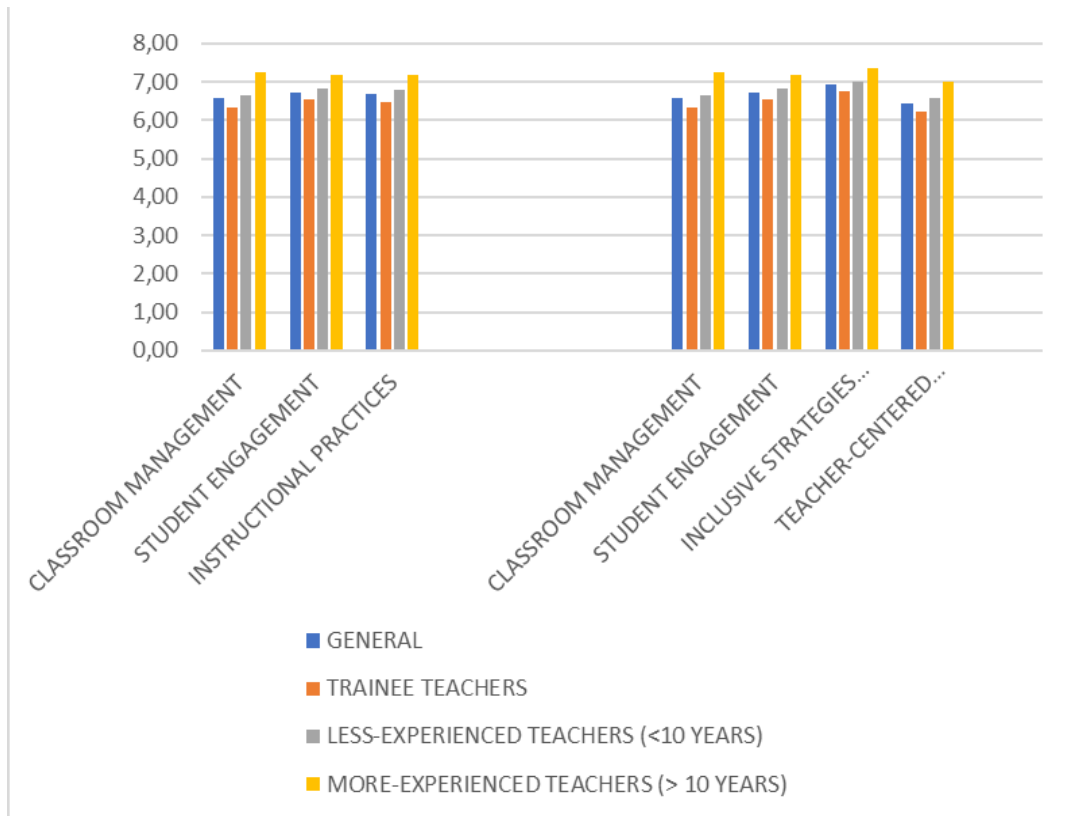
The answers to the questionnaires for both in-service and pre-service teachers globally considered showed middle/low levels of self-efficacy. At the initial stage, the perception of self-efficacy, as projection of the future job, is quite low, with the averages contained between 6 points and 7 points out of 10. The results are fairly uniform, but lower averages refer to trainees and higher averages, in all items, to teachers with more than 10 years.

Figure 1. Overall results per items. Source: Vezzani, Scipione, Bertolini, UNIMORE, Department for Education and Humanities (2024)



Nevertheless, the analysis conducted considering the above-mentioned four factors allows to see better the differences. It can be noticed that teachers and students/trainee teachers tend to consider themselves as less effective in the evaluation process and more effective in implementing students-centered practices.

Figure 2. Self-efficacy analysis considering three and four factors. Source: Vezzani, Scipione, Bertolini, UNIMORE, Department for Education and Humanities (2024)



Three years ago, a similar survey was done at the beginning and at the end of a training course on assessment strategies, with a smaller sample composed just by teachers (n. 61). Even if the samples are different, some highlights can be glimpsed. The items similarly denoted the minimum and maximum value in the same items, revealing constant training needs on different assessment strategies (which were considered as typical of teacher-centered teaching posture).

Tab. 1. Longitudinal analysis on initial results 2021/2024 Source: Vezzani, Scipione, Bertolini, UNIMORE, Department for Education and Humanities (2024)

	Asking students good questions	Using multiple assessment strategies	Providing alternative explanations or examples when students do not fully understand	Using alternative (multiple) teaching strategies
Initial Quest. 2021	7,31	6,91	7,11	6,91
Initial Quest. Teachers 2023/24	6,98	6,73	7,49	7,01
Initial Trainee Teachers/ Students 2023/24	6,47	5,99	7,03	6,49

Tab. 2. Longitudinal analysis on final results 2021/2024 Source: Vezzani, Scipione, Bertolini, UNIMORE, Department for Education and Humanities (2024)

	Asking students good questions	Using multiple assessment strategies	Providing alternative explanations or examples when students do not fully understand	Using alternative (multiple) teaching strategies
Final Quest. 2021	7,89	7,39	8,25	7,77
Final Quest. Teachers 2023/24	7,04	6,68	7,38	7,15
Final Trainee Teachers/ Students 2023/24	6,81	6,68	7,49	7,12

It should be noticed that in the last academic year's surveys teachers' self-efficacy has declined slightly, while trainees' self-efficacy has increased, even if the critical items remained the same.

The reasons for this decrease can be perhaps traced, paradoxically, to the more awareness of the difficulty of the assessment task, due to the recent reflections that involved all teachers across Italy about students' assessments, following two different changes in regulations. Also, the periods in the school year when the questionnaires have been administered can be relevant, maybe because of the tiredness and the teachers' worries about difficulty of assessment in increasingly heterogeneous classrooms. Surely, these results should be deepened more, across the years, to monitor and support this crucial aspect of teachers' professionalism.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Experience is confirmed to be a determinant factor on self-efficacy, as shown also in TALIS survey on 2018 (2020). Self-efficacy is overall fairly homogeneous, but on average/medium-low values. This points out an important task both for school leaders and for universities committed to train future teachers, in order to support long-term teachers' wellbeing, job satisfaction and students' outcomes. Looking at more academic issues, the four-factor analysis is confirmed to be an interesting model in order to observe self-efficacy. The analysis shows slightly higher self-efficacy for learner-centered instructional strategies for all categories, while teachers seem to perceive themselves to struggle more with the difference in assessment methods than with other aspects of traditional teaching professionalism. Therefore, formative needs emerge more pronounced for assessment practices, considered among the traditional functions of the education system. As Corsini (2023) underlines, the teacher makes use of power when he/she assessing, in terms of students' inclusion and exclusion, crucial to students' well-being. The power of formative assessment is to be deepened and shared with the teachers, in order to support them with tools and strategies that allow a more student-centered process of learning.

Further research pathways should consider diachronic changes over time for

specific teacher categories (i.e. looking at the different levels of pre-service academic degrees and training) and the effectiveness of instructional pathways for future teachers can be monitored, as indicators of effectiveness of the degree course itself.

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