



## Empowering Teachers: Exploring Early to Mid-Career Elementary School Teachers' Relationships Between Wellness and Self-Efficacy

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** A cyclical relationship has been documented among a teacher's self-efficacy, stress, and segments of their professional wellness (i.e., psychological, financial). Despite the recognized importance of teacher wellness and self-efficacy, research pertaining to public school elementary teachers specifically regarding these constructs is sparse.

**Purpose:** The current exploratory study aimed to discover the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and teacher wellness, controlling for factors such as time spent teaching, and potential site-based differences in the relationship.

**Methods:** The sample was comprised of 33 elementary school teachers across two elementary schools (K-5th grades), in two geographically different states, who completed the standardized Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form and the Five Factor Wellness Inventory.

**Results:** Results from a Spearman's rho indicated that, for both schools, there was a moderate, statistically significant, positive correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and wellness with higher self-efficacy related to higher wellness.

**Conclusions:** Given the results, the new insights into the relationship between teacher wellness and self-efficacy, regardless of location, indicates that preservice higher education training programs must emphasize the critical priority of building, supporting, and creating sustainable practices for teacher wellness and self-efficacy. As these practices begin prior to entering the profession, teachers can implement their coping skills to maintain higher wellness and self-efficacy levels, providing healthy modeling to others and potentially increasing effectiveness of instruction and retention levels.



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## 1. Introduction

Teachers' self-efficacy, behavior management stress, and wellness in the classroom (Aloe *et al.*, 2014; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Zee & Koomen, 2016) appear cyclical within the literature. A teacher's self-efficacy is negatively affected by difficulties managing continuous negative classroom behaviors and burnout symptoms (Aldrup *et al.*, 2018; Aloe *et al.*, 2014; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Brown, 2012; Zee & Koomen, 2016). These factors impact the teacher's belief about their effectiveness in the classroom, impacting their performance, and reinforcing positive or negative perceptions and beliefs about their professional competency. Teachers must then facilitate learning with increased assessment requirements and curriculum standards with growing

class sizes, despite research indicating smaller class sizes as more conducive to student learning (Bascia, 2010; Mathis, 2016; Schanzenbach, 2014).

The combination of larger class sizes, standardized testing, a lack of administrative support, and a lack of training in social-emotional skills and behavior management strategies can culminate into feelings of unpreparedness, elevated stress, and decreased self-efficacy (Eisenman *et al.*, 2015; McCarthy *et al.*, 2014; Stauffer & Mason, 2013). As teachers juggle their expanding responsibilities within the same time constraints, stress may increase, influencing their relationships with students, their job satisfaction, and their burnout rate (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Kokkinos, 2007; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Further, teachers have other responsibilities and tasks after

school, reducing any personal time in the evenings and on weekends to engage in self-care (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). Therefore, discovering the relationship between teachers' wellness and self-efficacy is critical to be able to enhance teacher performance and student achievement.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy within social cognitive theory as one's belief in their own capabilities to handle a given situation. Specifically, teacher self-efficacy is the teachers' beliefs that they can effectively help students with decreased social-emotional skills learn through influence and techniques (Bandura, 1997). Teachers' self-efficacy influences students through social learning in that students are developing beliefs in their own academic and personal capabilities through academic achievements, evaluations, and comparison to peers' performance. Thus, a teacher's supervision of students in the classroom provides a unique opportunity for them to positively influence their students' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Professional teacher self-efficacy (TSE) refers to three classroom processes: classroom management, instructing students, and fostering student engagement (Aloe *et al.*, 2014; Hultell *et al.*, 2013). Research on TSE is studied the most within the context of burnout and stress (e.g., Aldrup *et al.*, 2017; Hultell *et al.*, 2013; Kokkinos, 2007; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Burnout is a psychological response comprised of three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to depleted emotional energy that negatively affects emotional resources and the ability to psychologically engage. Depersonalization describes a shift in attitude from positive to negative, becoming more cynical towards others which is intertwined with emotional exhaustion. Decreased personal accomplishment centers around one's negative perception and evaluation of themselves (Maslach *et al.*, 1996).

Emotional exhaustion can specifically impact the classroom management aspect of TSE (Aloe *et al.*, 2014; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000), indicating teachers with low classroom management TSE potentially contain

a higher likelihood of withdrawing when faced with continuous disruptive misbehavior, causing emotional strain and exhaustion. Therefore, the stress, emotional exhaustion, and disruptive behaviors associated with burnout, in turn, influence teachers' belief that they are ineffective, causing their self-efficacy to decrease (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000), revealing its reinforcing relationship. Across 40 years of TSE research, teachers with higher self-efficacy are less likely to be stressed and less likely to experience total burnout or individual burnout components (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Further, teachers with higher self-efficacy also have higher job satisfaction, personal accomplishment levels, and higher commitment to the profession (Zee & Koomen, 2016). These findings infer that teachers with lower TSE may experience higher burnout and lower job satisfaction and professional commitment, potentially resulting in them leaving the profession.

Based on the multiple factors negatively influencing TSE, the potential mental, emotional, and physical toll on teachers is high and could negatively affect students. Particularly, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found that in the morning, classrooms of students with higher cortisol (a stress hormone) levels predicted higher burnout levels in teachers, thereby linking the stressful profession of teaching biologically to students' stress levels. Additionally, von der Embse and Mankin (2020) discovered higher TSE and lower stress at the start of the school year, but that TSE rapidly declined while stress levels rose, specifically around standardized testing, culminating in an overall 15% decrease in self-efficacy and 17% increase in stress by the end of the school year. Specific tasks and classroom stress seem to correlate negatively with TSE (Klassen & Chiu, 2010) especially with everyday stressors such as workload, discipline, parent relationships, individual student differences, unmotivated students, and students' progress and achievement (Davidson, 2009; Hultell *et al.*, 2013; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

### 2.2. Transactional Stress Theory

The transactional stress theory is directly related to TSE. Appraisal theory refers to assessing an environmental situation as positive, stressful, or irrelevant to wellbeing, analyzing personal resources to cope with that situation, and modifying the situation and strategies as needed (Psychology Press, 2005).

Lazarus expanded to the transactional stress model with Folkman (1987) which considers the relationship of the person and environment, the cognitive appraisal of the event, emotional responses to the event, and the subsequent behaviors. The mediating process occurs within the cognitive appraisal stage, evaluating the event that is occurring. The two types of cognitive appraisals are primary (is what is happening going to harm, threaten, challenge, or benefit oneself?) and secondary (how much control does one have over the outcome?) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Classroom stress clearly correlates negatively with self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010) especially with regard to common stressors in the classroom (Davidson, 2009; Hultell *et al.*, 2013; Stauffer & Mason, 2013) making the cognitive appraisal of classroom teachers negative, thus creating negative responses and behaviors. Additionally, teachers' appraisal of what constitutes misbehavior, stress, and self-care, as influenced by their memories and emotional state, in conjunction with their individual resources to cope with situations, may influence their perceived TSE to handle the situation. This cycle will continue if the teacher receives no support or training to increase their TSE because they draw from their previous experience (memory and emotions) and evaluate their resources to cope (which have not improved), resulting in their continued belief of their inability to handle the situation. These repeated negative and positive emotional appraisals continually impact TSE and in extension, teachers' overall wellness due to the mental and emotional stress from the situations themselves and of reappraisal from continued stressors.

### 2.3. Wellness

Multiple definitions and interchangeable term usage of wellness or wellbeing in the education realm cause some difficulty in consistency and consensus on teacher wellness. However, elements of teachers' wellness included the positive and negative effects on teachers' mental health in the schools (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001), focusing specifically on teachers' financial well-being (King *et al.*, 2016), psychological well-being (Liang *et al.*, 2017), or occupational well-being (Aldrup *et al.*, 2018). Further, wellbeing with self-efficacy and connectedness (von der Embse & Mankin, 2020) as subsets of the positive mental

health definition of teacher well-being (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001) were explored. Several studies focused on wellness in student education programs (e.g., Curry & O'Brien, 2012; Harwell & Daniel, 2012; Price & McCallum, 2015), but did not measure wellness with teachers currently in the profession.

The literature for preservice and current teachers reflects the conversation and empirical exploration of wellness within the context of stress. Price and McCallum (2015) remark on broadening the view of wellness by reporting that student teachers could identify potential negative influencers to their wellness but lacked the knowledge of appropriate, preventative strategies to address those influencers. Teachers who reported more stress also indicated a decrease in overall wellness and reported perceived stress and overall wellness predicted teacher job satisfaction (Watson *et al.*, 2010). Further, daily stress exposure in the classroom and outside of it negatively influenced teachers' wellness levels (Aldrup *et al.*, 2017). Finally, the perception of the teaching profession according to student teachers affected their wellness (Price & McCallum, 2015). For the purpose of this study, whole person teacher wellness was explored with a positive perspective (versus a deficit perspective) to see if it is connected with TSE, a question that clearly merits investigation.

A lack of studies exploring the relationship between teachers' wellness and TSE in the United States constitutes the need to discover the relationship between these two constructs, so that educators, administrators, and school mental health professionals can effectively support teachers in their professional and personal lives. Further, teacher educators can adequately train preservice teachers with realistic expectations and strategies to fortify their self-efficacy and wellness. As teachers receive the support needed in school and outside of school, the potential effect on students and families could positively impact communities and the educational system.

### 3. Current Study

This study involved an overall view, or whole person view, of wellness (e.g., psychological, emotional, physical, occupational, social, and spiritual) in the school environment and teachers' personal lives, wherein previous studies focused on specific aspects of wellness (e.g., psychological or occupational). The

purpose of this exploratory study was to discover the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and wellness with a focus on elementary school teachers while considering years of teaching, grade level, and age factors. Therefore, the current study sought to address the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** What is the relationship between teachers' wellness and their levels of self-efficacy?

**Research Question 2a:** To what degree does the length of teaching experience affect teacher self-efficacy?

**Research Question 2b:** To what degree does the length of teaching experience affect teacher wellness?

**Research Question 3a:** To what degree does the grade level a teacher instructs affect their self-efficacy?

**Research Question 3b:** To what degree does the grade level a teacher instructs affect their wellness?

**Research Question 4a:** To what degree does the age of the teacher affect their self-efficacy?

**Research Question 4b:** To what degree does the age of the teacher affect their wellness?

Because this study is exploratory, thus hypothesis-generating, no hypotheses are stated or tested.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Participants

This study was a correlational exploratory study between one elementary school in a Southeastern state and one elementary school in a rural Midwest state. Convenience sampling was used to survey teachers who were certified classroom instructors in both schools. One difference between the elementary schools that participated was the grade levels range. The Southeastern elementary school only taught kindergarten through third grade, whereas the rural Midwest elementary school taught kindergarten through fifth grade. However, after conducting bivariate correlation tests, there was no practically significant relationship between grade level and self-efficacy or wellness. Therefore, the full sample size for the elementary school from Rural Midwest was included and a suitable comparative sample size.

In the elementary school located in the southeast, all 17 certified classroom instructors participated in the study. Teacher breakdown in grade level included three kindergarten teachers (18%), six first-grade teachers (35%), five second-grade teachers (29%), and three third-grade teachers (18%). All participants were white females.

The average length of time teaching was 6.97 years ( $SD = 7.59$ ), with approximately one quarter clustered around 4 years of teaching experience. The average age was 33.76 years ( $SD = 9.18$ ). More than one half of the participants reported being married (53%), whereas 21% reported being single or unmarried. In terms of education, nine teachers had their bachelor's degree (53%) whereas eight teachers had advanced degrees (47%).

In the elementary school located in rural Midwest, 16 of the 22 (72.7%) certified classroom instructors participated in the study. There was one kindergarten teacher (6%), four first-grade teachers (25%), two second-grade teachers (13%), two third-grade teachers (13%), three fourth-grade teachers (19%), and four fifth-grade teachers (25%) who participated in the study. All participants were white females. The average length of time teaching was 14.81 years ( $SD = 11.35$ ). The average age of the participants was 40 years ( $SD = 11.35$ ). More than one half of the participants reported being married (63%), whereas 31% reported being single or unmarried. Regarding education, 10 teachers had their bachelor's degree (63%) and six teachers had advanced degrees (38%). Four teachers were graduate students (25%).

### 4.2. Procedures

This exploratory study was reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Board of the university with which the authors were affiliated. Participants at both elementary schools were informed in person about the purpose of the survey, consented to participate, and then were administered the survey. The signed consent forms were collected and stored separately from the survey questionnaires to protect confidentiality of participants. All teachers at both elementary schools were given the opportunity to participate at one of the school's faculty meetings. Teachers who did not attend the meeting with researchers were given the consent form and survey questionnaire in their mailbox at the respective school. Researchers retrieved all surveys within one week of distribution.

### 4.3. Measures

#### 4.3.1. Five Factor Wellness Inventory – Adult Form 2 (FFWEL-Form A2)

The Five Factor Wellness Inventory-Adult Form was used to assess wellness in the study participants. The FFWEL-Adult Form was created by Jane E. Myers and Thomas J. Sweeney to assess an individual's different



areas of wellness and areas needing improvement (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The FFWEL was developed from the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL) shown to be valid and reliable (Hattie *et al.*, 2004). The Indivisible-Self, the inventory's basis for determining wellness, is made up of five factors consisting of creative self, coping self, social self, essential self, and physical self. The creative self focuses on cognitive processes, emotions, work, sense of control, and sense of humor while the coping self centers around realistic beliefs, self-worth, and managing stress and leisure (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The social self refers to friendship and love while the essential self addresses spirituality, gender identity, self-care, and cultural identity (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). Finally, the physical self pertains to aspects of exercise and nutrition (Myers & Sweeney, 2004).

These five factors are measured with self-report inventories that have a total of 91 items scored via a 4-point Likert-type scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree) with seven sociodemographic items (Myers & Sweeney, 2014). According to the scoring methods for the FFWEL-Form A2 as outlined within "The Five Factor Wellness & Habit Change Workbook," no norms for scores were included because what is average or normal is not necessarily healthy for all (Myers & Sweeney, 2006). Therefore, Myers and Sweeney (2006) stated the following: "Rather, we encourage all to seek high level wellness, which we would define as 90 or better on any particular scale" (p. 24). Therefore, the scores that were 90% or higher for the factor or subsection scores were considered within the high wellness category.

Additionally, a self-rating scale was included within the workbook (Myers & Sweeney, 2006, p. 16) and adapted to categorize the remaining scores. The scale begins with one, indicating "Illness," and is used for the lowest 10% of scores. Next, two through four, indicating low health and is used for the next 30% of scores that are right before the halfway mark. The scores of five to six indicate "Health" or no illness or disease and was used for the 20% of scores at or above the halfway mark. Scores within the seven to eight range indicate individuals "Achieving wellness" and was used for the next 30% of scores nearing the 90% mark of high wellness. Finally, a score of nine or ten was reflected by the final 10% of scores that are 90% or higher of the perfect score for the factor section and indicates an individual having "High wellness" (Myer & Sweeney, 2006).

The FFWEL-A2 has been shown to generate scores that have internal consistency reliability with alpha coefficients for the five factors of 0.98 (creative self), 0.89 (coping self), 0.96 (social self), 0.95 (essential self), and 0.90 (physical self) (Myers & Sweeney, 2014). Additionally, the score validity of the instrument has been demonstrated via structural equation modeling, providing evidence of both convergent validity and divergent validity based on culture, age, gender, and ethnicity (Myers & Sweeney, 2014).

#### 4.3.2. *The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale Short Form (TSES-Short Form)*

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale-Short Form was used to assess teacher self-efficacy. The TSES-Short Form is a self-report measure that contains 12 items taken from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale Long Form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, n.d.). This assessment seeks to understand how much influence a teacher believes they have on student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Each question uses a 9-point Likert-format scale with labeled items at five of the options (nothing, very little, some influence, quite a bit, a great deal). Adequate score reliability and score validity of both the Long and Short Forms of the TSES have been reported by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), in their comparison of measurements across three studies.

## 5. Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS Statistics 28 software package. This study utilized bivariate analyses to describe sample characteristics and test Research Questions 1 – 4. At the bivariate level, due to the small sample size, Spearman's  $\rho$  was used to measure the strength of the association between the continuous variables of self-efficacy (dependent variable) and wellness (independent variable); the continuous variables of self-efficacy and grade level, years of teaching, and age; and the continuous variables of wellness and grade level, years of teaching, and age.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. *Descriptive and Bivariate Analysis*

The distribution of self-efficacy scores and wellness scores was screened for normality by applying the value of the skewness and kurtosis  $\pm 1.96$  (Hair *et al.*,

2017). Values of the skewness and kurtosis fell within  $\pm 1.96$ , indicating a reasonably normal distribution. Cronbach's alpha showed moderate score reliability in both measures for the elementary school in the southeast ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and moderate score reliability for both measures in the elementary school in the rural Midwest ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Spearman's *rho* was performed to examine Research Question 1 about the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and wellness. The results indicated for both schools that there was a statistically significant, positive correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and wellness. For the Southeastern elementary school there was a moderate statistically significant positive relationship ( $r^2 = 0.607, p < 0.05$ ) and a moderate statistically significant positive relationship for the elementary school in Rural Midwest ( $r^2 = 0.740, p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that the higher the self-efficacy reported by the teachers, the higher the wellness of the teacher (Table 1).

Spearman's *rho* was also performed to examine Research Questions 2a, 3a, and 4a about the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and grade level taught, years of teaching, and teacher's age for both schools. In the Southeastern elementary school, there was no statistically significant relationship found between the teachers' self-efficacy related to grade level and age. However, there was a statistically significant relationship discovered between teachers' self-efficacy and the length of time they had been teaching ( $r^2 = 0.559, p < 0.05$ ). In the rural Midwest elementary school, no statistical significances were found between self-efficacy and years of teaching, grade level, or age (Table 2).

Spearman's *rho* was also performed to examine Research Questions 2b, 3b, and 4b about the relationship between teachers' wellness and their grade level, years of teaching, and age. In the Southeastern elementary school, there was no statistical significance concerning the relationship between teachers' wellness and years of teaching, grade level, or age. In the rural Midwest elementary school, there was no statistical significance between teachers' wellness and years teaching, grade level, or age.

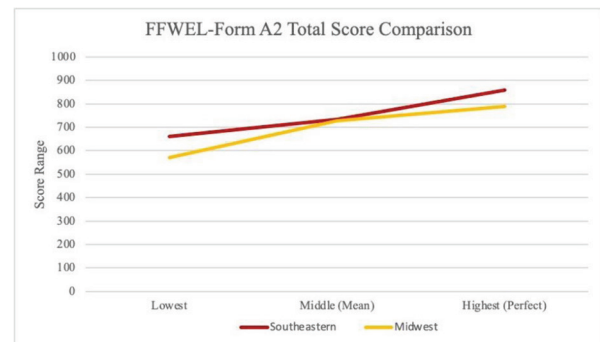
**Table 1:** Southeastern School Bivariate Analysis

Independent and Confounding Variables	Dependent Variable Teacher Self-Defficacy ( $r^2$ )	p value
Teacher Wellness	0.61	< 0.05
Years Teaching	0.56	> 0.05
Grade Level	0.2	> 0.05
Age	0.15	> 0.05

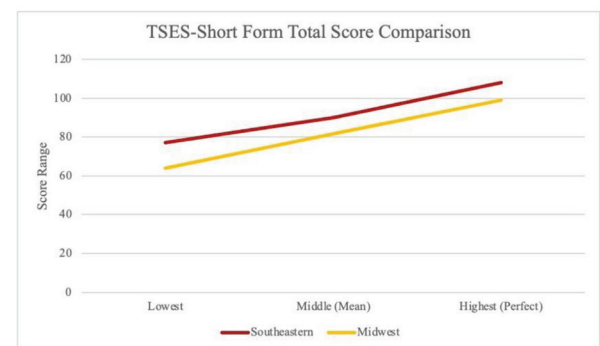
**Table 2:** Midwestern School Bivariate Analysis

Independent and Confounding Variables	Dependent Variable Teacher Self-Defficacy ( $r^2$ )	p value
Teacher Wellness	0.74	< 0.01
Years Teaching	- 0.14	> 0.01
Grade Level	0.35	> 0.01
Age	- 0.03	> 0.01

In comparing the two elementary schools, the overall means showed very little difference for wellness and self-efficacy between the schools. The FFWEL-Form A2 mean for the Southeastern elementary school was 732.52, whereas the rural Midwest elementary school was 726.81 (Figure 1). Additionally, the mean scores for both schools on the TSES-Short Form revealed very little difference (Figure 2). The Southeastern elementary school had a mean score of 89.91, whereas the rural Midwest elementary school had a mean score of 81.71. Despite the geographical difference for these two elementary schools, there was little difference between their average wellness and self-efficacy scores.



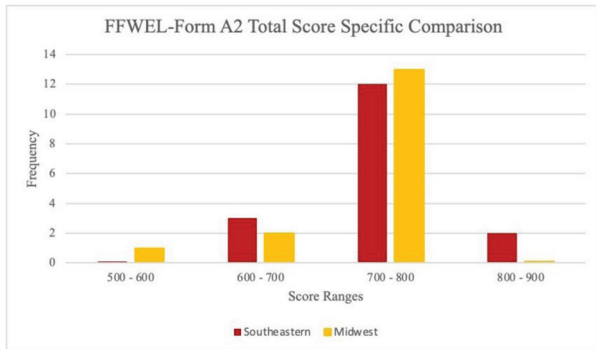
**Figure 1:** FFWEL-Form A2 Total Score Comparison



**Figure 2:** TSES-Short Form Total Score Comparison

Based on the mean scores for the FFWEL-Form A2, the majority of both elementary schools' teachers scored between 700 and 800 overall. According to the adapted

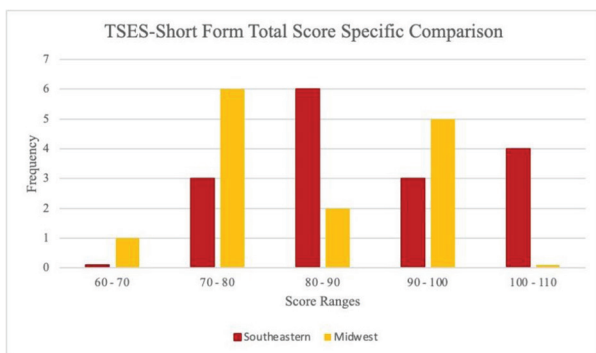
scale, this indicates that most teachers from both schools were categorized within the “achieving wellness” level. Only one teacher from the Southeastern elementary school achieved the 90% threshold of high wellness (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** FFWEL-Form A2 Total Score Specific Comparison

The TSES-Short Form did not include an interpretation guide. It appears that, similar to the FFWEL-Form A2, the structure of the assessment indicates that the higher the score, the higher belief teachers have in themselves and their effectiveness with student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Thus, the higher the score, the higher the self-efficacy. Because no interpretation was included for specific score ranges, researchers adapted the FFWEL-Form A2 scoring interpretation for the TSES-Short Form (Figure 4).

Each subsection of the TSES-Short Form (i.e., student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management) was measured via four questions with a self-report score ranging from one (no influence) to nine (a great deal of influence). The 90% threshold of high wellness was used as the same measurement for high self-efficacy. Most teachers from both schools scored between 70 and 90. According to the scale, this indicates that most teachers believed that they had a good deal of influence with their students and within the classroom.



**Figure 4:** TSES-Short Form Total Score Specific Comparison

## 7. Discussion

The current study explored the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and their overall wellness and comparative differences, if any, in two elementary schools located in the Midwest and Southeastern areas of the United States. Both areas had different demographics in student population and growth rates. Based on the results of this study, both elementary schools reported a moderate, positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and wellness levels. Therefore, teachers in these two schools who reported higher levels of self-efficacy, reported higher levels of wellness while the reverse was also true: teachers reporting lower self-efficacy, reported a lower level of wellness.

Despite few studies exploring the relationship of elementary teachers’ self-efficacy and overall wellness, this study revealed that there was a moderate, positive relationship between participating elementary teachers’ self-efficacy and wellness. There are many studies connecting the negative relationship of stress and burnout to TSE (e.g., Klassen & Chiu, 2010) and the relationship of stress and burnout to wellness (e.g., Milfont *et al.*, 2008). As teachers attempt to manage compounding stressors in multiple areas of their lives, a breakdown in their resiliency and persistence to maintain their wellness may decrease which could then lead to decreased self-efficacy (Caples & McNeese, 2010). An increase in resilience and persistence seems related to a higher self-efficacy and may increase the likelihood that teachers will both experience personal accomplishment and stay in the profession longer (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Though wellness can be affected by many different factors including their work environment, workload, and personal well-being (Nwoko *et al.*, 2023), the positive correlation between self-efficacy and wellness found that the majority of teachers (76%) at the Southeastern elementary school were positively within the health and wellness portion of the scale for their overall FFWEL-Form A2 score. Subsequently, the Essential Self subsection contained 18% of teachers in the top 90% of scores. Some teachers had high wellness regarding their sense of purpose, whereas the remainder of the teachers were included within the healthy and well portion of the scale, also indicating a strong sense of purpose. However, the Coping Self and Physical Self-contained no teachers in the top 90%,

suggesting that in terms of dealing with life's challenges and irrational thoughts and prioritizing nutrition and exercise, teachers did not have high wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2006).

In comparing the two schools located in different geographical areas of the US (Southeast and Midwest), there were several noteworthy findings. First, both schools were chosen to compare preliminary findings on teachers' self-efficacy and wellness due to their different locations. Despite expecting a difference between the two schools, only minor differences between both areas with respect to the overall means, factors, and subsection scores for the FFWEL-Form A2 and the TSES-Short Form were discovered.

Both the majority of teachers reporting from the Southeastern and the rural Midwest elementary schools scored within the healthy and well sections of the scoring scale. This is encouraging in that both schools had most of their teachers report a healthy wellness foundation, indicating that potential wellness growth is more likely. Both schools had similar scores for high wellness about the Essential Self, which indicates that both of these schools had teachers with a clear sense of purpose that might positively influence their self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment to teaching.

Most interestingly no teachers in either school scored in the high wellness range for the Coping Self, while the Coping Self realistic belief subsection had similarly large clusters of teachers at lower wellness scores (Southeastern = 65%; Rural Midwest = 69%). This seems to indicate that teachers in both elementary schools need assistance in finding a variety of ways to cope with different challenges and address irrational thinking. Additionally, this last finding seems to be supported by previous research exploring teachers' resilience levels impacted by their self-efficacy (Beltman *et al.*, 2011).

For self-efficacy, all teachers reported similar ranges of self-efficacy scores indicating that teachers in both elementary schools reported they believed they had a moderate or high influence regarding student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The rural Midwest elementary school had a few teachers who reported lower scores in their beliefs about their ability to influence students and to manage the classroom compared to the Southeastern school. Despite this small difference, both schools reflected that most of their teachers believe they are

effective in all areas of student engagement, learning, and behavior. This is encouraging in that teachers at both schools *believe* they can best assist the incoming students and they can effectively instruct students, as beliefs influence actions. Based on the reported moderate to high scores, teachers at these two schools are in ideal positions to increase their self-efficacy, but they also persist within the profession at their respective locations.

## 8. Implications

The exploratory results of this study provide information for educators, administrators, researchers, and teachers to build upon. Overall, this preliminary study sheds light on the relationship between elementary teachers' self-efficacy and their wellness. Regardless of location or growth rate at these two schools, the teachers in both the Midwest and Southeastern schools have a positive relationship between their self-efficacy and their wellness. This implies that preservice teachers would benefit from awareness on the connection between self-efficacy and wellness, with higher education instructors preparing them with strategies to protect, manage, and improve both self-efficacy and wellness (Price & McCallum, 2015). Additionally, administrators supporting the "whole teacher" or areas contributing to high wellness for teachers might increase teachers' beliefs in their abilities and thus their effectiveness within the classroom (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

One such strategy to promote teacher self-efficacy and wellness is utilizing the evidenced based framework of Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) widely used for students. This system centers around positive reinforcement for exhibiting expected behaviors, highlighting students' positive character traits, and celebrating student prosocial behavior progress (PBIS, 2023). While PBIS does improve teacher health and wellness (PBIS, 2023) indirectly through creating an equitable, stable environment to improve social, emotional and mental health for students, creating a teacher version of PBIS may provide further gains. For example, PBIS for teachers could promote prosocial adult behaviors centered on self-efficacy and wellness, recognizing positive character traits and compassionate actions, and providing rewards for teachers to earn throughout the school year.



Additionally, mental health professionals in schools could educate and train teachers in appropriate, trauma informed behavior management techniques and social, emotional learning skills which improve teachers' emotional regulation and self-efficacy and, in extension, students' emotional skills (Braun *et al.*, 2020; Taxer *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, mental health professionals in schools can model for teachers directly in the classroom how to manage challenging student behaviors and outside of the classroom in mediating with parents. Further, mental health professionals in schools can educate and promote self-care activities that are beneficial for implementation in the classroom such as mindfulness (Dave *et al.*, 2020). Regarding teachers' personal lives, mental health professionals in schools may provide referrals for mental health and community resources. Finally, mental health professionals in school could act as advocates to school administration about teacher needs.

### 8.1. Limitations

Despite the findings, this exploratory study has limitations and results should be used with caution. First, a small, undiversified sample size affects the generalizability of the results but indicates further research to include more elementary schools and gather a more ethnically diverse sample would provide better representation and generalizability of results. Secondly, both schools were in rural towns, further restricting the generalizability of the results to any larger areas. Future research should include similar district studies at a state-wide level for both rural and urban communities that are representative of the area, thereby increasing the generalizability of the results. Finally, only the Spearman's rho analysis was used. Conducting further analyses such as partial correlations to control for the effect of other continuous variables would be suggested for future studies.

## 9. Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their wellness in elementary school teachers at two geographically different locations. Overall, this study revealed that at both schools, teachers with higher self-efficacy had higher wellness and vice versa. Furthermore, this study indicated that regardless of geographical location and growth rate,

the positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and wellness remained. Based on these preliminary explorations, educators, administrators, and mental health professionals in these schools and surrounding communities may provide more individualized support for teachers' wellness or self-efficacy to see both improve. Future studies should seek to include additional schools, more teachers that are ethnically diverse, and a variety of locations to expand results and increase generalizability.

### Authorship Contribution

Anna O'Dell: Writing – original draft preparation, conceptualization, data collection, data analysis and interpretation

Laura Ainsworth: Writing – reviewing and editing, supervision, data analysis and interpretation

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### Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflicts of interest.

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