

A Study on the Relationship Between Pre-service Early Childhood Teachers' Motivation for Choosing A Teaching Career, Career Resilience: Mediating Effect of Career Decision Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the correlations between pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, their career decision self-efficacy, and their career resilience and to comprehend the relationships between these variables. Three hundred early childhood education majors attending four-year Universities A and B in city Daejeon in South Korea participated. Data were collected through questionnaires, and Pearson's correlation analysis and structural equation modeling were applied using AMOS 27 software. We found significant correlation between pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, their career decision self-efficacy, and their career resilience. Moreover, we found that career decision-making self-efficacy had a mediating effect on the relationship between motivation for choosing a teaching career and career resilience. The results indicate the need to develop strategies in early childhood education programs that will enhance pre-service teachers' career decision self-efficacy.

Keywords: pre-service early childhood teachers, career decision self-efficacy, motivation for choosing a teacher career, teacher resilience

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Introduction

Ministry of Education-approved early childhood education departments have been established in South Korean universities with the aim of cultivating teachers that specialize in early childhood education. It is generally expected that early childhood education students will pursue careers as early childhood teachers upon graduation, and once admitted to the program, enrollees consider this their predetermined career path. Although early childhood education programs provide pre-service teachers with appropriate curriculums to prepare them for their roles in early childhood education after graduation, pre-service teachers' ideas about the roles and qualities of teachers do not always align with reality (Sung, 2019), and their ideas about being a teacher can change after practical training (Lee, 2010; Kim, 2017). Moreover, beginning teachers may consider changing professions after experiencing conflicts and difficulties on the job (Gil & Lee, 2018; Ahn et al., 2015). These findings highlight the need for an examination of the information and images related to the teaching profession that influence pre-service teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career.

Based on the findings of previous studies on career choice-related psychological and behavioral factors, such as career resilience, career decision-making self-efficacy, career stress, and level of career decision (Gu et al., 2020; Kim, & Na, 2021; Lee, 2020; Im, & Lee, 2020), it can be predicted that pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing their career is related to factors that are also associated with becoming a teacher.

In this context, motivation for choosing a career refers to the reasons and purposes that pre-service teachers choose to become teachers and is related to the level of satisfaction they expect to experience as teachers or in the teaching profession (Lee, 2020). Huberman (1993) categorized such motivations as active, such as interest in teaching; passive, such as having no other career options; and material, such as working conditions and salary. Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) suggested that intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest and aptitude, and extrinsic motivation, such as social status or salary, as well as altruistic motivation, such as interest in others and the desire for social contribution, are important factors (cited in Park, 2015). The Korean Educational Development Institute(1983)classified such motivations as related to aptitude, social respect, occupational stability, and self-realization. Park(2015) summaries the classifications of several scholars and divides them into intrinsic, extrinsic,

and passive motivation. This intrinsic motivation has also been shown to be a very important variable in the process of foreign language acquisition(Kang, 2012).

Researchers have found that early childhood pre-service teachers' motivation to choose a teaching career is influenced by various factors, including the appeal of the teaching profession, the joy of working with children, being a meaningful influence on others, personal aptitude and ability, and situational circumstances (Kim, & Yu, 2018). Motivation influences pre-service teachers' teaching aptitude, teaching character, and satisfaction with major (Baek & Seo, 2019); career decision self-efficacy (Kim, & Na, 2021); performance of teacher's roles and dedication to teaching (Kim, & Na, 2021; Namgung, 2011; Lee, 2017); and work stress (Ahn et al., 2015), and is often positively reinforced after practical training (Shin, 2019; Shin, et al., 2007).

It has been revealed that while pre-service teachers may share the ultimate goal of becoming a teacher, those who are intrinsically motivated and those who are extrinsically motivated may take very different paths in working to achieve that goal (Go, 2017). It has been found that elementary school teachers' teaching motivation is influenced by intrinsic, passive, and extrinsic factors, and that motivation undergoes constant transformation due to various factors (practical training, policy, etc.) both before and after the decision to pursue teaching is made (Lee, 2021).

Career decision self-efficacy and career resilience are factors that influence a college student's career decision path. Career decision self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully accomplish tasks related to their career and academic goals and consists of sub-factors such as goal setting, self-evaluation, information gathering, and problem-solving (Betz et al., 1996; Taylor & Betz, 1983). The goal setting sub-factor measures an individual's confidence in their ability to establish and make decisions regarding their academic and career goals; the self-assessment sub-factor measures their confidence in accurately evaluating their abilities, values, and desires to identify a suitable occupation and explore the specific conditions of that occupation; the career planning sub-factor measures their belief in their ability to establish and pursue plans related to further education or employment; and the problem-solving sub-factor measures their belief in their ability to overcome career path-related difficulties. Early childhood teachers' self-efficacy is an important predictor of teacher commitment (Kan, Hutagalung & Chew, 2022). Pre-service

early childhood teachers' career decision self-efficacy has a significant effect on stress related to seeking employment (Jung & Yang, 2013) and is the variable that influences college students' career preparation behaviors the most (Yang & Kim, 2008; Oh, 2014). Career self-efficacy influences career choice (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Rotberg et al., 1987), career decision self-efficacy attitude (Luzzo, 1993), and cultural adaptation and problem-solving evaluation (Flores et al., 2006) and is related to high job satisfaction (Tang et al., 2020).

The concept of career resilience concerns psychological responses. For example, it denotes the ability to perceive negative elements such as career-related uncertainty and obstacles positively and cope with them flexibly (London, 1983; cited in Cho & Lee, 2020). The sub-factors of career resilience differ according to the scholar consulted, but common sub-factors include positive self-belief, strong desire for achievement, ability to utilize personal relationships, and career self-determination (Kim, 2014; Yu, 2013).

Career decision self-efficacy and career resilience have been found to influence college students' career decision-making (Kim, 2019), and career resilience was found to influence unemployed youths' career decision self-efficacy (Oh, & Oh, 2022), while elements of career resilience were found to have a significant effect on career decision self-efficacy (Lim & Lee, 2020). In a study with college nursing students, career decision self-efficacy and career resilience were identified as the two factors with the greatest influence on career preparation behavior (Yu, 2021), and in a study with university students, higher career decision self-efficacy was found to be associated with higher levels of career resilience (Kim & Lee, 2021). Thus, the variables career resilience and career decision self-efficacy appear to be closely related to and associated with students' career decision-making.

Based on the above, we predicted that pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career in the process of determining their career paths would be related to their career decision self-efficacy and career resilience. It is necessary to identify what motivates pre-service early childhood teachers in choosing a teaching career and explore ways to increase their career decision self-efficacy and career resilience. To that end, the purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, their career decision self-efficacy, and their career resilience and to comprehend the relationships between these variables.

The following research questions guide this study: First, what are the relationships between

pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, their career decision self-efficacy, and their career resilience? Second, does pre-service early childhood teachers' career decision self-efficacy mediate the relationship between their motivation for choosing a teaching career and their career resilience?

Methods

Participants

The subjects of this study were extracted through the three hundred students majoring in early childhood education at four-year Universities A and B in city Daejeon in South Korea participated in this study. Prior (paper) survey, a survey was conducted on students who agreed after explaining the purpose and purpose of this study. The composition of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Composition of Research Participants* (N=300)

College year	Students		Total	Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
Freshmen	0	70	70	23.3
Sophomores	2	79	81	27.0
Juniors	1	69	70	23.3
Seniors	2	77	79	26.4
Total	5	295	300	100

Measurement Tools

Motivation for Choosing a Teaching Career. Participants' motivation for choosing a teaching career was measured using the survey items about teachers' teaching consciousness developed by the Korean Educational Development Institute and the scale developed by Choi (2006), and divided by sub-factor as follows: 5 questions to measure intrinsic motivation, 4 to measure extrinsic motivation, and 3 to measure passive motivation. Participants answered

on a 5-point Likert scale; higher scores indicated higher levels of motivation. The reliability of the motivation questions was .72.

Career Decision Self-efficacy. Career decision self-efficacy was measured with the tool developed by Betz et al. (1996), which was translated by Lee, K. and Lee, H. (2000) and validated by Lee, E. (2001) for use with college students. We eliminated questions with low reliability, and included a total of 13 questions, divided by sub-factor as follows: 6 questions about goal setting, 4 about job information, and 3 about problem-solving. Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale; higher scores indicated higher levels of career decision self-efficacy. The reliability of the career decision self-efficacy questions was .85.

Career Resilience. Career resilience was measured with the tool developed by Kim, M. (2014). We eliminated questions with low reliability, and included 18 questions, divided by sub-factor as follows: 5 questions about career independence, 5 about relationship utilization, 4 about self-belief, and 4 about desire for achievement. Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale; higher scores indicate higher levels of career resilience. The reliability of the career resilience questions was .92.

Data Collection and Analysis

From April 25 to May 13, 2022, we distributed a paper survey to students who had agreed to participate after the purpose of the study was explained to them. Three hundred and eight surveys were returned. After excluding surveys with unanswered questions, we analyzed a total of 300 surveys with IBM SPSS Statistics 27 and IBM SPSS Amos 27. Also, to identify the variables that influence the relationships between motivation for choosing teaching career and career decision self-efficacy and career resilience and to examine the level of such influence, this study obtained descriptive statistics and carried out factor analysis, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis. Statistical analysis was done through the statistics program, and Amos 27 was used to verify the significance of the indirect effects using structural equation modeling. As noted, questions that were found to have low validity for the sub-factors after analysis were excluded.

Results

The relationships between the pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience

This study explored three sub-factors of motivation for choosing a teaching career (intrinsic, extrinsic, and passive motivation), three sub-factors of career decision self-efficacy (achieving goals, job information, problem-solving), and four sub-factors of career resilience (career independence, relationship utilization, self-belief, and desire for achievement). Table 2 shows the general tendencies for the each. Descriptive statistics were obtained to examine the skewness and kurtosis and assess the overall tendencies and normality for each variable. Generally, skewness values of ± 2 or lower and kurtosis values of ± 7 or lower are considered acceptable for normality. With the exception of relationship utilization and goal setting, the absolute skewness and kurtosis values for the study variables were below ± 1 , indicating no issues regarding normality.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of pre-service early childhood teachers' general tendencies: motivation for choosing a teaching career, career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience* (N=300)

Variables	Sub-factors	Average (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Motivation for Choosing a Teaching Career	Intrinsic Motivation	1.97	.71	0.648	0.763
	Extrinsic Motivation	3.09	.83	-0.053	-0.154
	Passive Motivation	3.78	.91	-0.543	-0.069
	Overall	2.80	.50	0.044	0.777
Career Decision Self-efficacy	Goal setting	2.00	.60	0.482	1.261
	Job information	1.83	.54	0.269	-0.401
	Problem-solving	2.30	.75	0.278	-0.292
	Overall	2.02	.48	0.055	0.010
Career Resilience	Career Independence	1.89	.60	0.412	-0.198
	Utilization of relationships	1.61	.65	1.209	1.479
	Self-belief	1.85	.68	0.428	-0.328
	Desire for achievement	2.06	.71	0.226	-0.669
	Overall	1.85	.52	0.392	-0.134

Table 3 shows the results of the Pearson's correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationships between pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience. Correlation analysis indicates significant correlations between each variable. As for the relationship between motivation for choosing a teaching career and career decision self-efficacy, a positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and career decision self-efficacy, a positive correlation between extrinsic motivation and career decision self-efficacy, and a negative correlation between passive motivation and career decision self-efficacy were found. As for the relationship between motivation for choosing teaching and career resilience, positive correlations between intrinsic motivation and career resilience, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation and career resilience were found. Positive correlation between career decision self-efficacy and career resilience were also found. Furthermore, correlations between the sub-factors of motivation for choosing teaching were found. A negative correlation between intrinsic motivation and passive motivation and a positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation were found.

Table 3. *Correlation between pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience* (N=300)

Variables	Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation	Passive Motivation	Career Decision Self-efficacy	Career Resilience
Intrinsic Motivation	-				
Extrinsic Motivation	.32**	-			
Passive Motivation	-.31**	.20**	-		
Career Decision Self-efficacy	.47**	.23**	-.12*	-	
Career Resilience	.49**	.28**	-.14*	.71**	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The mediating effect of pre-service early childhood teachers' career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between motivation for choosing a teaching career and career resilience

Structural equation modeling was conducted to examine the mediating effect of pre-service

early childhood teachers' career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between their motivation for choosing a teaching career and their career resilience. As a prerequisite for verifying the mediating effects, the independent variable must be first found to have a significant effect on the mediating variable and the dependent variable, and the mediating variable must be found to have a significant effect on the dependent variable. Also, a mediating effect is considered to have occurred when the influence of the independent variable on the mediating variable and the influence of the mediating variable on the dependent variable are controlled, and the independent variable's effect on the dependent variable is no longer significant or decreases. We verified the mediating effect of career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between the sub-factors of motivation for choosing a teaching career as the independent variables and career adaptability as the dependent variable.

Table 4. *Structural equation analysis of pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience* (N=300)

Direction	Non- standardized coefficients (B)	Standard error	Standardized coefficients (β)	t	p
Career decision self-efficacy intrinsic motivation	.58	.10	.61	5.77	***
Career decision self-efficacy extrinsic motivation	.09	.07	.11	1.26	.21
Career decision self-efficacy passive motivation	.00	.10	.00	.01	.99
Career resilience career decision self-efficacy	.65	.08	.92	7.83	***
Career resilience intrinsic motivation	-.01	.07	-.02	-.20	.84
Career resilience extrinsic motivation	.01	.04	.02	.23	.82
Career resilience passive motivation	.00	.06	.00	.05	.96

*** $p < .001$

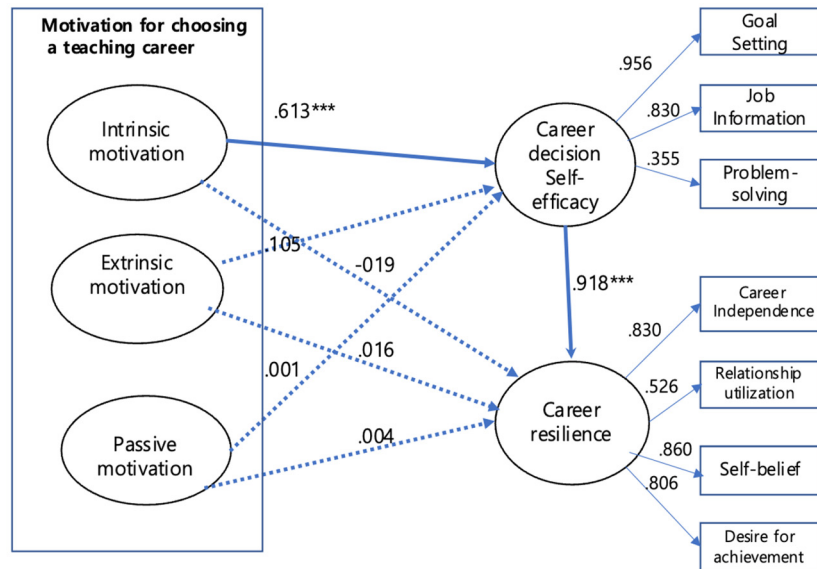


Figure 1. Structural equation verification of pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, the results of the analysis of path coefficients indicate that intrinsic motivation had a positive effect on career decision self-efficacy ($\beta=.61$, $t=5.77$, $P<.001$). Career decision self-efficacy had a positive effect on career resilience ($\beta=.92$; $t=7.83$, $p<.001$). However, extrinsic and passive motivation had no significant effect on career decision self-efficacy, and career resilience had no significant effect on intrinsic, extrinsic, and passive motivation.

Bootstrapping analysis was conducted to verify the significance of the indirect effect, where the independent variables (intrinsic, extrinsic, passive motivations) have no direct effect on the dependent variable (career resilience) but have an indirect effect on career resilience through a mediating variable (career decision self-efficacy). We carried out the bootstrapping analysis, resampling a sample for analysis and calculating statistics for each resampled sample, and then combined the results to estimate the final statistics. Table 5 presents the results.

As shown in Table 5, the indirect effect of intrinsic motivation $\rightarrow$ career decision self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ career resilience presented a statistically significant mediating effect. This confirms that the relationship between intrinsic motivation and career resilience is mediated

by career decision self-efficacy. However, no effect was found for extrinsic motivation → career decision self-efficacy → career resilience or passive motivation → career decision self-efficacy → career resilience.

Table 5. *The mediating effect of pre-service early childhood teachers' career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between motivation for choosing a teaching career and career resilience* (N=300)

Direction	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	p
Intrinsic motivation → career decision self-efficacy → career resilience	-.19	.56	.54	.15*
Extrinsic motivation → career decision self-efficacy → career resilience	.16	.10	.11	.32
Passive motivation → career decision self-efficacy → career resilience	.04	.00	.00	.94

*** $p < .001$

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between pre-service early childhood teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career, their career decision self-efficacy, and their career resilience and to comprehend the relationships between these variables. The results of our analysis can be summarized as follows.

First, pre-service early childhood teachers' intrinsic motivation influenced their career decision self-efficacy and their career resilience. This is consistent with previous studies that found that pre-service early childhood teachers' intrinsic motivation affected their career decision self-efficacy (Kim, & Na, 2021) and their teaching dedication (Lee, & Park, 2020) and that it had a significant impact on their aptitude and their satisfaction with their majors (Baek & Seo, 2019). This is also similar to findings that pre-service teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation and self-encouragement had high perceived teaching performance ability (Lee, 2017), that their teaching motivation had an impact on their teaching passion and their career preparation behavior (Lee, 2020), and that their intrinsic motivation led to less work stress and lower turnover intention (Ahn et al., 2015).

As such, pre-service early childhood teachers who choose a teaching career in accordance with their intrinsic motivations such as personal interest or aptitude may perceive factors such as uncertainty positively and have confidence that they will successfully work through career-related issues and overcome difficulties as new teachers while transitioning into their new roles. The above findings have important implications for the selection of candidates for pre-service early childhood teaching programs. A thorough interview process is needed to examine candidates' intrinsic motivation for choosing a teaching career and administrative backing to institutionalize it. During the program itself, attention should be given to factors that affect pre-service teachers' intrinsic motivation, and support programs to help them accentuate and maintain intrinsic motivation must be provided. For example, field training, which has been identified as a factor affecting intrinsic motivation, must be conducted more systematically (Shin, 2019; Shin, et al., 2007).

Second, in analyzing the mediating effect of pre-service early childhood teachers' career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between their motivation for choosing a teaching career and their career resilience, only intrinsic motivation was found to have a positive effect on career decision self-efficacy, and career decision self-efficacy was found to have a positive effect on career resilience, thus confirming that the relationship between intrinsic motivation and career resilience is mediated by career decision self-efficacy. Such results are consistent with findings that career decision self-efficacy had a mediating effect on the relationship between various career-related factors. This complements and confirms findings that the higher the level of career preparation behavior (Kim & Lee, 2019; Yang & Kim, 2008), satisfaction with major and with career counselling (Lee & Kim, 2019), adjustment to college life (Park, & Im, 2019), and career decision self-efficacy, the higher the level of career resilience (Kim, & Lee, 2019). This also complements findings that career decision self-efficacy can reduce stress related to job hunting (Jung & Yang, 2013; Oh, 2014).

As the above examination confirms, career decision self-efficacy and career resilience are very important variables that influence motivation for choosing a teaching career. Having a high level of career decision self-efficacy means having the confidence to set one's own goals and make one's own decisions in selecting and building a career and knowing that one has the problem-solving skills and the ability needed to put theory into practice. Having a high level of career decision self-efficacy helps pre-service early childhood teachers maintain their

intrinsic motivation and is highly related to their career resilience, that is, to their ability to perceive challenging situations positively and respond to them appropriately. Thus, to enhance their career decision self-efficacy, pre-service early childhood teachers need to set goals, experience teaching vicariously through modeling, and receive adequate encouragement and support. For example, during counseling in pre-service early childhood teacher education programs, counseling strategies that strengthen students' career decision-making efficacy are needed. Moreover, concrete efforts to should be made to simultaneously reduce their stress and psychological anxiety (Yang & Kim, 2008; Betz et al., 1996; Taylor & Betz, 1983). Decision self-efficacy can be an important variable in whether pre-service early childhood teachers overcome conflicts and difficulties and develop professionally as teachers after training.

Lastly, we propose that follow-up studies on the intrinsic motivation of pre-service early childhood teachers are needed. It is important to consider intrinsic motivation, not only in terms of a person's decision to study and major in early childhood education but also in terms of their actual entry into the profession. As such, further in-depth research is needed to identify factors that influence the intrinsic motivation of pre-service early childhood teachers in order to design programs, materials, and supports that can strengthen their intrinsic motivation as they prepare to formally enter the teaching profession and that research should continue to include variables other than grade level.

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