

Correlation Between Special Education Teachers' Self-efficacy and Work Stress

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ABSTRACT

Work stress in the educational field is defined as a series of physical and psychological reactions that occur when teachers must cope with occupational demands. It is a natural reaction to the pressures of the job, but prolonged exposure can severely affect health, leading to issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. The aim of objective to find out the Correlation Between Special Education Teachers' Self-efficacy and Work Stress. The current study adopted a quantitative and descriptive approach to achieve its objectives, through collecting and analyzing data in a way that allows for describing the phenomenon under study. The study was conducted in a number of schools in the city of Mosul, which include staff of special education teachers. These schools included diverse selections to ensure appropriate representation of the special education environment in the city. The data collection process done during the period from 15 October to 10 December 2025, The study employed two standardized instruments to assess teachers' occupational stress and self-efficacy. First, the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) developed Second, the Muteveri Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (MTSES). The study found out the regarding age, half of the participants (50%) were between 30–39 years, followed by those aged 40–49 years (24%). Participants aged 20–29 years accounted for 16%, while smaller proportions were aged 50–59 years (9%) and 60 years or older (1%). In terms of sex, the majority of participants were female (56%), while males represented 44% of the sample. Most participants were married (82%), whereas 18% were single. Regarding years of experience, 43% of participants had less than 5 years of experience. About 24% had 16–20 years, while 18% had 6–10 years of experience. Smaller proportions had 11–15 years (12%) and 21 years or more (3%). Finally, the majority of participants were permanently employed (90%), while 10% were working on a contract basis. The study concluded that the show that there is an inverse correlation between teachers' stress and the teacher's self-efficacy.

Keywords: *Special Education, Teachers', Self-efficacy, Work Stress.*

INTRODUCTION

Stress, remains a persistent challenge in the teaching profession, exacerbated in the context of special education where complex learner needs, increased workload, and emotional labor are prevalent¹. Various stressors ranging from administrative demands and a lack of support to behavioral challenges are cited as detrimental to teacher well-being². Emphasized that while self-efficacy mitigates occupational stress, the contextual variables, such as school support and workload, moderate this relationship^{3,4}. On the other hand, stress continues to be a problem in the teaching profession and is made worse in the special education setting due to the prevalence of complex learner needs, greater workload, and emotional labor⁵. Teachers' well-being is said to be negatively impacted by a number of stressors, from behavioral issues to administrative duties and a lack of support⁶. According to other research, stress has a detrimental impact on teachers' health, work happiness, and efficacy in the classroom^{7,8}. Research on the psychological impact of work stress on self-efficacy among special education teachers has emerged as a critical area of inquiry due to the demanding nature of their roles and the high prevalence of burnout within this population^{9,10}. The importance of self-efficacy in educational contexts has been established through decades of research demonstrating that teacher efficacy beliefs influence instructional practices, teacher persistence and effort, teacher wellbeing, and ultimately student outcomes. Teachers with higher self-efficacy set more challenging goals, persist longer

in the face of difficulties, employ more effective teaching strategies, are more open to innovation, and experience greater job satisfaction and lower burnout^{11,12}. Teaching is a profession widely acknowledged for its inherent demands, with special education amplifying these challenges due to the unique complexities associated with supporting students with diverse needs^{13,14}. Consequently, special education teachers frequently encounter heightened levels of work-related stress stemming from the intensive behavioral and academic requirements of their students, as well as the systemic pressures within educational institutions¹⁵⁻¹⁷. This persistent exposure to stressors can significantly impact their professional well-being and their perceived capability to execute their teaching duties effectively^{18,19}. This overview explores the intricate relationship between occupational stress and self-efficacy among special education teachers, recognizing that higher stress levels may inversely correlate with a teacher's belief in their ability to manage classroom demands and student progress^{20,21}. This interaction is particularly critical as special education teachers often grapple with insufficient resources, such as materials, technology, and personnel, which further exacerbates their stress and can lead to burnout^{22,23}. Furthermore, the dynamic interplay between environmental demands and an individual's personal resources, including self-efficacy, largely dictates the perception and impact of stress^{24,25}. The purpose of this quantitative explanatory correlational study is to examine the relationship between stress levels and feelings of self-efficacy among special education teachers in Mosul Governorate. It is necessary to

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study this relationship in order to develop effective strategies that reduce teacher stress and enhance self-efficacy, ultimately improving the quality of education for students with special needs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design: The current study adopted a quantitative and descriptive approach to achieve its objectives, through collecting and analyzing data in a way that allows for describing the phenomenon under study.

Setting of the study: The study was conducted in a number of schools in the city of Mosul, which include staff of special education teachers. These schools included diverse selections to ensure appropriate representation of the special education environment in the city.

Sample size and participants: Before commencing any study, it is essential to determine the appropriate sample size for accurate data analysis. Since our study requires the application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in analyzing the questionnaire, and this method necessitates a specific sample size for its application using AMOS software, several websites are available to determine the minimum suitable sample size for applying Structural Equation Modeling.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Special education teachers working in public schools
2. Who have at least one year of experience teaching students with special needs
3. Who have expressed their consent to participate and signed the informed consent form.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Teachers not working in the field of special education
2. Those with less than one year of experience teaching students with special needs
3. Those who refused to participate or did not complete the study tools
4. The pilot study sample of 15 teachers, which was used only to test the validity of the tool and was not included in the final analysis.

Data collection tool: The study employed two standardized instruments to assess teachers' occupational stress and self-efficacy. First, the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) developed by Michael J. Fimian in 1984 was used to measure sources and manifestations of stress among teachers. The instrument consists of 49 items across ten subscales (Time Management, Work-Related Stressors, Professional Distress, Discipline and Motivation, Professional Investment, Emotional Manifestations, Behavioral Manifestations, Fatigue Manifestations, Cardiovascular Manifestations, and Gastronomic Manifestations), rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Second, the Muteveri Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (MTSES) developed by Ebel Muteveri in 2025 was employed to evaluate teachers' perceptions of their professional self-efficacy. This instrument comprises 16 items covering domains such as classroom management, instructional planning, student motivation, and coping with challenges, also rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Validation studies demonstrated strong construct validity and high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between 0.81 and 0.89 across domains.

Statistical procedure: A range of statistical methods were used to test the questionnaire, verify correlations and influences between the axes, and test for differences. These methods were employed using the SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 24 statistical software programs.

RESULTS

The study found out the regarding age, half of the participants (50%) were between 30–39 years, followed by those aged 40–49 years (24%). Participants aged 20–29 years accounted for 16%, while smaller proportions were aged 50–59 years (9%) and 60 years or older (1%). In terms of sex, the majority of participants were female (56%), while males represented 44% of the sample. Most participants were married (82%), whereas 18% were single. Concerning the number of students taught, the majority of participants (82%) taught 15 students or fewer. About 13% taught 16–30 students, while only a small proportion taught 31–45 students (3%) or 46 students and more (2%). Finally, the majority of participants were permanently employed (90%), while 10% were working on a contract basis (Table 1).

The results of Table (2) and Figure (1) show that there is an inverse correlation between teachers' stress and the teacher's self-efficacy, in terms of the value of the correlation coefficient, which appeared equal to (-0.68), and this relationship is significant based on the probability value (P-value), which appeared equal to (0.006), which is less than (0.05), and the same result shows the similarity of the signals of both the lower and upper boundaries.) for the confidence interval (95%Confidence Interval) at a significant level of (0.05) where each of the two limits appeared with a negative signal, and based on what has been presented, the hypothesis of nothingness will be rejected and the alternative hypothesis will be accepted that there is an inverse

Table 1. Demographic Data of study participants (N=210)

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
20-29	33	16%
30-39	104	50%
40-49	51	24%
50-59	19	9%
60 and more	3	1%
Sex		
Male	93	44%
Female	117	56%
Marital status		
Married	172	82%
Single	38	18%
Number of students teach		
15 student and below	173	82%
16-30 student	27	13%
31-45 student	6	3%
46 student and more	4	2%
Education Level		
Diploma	54	26%
Bachelor's	148	70%
Master degree	4	2%
Doctorate	4	2%
Years of Experience		
Less than 5 year	90	43%
6-10 years	37	18%
11-15 years	25	12%
16-20 years	51	24%
21 years and more	7	3%
Type of assignment		
Permanent	189	90%
Contract	21	10%
Total	210	100%

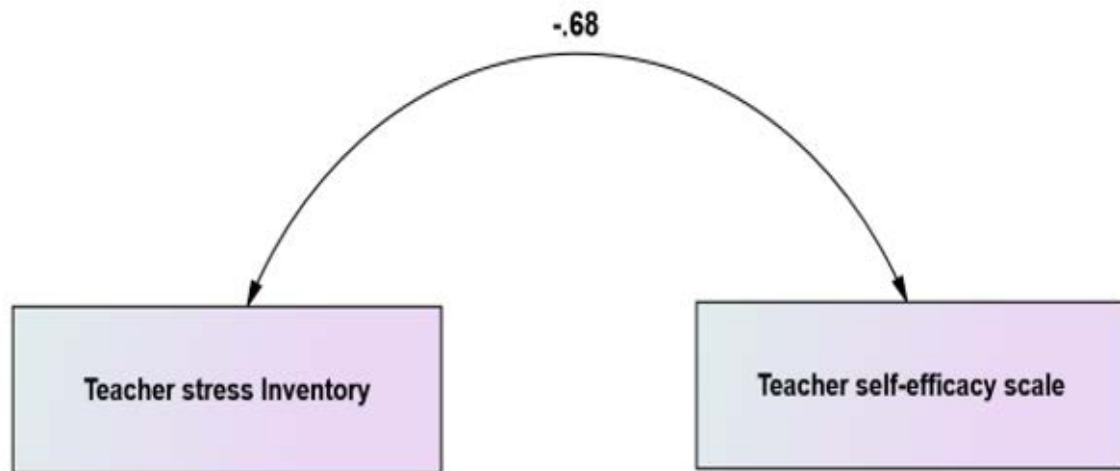
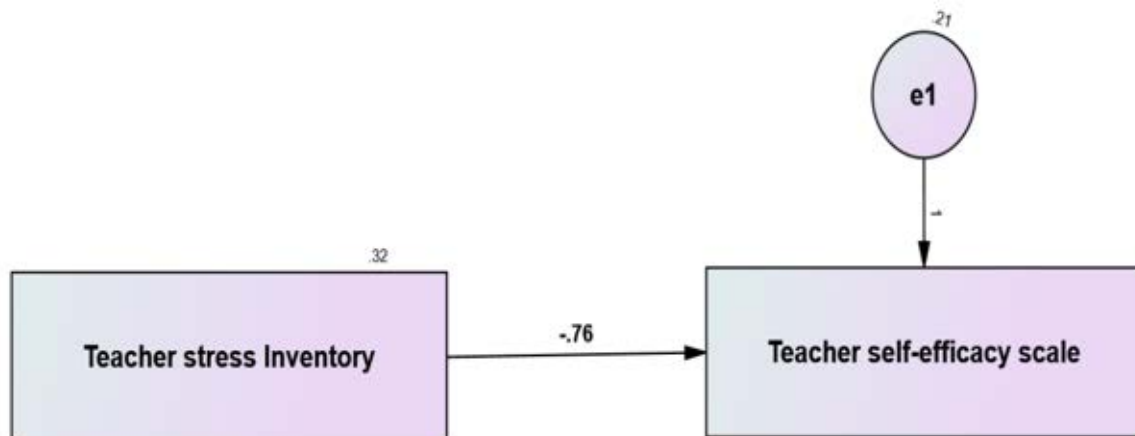
Table 2. The Relationship between Teachers' Stress and Teacher's Self-Efficacy

The first variable	Relationship Direction	The second variable	Correlation value	95% Confidence Interval		P-value
				Upper	Lower	
Teachers' Stress	<-->	Teacher's Self-Efficacy	-0.68	-0.951	-0.763	0.006

Table 3. Results of the Effect of Teachers' Stress on Teacher's Self-Efficacy

Independent variable	Direction of Impact	Dependent variable	Regression coefficient	Standard error of regression coefficient	Determination Coefficient	C.R.	P-value
			Estimate(β)	Se.(β)	R ²		
Teachers' Pressure	←	Teacher's Self-Efficacy	-0.76	0.056	0.47	-13.575	0

Table Value = 1.96

**Figure 1.** Show that there is an inverse correlation between teachers' stress and the teacher's self-efficacy**Figure 2.** The Effect of Teachers' Stress on Teacher's Self-Efficacy

correlation with significant significance between teachers' stress and the teacher's self-efficacy.

Table (3) and Figure (2) show that there is an inverse effect of teachers' stress on the teacher's self-efficacy, in terms of the value of the regression coefficient (β) which reached (-0.76) and this effect is significant in terms of the probability value (P-value) which reached (0.000) which is less than (0.05)), and the same result indicates the absolute value of the critical value (C.R.), which reached (13.575), which is greater than the tabular value of (1.96) at the level of significance (0.05), and the value of the determination coefficient (R²) shows that (47%) of the changes

in (teacher's self-efficacy) are due to (teachers' pressure). The remaining percentage (53%) is for other variables that were not included in the model, and based on this result, the hypothesis of no-nonsense will be rejected and the alternative hypothesis will be accepted that there is a significant adverse effect of teachers' pressures on the teacher's self-efficacy from the point of view of a sample of special education teachers.

DISCUSSION

Table(1) show that the demographic profile of the 210 participants in this study provides important context for interpreting subsequent

findings. The age distribution shows that half of the participants were between 30–39 years, with smaller proportions in younger (20–29 years) and older age groups (50 years and above). This middle-age dominance is consistent with other studies of teacher populations, where many educators fall into early to mid-career stages (30–49 years), reflecting both workforce stability and the presence of experienced educators capable of implementing pedagogical strategies effectively. Such distributions often blend the innovation of younger teachers with the classroom management expertise of more experienced ones, which has been noted as beneficial in educational settings²⁶. Gender composition in this sample shows a female majority (56%), a pattern frequently observed in educational institutions globally. Research indicates that the teaching profession tends to be female-dominated, particularly in primary and secondary education, which can influence pedagogical styles and classroom dynamics. While gender alone does not directly determine teaching effectiveness, gender diversity has been linked to broader perspectives and varied interaction styles that can enrich learning environments^{27,28}. Overall, the demographic characteristics of the study participants resemble patterns found in broader educational research, with a predominantly female, mid-career workforce holding mainly bachelor's qualifications and substantial long-term employment. These factors shape the educational context in which the study is situated and should be considered when interpreting performance or attitude measures collected from the same sample²⁹⁻³². The results presented in Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate a strong and significant negative correlation between teachers' stress and teachers' self-efficacy ($r = -0.68$, $p = 0.006$, 95% CI: -0.951 to -0.763). This finding suggests that as stress levels increase, teachers' perceptions of their own instructional capabilities decrease, and conversely, higher self-efficacy is associated with lower experienced stress. In educational psychology, this pattern is well supported: teachers who hold strong beliefs in their effectiveness tend to interpret challenging classroom situations as manageable and within their control, thereby experiencing less stress related to job demands^{33,34}. This inverse relationship aligns with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which posits that self-efficacy functions as a cognitive resource that influences how individuals appraise stressful contexts. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to view demanding tasks as challenges to overcome, rather than threats, which buffers the psychological impact of stressors. Conversely, those with low self-efficacy may perceive routine challenges as overwhelming, heightening stress responses³⁵⁻³⁸. Empirical research has similarly documented negative associations between stress and self-efficacy among educators. A study in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers found that higher self-efficacy was linked with significantly lower professional stress levels, which supports the notion that confidence in teaching ability mitigates anxiety and strain in the classroom^{39,40}. Moreover, reviews of the literature on teacher stress and self-efficacy indicate that these constructs are consistently negatively related across diverse educational settings: as stress and job burden increase, self-efficacy beliefs tend to diminish, which can lead to poorer emotional well-being, increased burnout, and a greater likelihood of attrition from the profession. At the same time, higher self-efficacy is associated with greater professional commitment and job satisfaction, highlighting its protective role against occupational stress⁴¹⁻⁴⁶. The pattern observed in this study (an inverse correlation) also resonates with wider findings that teachers who feel confident in their instructional skills and classroom management are better equipped to cope with job pressures, engage in adaptive coping strategies, and maintain positive professional identities even when faced with heavy workload, student behavioral challenges, or administrative demands⁴⁷. In practical terms, this relationship implies that efforts to enhance teacher self-efficacy—such as through professional development, mentorship, supportive feedback, and workload management—could

help reduce stress levels. These strategies can empower teachers with stronger beliefs in their capabilities, which has been shown to correlate positively with emotional well-being and job satisfaction⁴⁸. In summary, the results reinforce a well-established theoretical and empirical link: teachers with higher self-efficacy experience lower stress, while heightened stress is associated with lower self-efficacy. This dynamic has important implications for teacher support programs and educational policy, suggesting that fostering self-efficacy should be a priority in efforts to improve teacher well-being and performance⁴⁹⁻⁵¹. The regression results in Table 3 show that teachers' stress has a significant negative effect on teachers' self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.76$, $p < 0.001$). The t -value (C.R. = -13.575) far exceeds the critical value of 1.96, indicating that this effect is statistically robust. The determination coefficient ($R^2 = 0.47$) indicates that 47% of the variance in teachers' self-efficacy can be explained by teachers' stress levels in the model. In other words, nearly half of the differences in self-efficacy scores among teachers in your sample are accounted for by variations in experienced stress⁵². The negative regression coefficient (β) clearly indicates an inverse effect—as stress increases, self-efficacy significantly decreases. This finding is congruent with extensive educational research showing that higher levels of work-related stress compromise a teacher's confidence in their instructional and professional capabilities. Self-efficacy reflects a teacher's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions required for successful teaching; high stress can undermine these beliefs by increasing emotional exhaustion, reducing cognitive resources, and diminishing belief in professional effectiveness. This aligns with empirical studies that report significant negative links between teacher stress and self-efficacy, where stress predicts lower self-efficacy levels. For example, research among school teachers found that increased stress significantly predicted reductions in teachers' efficacy beliefs, reflecting similar dynamics to those observed in this study⁵³⁻⁵⁵. Moreover, regression analysis in other educational contexts demonstrates that stress not only correlates with lower self-efficacy but can act as a predictor of diminished self-efficacy outcomes. In studies involving clinical and general education teachers, perceived stress and job stress factors significantly predicted self-efficacy outcomes, with stress accounting for a meaningful portion of variance in efficacy scores^{56,57}. The results depicted in Figure 2 visually reinforce the regression findings by showing a downward slope in the effect of stress on self-efficacy higher stress corresponds with lower predicted self-efficacy. This visual pattern is consistent with theoretical expectations based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, which suggests that stress can impair self-efficacy by increasing cognitive load and emotional strain, making educators less confident in their professional effectiveness under pressure. Teachers with higher stress are more likely to appraise classroom and workload challenges as threats rather than manageable tasks, thereby reducing their belief in their capability to positively influence student outcomes⁵⁸. From a practical standpoint, these findings highlight important implications for educational policy and teacher support systems. Interventions aimed at reducing workplace stress such as workload management, mentoring programs, stress-reduction training, and supportive administrative practices could help sustain or improve teachers' self-efficacy. A high sense of self-efficacy has been linked to greater instructional resilience, classroom management skills, job satisfaction, and lower burnout, while stress is frequently tied to burnout and attrition in the profession⁵⁹⁻⁶⁴. In summary, the evidence from your regression results confirms that teachers' stress exerts a significant and negative impact on teachers' self-efficacy, meaning that efforts to reduce teacher stress are likely to support stronger professional efficacy beliefs. These findings are consistent with the broader literature showing that stress undermines teacher confidence and efficacy, which are essential for effective teaching and teacher retention^{65,66}.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the show that there is an inverse correlation between teachers' stress and the teacher's self-efficacy, in terms of the value of the correlation coefficient, which appeared equal to (-0.68), and significant relationship between the dimensions of teachers' stress and the teacher's self-efficacy from the point of view of a sample of special education teachers.

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Competing Interest: None

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