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A Study Concerning Factors that Contribute to School Counselors' Self-Efficacy

Cory J. Neal

Missouri State University, coryneal@missouristate.edu

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**A STUDY CONCERNING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOOL
COUNSELORS' SELF-EFFICACY**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science, Counseling

by

Cory James Neal

July 2021

A STUDY CONCERNING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S SELF-EFFICACY

Counseling, Leadership and Special Education Department

Missouri State University, July 2021

Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Many school districts and states still require that school counselors have previous teaching experience before one can begin a career in school counseling. There is little to no data to support these claims and the data that is available does not include how the school counselor's own previous experiences influence their self-efficacy in their current roles. The data for this study was collected through an online survey sent to school counselors in Missouri. The qualitative data was evaluated using a grounded theory approach while the quantitative data was analyzed through a series of t-tests for independent samples, with group membership (counselors with teaching backgrounds and those without teaching experience) as the independent variable and each question is set as the dependent variable. The results from this survey show that there were not any significant differences between the two groups of participants, those with teaching backgrounds and those without. One area that did come up frequently between both groups was that having additional education or training experiences helps those in this field gain knowledge and skills they may be lacking, whether that be teaching knowledge or not.

KEYWORDS: school counselor, self-efficacy, previous experiences, teaching background, non-teaching background, mental health experiences

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Approved:

Joseph Hulgus, Ph.D, Thesis Committee Chair

Bonni Behrend, Ph.D, Committee Member

Kelly Wynne, Ph.D, Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D, Dean of the Graduate College

In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, school counselors have had to have previous teaching experiences before they could receive the position as a school counselor. This issue has caused many debates within the profession, with many areas in the United States, such as Texas, still requiring teaching experience before one is able to become a school counselor. (Moyer & Yu, 2012; Stein & DeBerard, 2010). There are many other states, however, that have removed that requirement from aspiring school counselors. Even with this requirement being removed, there are still many school districts continue to list having previous requirements to become a school counselor.

Over the past ten years, there have only been a few studies (Moyer & Yu, 2012; Stein & DeBerard, 2010) that have been conducted to see if previous experiences have any influence on the school counselor's performance in their roles. Even without the data, many school districts are still requiring teaching experiences before one is able to become a school counselor. The studies that have been conducted, lack the counselors' own perspectives of what influences their role's performance. Without the school counselors' perspectives on what influences their roles, the data cannot truly describe what would help influence the performances in their roles.

In Missouri, the requirements to become a school counselor have constantly been changing, but the state no longer requires school counselors to have previous teaching experience. Counselors must receive a master's degree in counseling or another related degree. They also must complete two separate 300-hour supervised internships within their master's program. These programs focus on different competencies, such as student development, program implementation, professional relationships, leadership, advocacy, ethical, and professional conduct.

Universities in Missouri have adapted their programs to follow the American School Counselor Association or better known as ASCA, when it comes to what should be offered in their graduate programs when training future professionals for this role. Many states have adapted their requirements and even the universities in those states have adapted their programs to better train the future professionals, that will best align with ASCA's requirements. ASCA states that advanced degree courses should include the following topics – human growth and development, theories, individual counseling, group counseling, social and cultural foundations, testing/appraisal, research and program evaluation, professional orientation, career development, supervised practicum, and supervised internship (<https://www.schoolcounselor.org>).

In other states, such as Texas, there are different requirements that school counselors must meet. In Texas, school counselors need to have a combination of education, as well as previous teaching experience, before entering that role. School counselor applicants will need to receive a master's degree from an accredited university approved from Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Also, students must complete an approved educator preparation program in Texas and pass TExES School Counselor Exam (which is similar to the MOCA exam in Missouri and other state licensure exams). Another requirement is that school counselors must have at least two years of classroom teaching experience before they are able to enter their counselor role (<https://tea.texas.gov>, 2019, August 18).

While many school districts and states require that school counselors have previous experiences, such as teaching, there are few data to back up these requirements. The data that is out there shows no significant differences between those that have teaching experiences and those without. If there were differences between those two groups then it was only a slight difference, still not enough to show any significant differences. Within the last ten years, there

have been only a few studies that show what previous experiences influence their roles. Even with these studies being conducted, there was not any data to show that previous experiences, such as teaching, influence their roles in any measurable ways. These studies also left out the school counselors' own perceptions of what influences their roles within the school. If states and school districts are requiring certain experiences before an applicant is considered for a position, then there needs to be data to prove whether it has an influence or not.

The results of this study will seek to find what factors influence school counselors' performances within their roles. Many previous studies that have been done on this topic area have mainly focused on how other professionals within the school perceive what factors best influence school counselors' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as one's own perception of how they can successfully perform within their specific roles or assignments. This study will focus on how the school counselors themselves perceive what factors influence their self-efficacy within their roles.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many school districts are still requiring school counselors to have previous experience, such as teaching or other involvements within a school system. However, there is little-to-no data to show whether such factors influence a school counselor's perceived self-efficacy. In the last ten years, research has been very limited (Moyer & Yu, 2012; Stein & DeBerard, 2010) pertaining to this topic were found in the literature. Even without evidence to back up the claims that school counselors need previous teaching or related experiences to help positively influence their self-efficacy, many states are still requiring such things. For example, Texas still requires all school counselors to have two years of teaching-related experience before they can assume their counseling roles.

In a study entitled *Factors Influencing School Counselors' Perceived Effectiveness*, Moyer and Yu (2012), explored what factors school counselors perceived to influence their roles within the school. The school counselors were chosen from various states, and all had various credentialing standards. Moyer's survey included questions that regarded perceived counseling effectiveness, collective self-esteem, and previous teaching and school counseling experience.

The study was conducted by using a web-based, cross-sectional survey design, in which assessment instruments were sent to American School Counselor Association representatives. Moyer included 308 school counselors in the survey from 16 states. The sample consisted of 42 males and 266 females, ranging in age from 24 to 70 years of age. This survey was created using core skills that are described in the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs standards. The survey consisted of 17 items, each ranging from (1) very

poor to (5) very strong. The scale embodied four underlying factors: understanding stakeholder's concerns, counseling and guidance skills, adjusting to the demands of the profession, and relationship with stakeholders (Moyer & Yu, 2012).

The survey results showed that the relationship between effectiveness, school counseling experience, and membership collective self-esteem were positive, while the relationship between effectiveness and teaching experience were not as significant. Overall, the research was able to show that school counselors' performance does not vary based on teaching experience.

In a somewhat similar study entitled *Does Holding a Teacher Education Degree Make a Difference in School Counselor's Job Performance*, Stein and DeBerard (2010) explored whether holding a teaching degree increases the school counselor's job performance by studying supervisors' evaluations of their performance in four main skill areas. The study was looking at school counseling interns via the ratings of their supervisors. These counselor interns that were a part of this study had teacher certification and at least two years of experience. The four main skill areas that the counselors were rated on were professional behavior, clinical skills, teaching skills, and hiring ability.

The study was conducted by using a cross-sectional survey design; the school counselor interns at Utah State University were a part of this study. Of the interns, 142 were included in the study, 78% were women, and 22% were men. Of those included, 88% were Caucasian, 7% were Hispanic-American, 3% were Asian – American, and 2% represented various other ethnic groups. Exactly 41% either had teacher education majors or had been trained/certified within the teaching realm. The rest of the participants had majors in psychology, sociology, social work, other social science degrees, economics, criminal justice, youth leadership, and art degrees.

The survey results failed to show if teachers or non-teachers differed in their abilities

with their professional behavior, clinical skills, teaching skills, and hiring ability. The data showed that, if there were any differences between teachers and non-teachers, they were too small or too difficult to identify.

A study conducted by Lane, Bohner, Hinck. and Kircher (2020) examined how Kansas administrators regarded their perceptions of the role of school counselors. This study involved over 500 administrators from elementary, middle, and high school settings. The data proved to current Kansas administrators that more education was needed for them to better understand the role of professional school counselors.

The study was a cross-sectional online survey to utilize principals' perceptions of the roles of the school counselors. The participants were a total of 568 school principals from the state of Kansas, ranging from elementary to high school levels. The study included three Likert-type and six yes-or-no questions to best determine the administrators' familiarity with the different situations that school counselors find themselves in on a daily basis, for example how to deal with students in crisis, how to build positive relationships with staff and students, etc. The next set of questions involved asking the administrators about their current school counseling program, which included asking if they currently had a school counselor working for them. If the administrators did have a school counselor working for them, the next set of questions involved what the school counselors' roles were within the school.

The data from this study showed that 89% of the administrators were either not very familiar or not at all familiar with the American School Counselor Association model. It also showed that 76% of the administrators were not very familiar with or not at all familiar with the Kansas Comprehensive School Counseling Program. Lastly, the study showed that 65% of the administrators were not very familiar or not at all familiar with the Kansas Curricular Standards

for School Counseling. The administrators within the school system play an important role for advocating and even deciding on the specific school counselor roles within a specific school system; however, the data from this study shows that many administrators do not truly understand what the role of the school counselor is or what their duties should be within the school. As administrators deciding on what they believe to be an effective school counselor, even though they may not truly understand what the role of the school counselor is, could create outdated requirements (such as teaching experience) when trying to recruit for the school counselor role.

Research, which was conducted by Heled and Davidovich (2019), set out to focus on the influence of academic training, personality, and demographic characteristics on school counselors' performance within their roles. The research focused on school counselors and how their work features, training features, and personality features influence their professional identity, which, in turn, influences their performance as a school counselor. Heled and Davidovich concluded that to date there has not been any large-scope quantitative study to measure the personal identity of counselors and how that influences their job performance (Heled & Davidovich, 2019).

From their research, they also focused on how self-efficacy influences a school counselor. Heled and Davidovich were able to conclude that, if a school counselor were able to show positive self-efficacy, they were able to perform better in their work environment, career anxiety was better, and their performance duties were shown to improve as well

Another major area that comes out of Heled and Davidovich's study was that professional studies helped improve school counselors' performance. From professional studies, counselors can build a counseling identity, which they can then use within their own practices.

Once the counselors can build an identity from their studies, they are able to develop a source of pride about their certain counseling practices. The more counselors involve themselves with professional studies, the more likely they can build their own counseling identity and to develop more confidence in their practices within the school system.

The overall results from the literature found that previous teaching-related experience does not appear to be necessary to become a successful school counselor. Despite the lack of evidence, many school districts and even states, such as Texas, still require school counselors to either have teaching experience or experience within a public-school system. Two different studies within the last ten years focused on the school counselors' own perceived effectiveness within their roles. The data showed that those who had teaching or public-school experience scored their perceived effectiveness in the same range to those of the counselors that did not have previous teaching or public-school experiences. While many school districts still require school counselors to have these experiences, there is little-to-no data to show whether this truly does affect counselors' performance in school systems. Not only is the data lacking, but it also does not take into consideration how school counselors perceive what influences their roles.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to offer the research method for this mixed methods study, regarding factors that contribute to school counselors' self-efficacy within their roles. Self-efficacy is a personal reflection of how well that person can perform certain tasks in their role. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of what factors truly influence the school counselor's roles based on the perspectives of the school counselors.

Research Questions

This mixed method study will explore the following research questions:

1. What factors do school counselors perceive to influence their roles within the school and how do those factors specifically influence their roles?
2. More specifically, how do school counselors who have teaching experience differ in their roles when compared to school counselors who do not possess teaching experience?

Participants

The participants were school counselors within the state of Missouri, including school systems within Missouri's largest cities and rural areas. The counselors that were included in this study had various years of experience and had previous career experiences. This study included counselors from many different backgrounds as well to see how those factors contributed to their roles as counselors.

Survey Questions

The survey questions were created by reflecting on the previous studies, that were mentioned in chapter II, specifically with what questions were asked and why the researchers asked those questions. Once that process was finished the researcher developed a set of questions that was then sent to the committee chair to review and revise. Once the committee chair was finished with their revisions, the questions were sent back to the researcher to review and make any edits they thought were necessary. This process was continued until the researcher and the committee chair thought the questions met the needs of the study.

Procedures

This study went through the required procedures to be accepted by the Institutional Review Board, or the IRB, of Missouri State University, the approval form can be seen in Appendix A. Institutional Review Board Acceptance. The IRB approval form was sent on 11/18/2020, for approval and was approved on 2/18/2021; the number for this form is IRB-FY2021-321. The school counselors within this study received an email about the purpose of the study, as well the online study link attached within the email. The email included an informed consent (which is shown in Appendix B. Informed Consent) statement to ensure the school counselors' confidentiality. By proceeding to complete the survey, participants gave their consent to be included in the study. The counselors received a link to an online survey (which is shown in Appendix C. Online Survey) in this email that included four questions that had a five-point scale ranging from one - performing very poorly, to five - performing very strongly. There were six questions that required the participants to answer with a short response. The other three questions were open-ended qualitative based on the counselor's time in their role.

The first set of questions were about the counselor's own perceptions of themselves. These questions concern the counselor's ability to handle students in crisis situations, to build positive relationships with administrators and other staff, to build positive relationships with students, and to successfully perform extra assigned duties. The other six questions revolved around what the counselor's current role is like; what their current positions title is, how long they have been in this role, what is their current caseload like, how many counselors are in their building, what is their current highest degree, and does their school follow the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model. The survey ended with three qualitative open-ended questions, the first being, "What personal or career related experience that you had before you became a school counselor that has helped you in this role?", "If you have been a school counselor more then a year what are some previous experiences that you wished you had before entering this role?" and "Is there additional training that helped you receive your position as a school counselor?".

Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data were compiled with descriptive statistics computed on demographic and study variables, overall and by group (teaching experience/non-teaching experience). The results gathered, provided for a fuller description of the study sample.

Since there were a limited number of quantitative questions, and since each question were on a Likert-type scale, the two groups were compared on each question individually using a series of t-tests for independent samples, with group membership (counselors with teaching backgrounds and those without teaching experience) as the independent variable and the question

as the dependent variable. To control for experiment-wise error rate, the alpha level for each test was set at .025.

Qualitative questions were analyzed using Grounded Theory methodology. The data was gathered through an online survey, which was sent out to the school counselors in Missouri. The data that was collected was able to show repeated concepts that were shown through the online survey. As more data was collected from the results of the survey, a theory was developed to best represent the data that was collected from the survey results. Once the data was collected, it was able to be categorized into different codes. Coding was used to identify common anchors within the given data. Once the coding process was finished, concepts were developed that were closely related to each other to build a more inclusive concept that represents the data. Memoing was then completed to compare the concepts of the data. This process was created to create field notes about observations and insights made from the concepts. After the coding categories were created, they were then used to create a central category that can hold every theory together. Theorizing was used throughout all this process to be able to test and build on the presented theory.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

A total of 300 surveys were sent to school counselors in k-12, elementary, middle, and high school settings. These school counselors were in Missouri’s biggest cities, such as St. Louis and Kansas City, and some of Missouri’s smaller towns, such as Mountain View or Republic. A total of 100 surveys were completed by participants. These participants came from different school counselor roles, some were in the elementary, middle, high school setting or even in a k-12 school setting. Their caseloads and their ability to handle certain situations will be shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic Analysis

Job Title	Total	Years of Experience	Total	Case-load Number	Total	School Counselor per Building	Total	Degree Attained	Total
School Counselor	69	0 – 5 years	40	0 - 200	40	1 School Counselor	61	Master’s	72
Elementary School Counselor	12	6-10 years	28	201 - 300	26	3 – School Counselors	20	Master’s In Art Degree	6
Middle School Counselor	2	11 – 15 years	11	301 - 400	21	4+ School Counselors	19	Master’s in Education Degree	8
High School Counselor	9	16 – 20 Years	10	401 - 500	12			Doctorate Degree	2
K-12 School Counselor	2	21+ Years	11	500 +	1			Specialist Degree	12

As you can see from Table 1. Demographic Analysis, the participants that filled out the survey came from a wide variety of different backgrounds; from an elementary, middle, high, k-12 school, or other various backgrounds. Most of the participants classified themselves as just being a school counselor, even though they might have worked in an elementary, middle, or high school setting. A total of 69 participants classified themselves as being a school counselor. Another area that was asked of the participants was how long they have been in their role as a school counselor. The most common answer to this question was in the 0 – 5 year range with a total of 40 participants. The topic of the school counselors' caseloads was also asked in this survey. The most common answer was a caseload of 0 – 200 with a total of a total of 40 participants. Many school districts only have one counselor for hundreds of students; this question was also asked in the survey. The most common response was 1 school counselor in the school with a total of 61 participants. To become a school counselor in Missouri, one of the requirements is to attain a masters' degree in a counseling like field. A total of 72 participants responded to having a master's in science degree.

One of the major areas that many Missouri school counselors try to ensure is that their counseling program follows, as much as possible, the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model. This model was designed to help school counselors try to implement a successful counseling program for their students and even the staff in the school. A total of 50 participants responded that they implement 81 – 100% of the counseling model in their program. A total of 32 participants responded that they implement 51 – 80% of the counseling model in their program. A total of 13 participants responded that they do not implement any form of the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model in their program. A total of 4 participants

responded that they implement 21 – 50% of the counseling model in their program and one participant responded that they implement 1 – 20% of the counseling model in their program.

The survey also included four Likert-scale questions, which will be shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Analysis of Likert-scale Questions

Likert-scale Questions	1 = Low	2 = Slight	3 = Moderate	4 = Moderately High	5 = High
Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Students	0	0	0	23	76
Ability to Handle Students in Crisis Situations	0	0	2	42	56
Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Administrators and Staff	0	1	2	29	68
Ability to Successfully Perform Extra Assigned Duties	1	2	13	32	52

The next few questions utilized a Likert-type format, ranging from 1 (representing a low response) all the way to a 5 (representing a high response). These questions were based on the participants ability to build positive relationships with students, their ability to handle students in crisis situations, their ability to build positive relationships with administrators and other staff,

and their ability to successfully perform extra assigned duties. If you review Table 2. Analysis of Likert-scale Questions, you will be able to see how the participants answered each question. For the ability to build positive relationships with students 76 participants chose the high response or a five, which is the majority response. The ability to handle students in crisis situations questions, 56 participants responded with a high response or five. The ability to build positive relationships with administrators and other staff, 68 participants responded with a high response or 5. The ability to successfully perform extra assigned duties, 52 participants responded with a high response or a 5. The t-test scores of these questions can be shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Group Statistics

Likert-scale Question	Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean
Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Students	Teaching	44	4.77	0.424	0.064
	No Teaching	54	4.76	0.432	0.059
Ability to Handle Students in Crisis Situations	Teaching	44	4.57	0.545	0.082
	No Teaching	55	4.51	0.540	0.073
Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Administrators and other Staff	Teaching	44	4.66	0.526	0.079
	No Teaching	55	4.62	0.623	0.084
Ability to Successfully Perform Extra Assigned Duties	Teaching	44	4.45	0.730	0.110
	No Teaching	55	4.22	0.937	0.126

As you can see in Table 3. Group Statistics, the scores from the questions that reflected the abilities of the school counselors to handle certain situations, showed little to no significant difference between those that did have teaching experiences and those that did not. For example, the question *Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Students*, those that had a teaching background had $M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.424$ and those that had no teaching background had $M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.432$. These standard deviations were too close together to show any significant differences between the groups' responses to this question. This can be said about the questions, *Ability to Handle Students in Crisis Situations* and *Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Administrators and Other Staff*, as well. The standard deviation for the responses of the two groups of these two questions were again too insignificant to prove any major differences. The only question that resulted in any slight difference was *Ability to Successfully Perform Extra Assigned Duties*, for the participants that had a teaching background, with $M = 4.45$, $SD = .730$ and for those that did not have a teaching background, $M = 4.22$, $SD = .937$. These standard deviations show that the group of participants with teaching experiences were closer to the mean, however only slightly. If one continues to look at each question one will notice a pattern of the group with teaching experiences having a higher mean, only slightly though and nothing to cause any significant differences between the two groups.

To be able to test the hypothesis that participants with a teaching background had no significant difference between those that did not have a teaching background, a series of independent samples t-tests were performed. To control for experiment-wise error rate, given that several comparisons were performed, the value that was used for each test was set to 0.01. When reviewing their results from the question *Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Students* – the $t(96) = .155$, $p = .877$. These results show that t value, as stated above, was .155

which is greater than the p value of .05. This means any value that is greater than .05 has no significant difference between the groups. The degrees of freedom is 96 out of 100 while the degrees of freedom for the equal variances not assumed was 92.670. Showing that the equal variances assumed is more likely to be correct due to the degree of freedom of 96 being closer to the value of 100. The exact significance was a .877 which is greater than the value of 0.05, showing that there were no significant differences between the two groups. Furthering, the evidence that the two groups had no significant difference, the questions, *Ability to Handle Students in Crisis Situations* – $t(97) = .539$, $p = .877$, *Ability to Build Positive Relationships with Administrators and Other Staff* – $t(97) = .347$, $p = .729$, and *Ability to Successfully Perform Extra Assigned Duties* – $t(97) = 1.373$, $p = .137$. All these questions had significance that were greater than .05, degrees of freedom closer to 100 when compared to equal variances not assumed, and sig. 2 tailed greater than .05, further proving that there were no significant differences between the groups.

To accurately tell if the differences were significant or not a chi square test was conducted. Results showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups. For the question *How long have you been in this role?* the results of the chi square test showed that the significance level was a .013 which is lower than the critical alpha level of .05 which would show a significance between the groups. For the sections, 0-5, 6- 10, and 11 – 15 (years in the school counselor role) there were relatively more no teaching background responses. While for the sections, 16 – 20 and 21+ (years in the school counselor role) there were relatively more teaching background responses. Thus, this indicates that those that have been in this career field longer have teaching experience while those that are newer to the school counselor role do not

have teaching experience. This could be explained by Missouri formerly requiring school counselors to have teaching experience.

For the question *What is your current caseload...* the pattern repeats of no significant differences between the two groups. However, once again, to test this and see if there were any significant differences, a chi square was conducted. The chi-square, further shows that the significance level was .592 which is greater than .05 showing that there were no significant differences between the two groups in this study. The questions *How many counselors (including you) are in your department* - the chi-square significance level results were .847, and *What is the highest degree you have attained?* - the chi-square significance level results were .266; all showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups. The question *Does your school follow the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling mode?* - the chi-square significance level results were .083, which again, even though it was close to .05, there was still no significant differences between the teaching and no teaching background groups. Thus, this indicates that there were not any major differences between the two groups, those with teaching experiences and those without, with their answers to how well they can handle certain situations.

The qualitative data for this survey was collected through three main questions - *Are there additional training that helped you receive your position as a school counselor? (specify)*, *If you have been a school counselor more than a year, what are some previous professional experiences you wished you had before entering this role?*, and *What personal or career related experience(s) that you had before becoming a school counselor has helped you in this role?*. As previously mentioned, many states and school districts develop criteria and requirements for the school counselor role without having any data or even what the school counselors, themselves

perceive is effective for their roles. The main goal of these qualitative questions was to be able to gather how school counselors perceive what is crucial for their role.

For the question *Are there additional trainings that helped you receive your position as a school counselor?*, the most common theme was that participants felt that there was not any additional training offered to them that helped them in their role. A total of 26 or 26% participants responded with no additional experiences helped them in their role, 25 or 25% participants responded that additional education/training experiences helped them, 17 or 17% participants responded with mental health experiences, a total of 16 or 16% participants responded that they felt teaching experiences helped them receive their role, a total of 12 or 12 % participants did not provide an answer, a total of 2 or 2% participants responded with non-profit experiences and a total of 2 or 2% participants responded with experiences working in a college setting.

For the question *What personal or career related experience(s) that you had before becoming a school counselor has helped you in this role?*, the most common theme was teaching. A total of 43 or 43% participants responded with previous teaching experiences has helped them become an effective school counselor, while the quantitative responses showed no significant differences between the two groups (those with teaching experiences and those without) this question clearly shows that the majority of the respondents truly felt that having teaching experiences has helped them in this role. A total of 28 or 28% participants responded with mental health experiences, 11 or 11% participants responded with education/training experiences, 7 or 7 % participants responded with non-profit experiences, a total of 7 or 7% participants responded with experiences working in a college setting, a total of 2 or 2%

participants responded with retail experiences, one participant did not respond with an answer, and one participant responded with working in a physical health setting.

For the question *If you have been a school counselor more than a year, what are some previous professional experience(s) that you wished you had before entering this role?*, the most common theme was mental health experiences, specifically dealing with trauma and suicidal situations. A total of 31 or 31% participants responded that mental health experiences would have helped them develop into an effective school counselor, 18 or 18% participants responded that there were no other experiences that they could have been a part to help them in their role, a total of 17 or 17% participants responded with teaching, a total of 16 or 16% participants responded with additional education, 10 or 10% participants did not provide an answer, a total of 5 or 5% participants wanted more experience of how to effectively work with other staff, and a total of 3 or 3% participants wanted more experience of how to collect data and report it to DESE.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Many school districts and even whole states, such as Texas, still have a requirement for school counselors to have teaching experience before they can enter the school counseling career field. These requirements are set in place even though there is very little data to show why these requirements were made in the first place. Even with extant data, studies do not show how school counselors perceive their own effectiveness based on their previous experiences. This study gathers information on how school counselors perceived their own self-efficacy to see what experiences, training, and knowledge helps them in their roles within the school.

The school counselors that did fill out the surveys came from many different backgrounds, including elementary, middle, high or even a k-12 school. Their caseload also greatly differed from one another, which could also change to how they answered some of the questions that were asked in the survey. One of the biggest changes in the school counselor role, nationwide, has been changing the role title from guidance counselor to school counselor. This role title change can be shown within the data of the survey based on most of the participants just describing themselves as a school counselor instead of guidance counselor. A total of 69 participants out of 100 described themselves as a school counselor. Another interesting data point that was collected from the surveys was the number of years the participants have been in the school counseling role. A total number of 40 participants have been in the school counselor role for 0 – 5 years. This could explain why the second most answered response to previous experience influencing their ability in their school counselor role, being mental health experience. This could be attributed to new professionals coming into the role with new ideas and knowledge to further advance the career field as a whole.

Another point of interest that was collected from the surveys was the current caseload and how much the participants followed the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model in their school. These two areas were interesting because it could be argued that the smaller a school counselors' caseload the more likely it will be that they would follow the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model. For example, the participant who responded that they had a caseload of 500 responded that they followed the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model by at least 50% of their time while a participant with a caseload of 200 responded they followed the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model by at least 85%. While the participants' caseload did not attribute to how they answered the questions that dealt with their self-efficacy, it could be argued that the more a school counselor is able to spend with the students in their building the more likely they will feel as if they are being effective in their role.

Out of the surveys that were completed, most of the answers revolved around how teaching or a mental health experiences greatly benefited their self-efficacy for their school counseling career. Another area that was repeatedly mentioned was how extended education has influenced their effectiveness in their roles. These participants were from elementary, middle school, high school, k-12 school counselor roles. While the most common career related answer, for the qualitative question - *What personal or career related experience(s) that you had before becoming a school counselor has helped you in this role?*, was teaching experience that greatly improved their effectiveness in their role, there were other answers that commonly appeared as well throughout the survey, such as a mental health background.

From the responses that involved teaching experience being the greatest benefit in their career, the most common reasoning with this answer revolved around having experience with classroom management. Classroom management is explained as the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use within their classroom to help keep students productive during a class. Many respondents mentioned that these skill sets learned from being a teacher greatly helped their counseling roles, especially when they had to enter a classroom and perform social/emotional learning lessons or other duties that require them to be in a classroom setting. Another area that was mentioned within teaching experience was already having a basic knowledge of “school terms” and having a better understanding of how a teacher’s day is conducted.

Another answer that was commonly discussed throughout the survey was having mental health experiences greatly benefited their effectiveness within their role. The topic that was mentioned multiple times within mental health experiences was having training or knowledge that dealt with crisis or traumatic situations, such as how to handle a student in crisis or a suicidal student. Even some of the participants that responded saying that teaching experience greatly benefited their role wished they had received more training in crisis or traumatic situations.

Another area that was mentioned often in the question, *Are there additional training that helped you receive your position as a school counselor? (specify)* was receiving additional education. These respondents mentioned that the additional training they received was in receiving a specialist degree, being involved in professional development, or taking classes to enhance their counseling skills and techniques. Participants who responded that they believe either their mental health or teaching experiences benefited their role in the school,

overwhelmingly mentioned that being involved in additional education training or courses helped bridge the gap between mental health and teaching.

From the results of the data discussed above, most of the participants believed their teaching experience has been the greatest benefit in preparing for their role as school counselor. As mentioned above, another area that was mentioned often was how mental health experiences greatly influenced their role, especially involving experiences in crisis or traumatic situations. Even participants that responded having teaching experience was the best factor in preparing them for the school counselor role wished they had more training when dealing with crisis or traumatic situations. Those that responded with teaching or mental health believed that the knowledge and skillset they gained from their additional education/training helped to close the gap that might be missing if they had only teaching or mental health experiences before this role.

To be able to better understand if there were truly any differences between the two groups answers, those with a teaching background and those without, t-tests and chi squares were performed. The data showed that there were not any major differences in the responses between the two groups. For example, when you review the questions that discussed how they perceived their ability to handle certain situations the two groups' answers were too similar, to really show any significance between them. This would lead one to believe that, while many employers and even school counselors believe that one must have teaching experience to successfully complete the tasks assigned to a school counselor; the quantitative data does not back these claims. However, the qualitative data did show that teaching experience was a majority response for an experience that best prepared these professionals for this role. This could lead one to believe that while the data from the quantitative results showed little differences between the two groups, this idea of having teaching experience is still believed to be an important criterion to enter this role,

even if the quantitative scores did not reflect that statement. As previously stated through this document, there are few studies to compare the differences between these two groups and their successfulness in their roles, let alone their self-efficacy. The data from this study shows that when comparing the two groups own self-efficacy results the differences between their responses were too similar, causing us to believe that it does not depend on your previous experiences to influence your effectiveness in the school counselor role.

One of the few areas that showed a significant difference was with the question - *How long have you been in this role?*, for the sections 0-5, 6- 10, and 11 – 15 years of experience there were relatively more no teaching background responses and for the sections, 16 – 20 and 21+ there were relatively more teaching background responses. This could be explained with, Missouri used to require school counselors to have teaching experience before they were able to start their role as a school counselor. This would cause those that have been in this career longer, possibly during the time of this guideline, as having more teaching experience respondents.

These results show that different participants, whether teaching or not, truly believe their experiences were beneficial in their own way and the majority of the participants, from both groups, responded that receiving additional education/training helped them gain knowledge that they were currently lacking. While some school districts may still require teaching as a requirement before you can enter the school counseling role, this data shows that no matter if a participant had a teaching background or not, there were not any significant differences between their previous experiences and their self-efficacy scores.

An interesting find from the data of this survey was that participants who had a teaching background wished they had previous experiences (such as mental health experiences) before becoming a school counselor and those without a teaching background, wished they had teaching

experiences before becoming a school counselor. The most common shared answer between both groups was that additional training or education helped bridge the gap between those with and without teaching backgrounds. The data from this survey shows that there really is no significant difference between the groups and that the best way to prepare school counselors for this role is to continue their training and educational experiences even when they are already in the role. This career is ever changing, and it is important to keep the school counseling programs within the school system up to par with what the current models are proving to be the most effective, which can be taught to school counselors through additional training and education.

From the results of this survey, one would be able to gather there was not any differences found from those with teaching experiences and those without when it came to how they score their ability to handle certain situations. There were not any significant differences between these two groups even though many school districts and even states have this as a requirement for their school counselors. One area that was brought up between both groups' answers was how they wished they received more training/ education or if they did receive more training/education how much it was beneficial to them in their role as a school counselor. A specific training that many participants, whether they had teaching background or not, wished they received more of was how to effectively deal with crisis situations, specifically students dealing with suicide or traumatic events. As more schools are becoming trauma informed schools this will be crucial skills and knowledge that a professional, such as a school counselor should have. When employers are looking at requirements this should be their focus rather than if they have had teaching experience or not. If those entering this career field are lacking this crucial skills/knowledge, then either adapting the graduate programs to offer more courses in these areas or having the school districts offer more on the job training in these areas.

Limitations

The limitations that were discovered after this study was completed was that the study lacked demographic information. When the participants were finished with the survey, it was sent back to the researcher anonymously, this caused the researcher to not know where the respondent was located, or what school district they were from. If the researcher had this information as well as the other data that was developed through the study, it could have changed how some of the groups were influenced by their experiences. These overall experiences that influence these professionals' self-efficacy are not only from previous career related experiences but also their location, race, gender, etc. and this additional data could have shown how these specific areas can influence ones' answers.

Future Research

For future research to better understand of what requirements employers could include when recruiting school counselors, researchers could have respondents answer questions on what they believe should be required to enter in this career field. This would help expand the data gathered to further explain how participants previous experiences influenced their answers and to see if their previous experiences influence their answers in any way. This would also help gather data to show what those within this role believe should be a requirement for this career field, which as you read from this document is lacking in the current research for this topic. To be able to fully understand how a school counselor's previous experiences influence their self-efficacy the data gathered must not only include how these experiences have influenced their perceived ability to effectively handle certain situations in this career but also, the data must show how their experiences influence what they perceive to be an effective school counselor in general.

This information could be used to see how the two groups (those with and without previous teaching experience) answers differed, and if they did, in what ways they see their previous experiences as being important. If employers are requiring previous teaching experiences to become a school counselor, then we must stop looking towards what those outside of this career field believe to be the best criteria and start listening to those in this career field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Institutional Review Board Acceptance

Date: 2-18-2021

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-321

Title: A Study Concerning Factors that Contribute to School Counselor's Self-Efficacy

Creation Date: 11-18-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Joseph Hulgus

Review Board: MSU

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Joseph Hulgus	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	josephhulgus@missouristate.edu
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Member	Joseph Hulgus	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	josephhulgus@missouristate.edu
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Member	Cory Neal	Role	Investigator	Contact	coryneal@missouristate.edu
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Appendix B. Informed Consent

Missouri State University – Counseling Program

Informed Consent

My name is Cory Neal and I am a Masters student in the Counseling programs at Missouri State University. As part of my degree completion, I'm conducting a study. You are invited to participate in this project about Factors that Influence a School Counselor's Self – Efficacy. The purpose of this study is to see how school counselors' previous experiences have influenced how they view their own effectiveness in their roles. This online survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you are free to end your participation at any time. Your responses to this study will be kept anonymous and confidential. Results from this study will be used in my thesis research, with any results only reported in the aggregate. Data will be held on a password-protected computer in a password protected file. Risks from participating in this study are no greater than what you would encounter in your daily life. If, however, you experience some unexpected discomfort from participating in this study, please contact me immediately so that I can help you address it.

Completion of the survey will be interpreted as your consent to participate in this study and that you are confirming that you are at least 18 years of age.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me, Cory Neal, (CoryNeal@MissouriState.edu). You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Joe Hulgus at josephhulgus@missouristate.edu

Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

* I have read the above information and agree to participate in this research project.

Appendix C. Online Survey

MSU Counseling - Online Survey

This survey is to gather data for the thesis requirement at MSU - Counseling program.

Please read each question in this survey and answer each to your best ability.

* Required

What is your current role in the school ? *

How long have you been in this role? *

What is your current caseload (i.e., on average, how many students do you work with a day)? *

How many counselors (including you) are in your department? *

What is the highest degree you have attained?

Is there additional training that helped you receive your position as a school counselor? (specify)

Does your school follow the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling model? If so, how thoroughly do you think it is implemented? (i.e., 70%, 85%, 100%?)

On the following questions, please rate your ability (1 = low, 2 = slight, 3 = moderate, 4 = moderately high, 5 = high)

Ability to build positive relationships with students.

1

2

3

4

5

Ability to handle students in crisis situations.

1

2

3

4

5

Ability to build positive relationships with administrators and other staff.

1

2

3

4

5

Ability to successfully perform extra assigned duties.

1

2

3

4

5

What personal or career related experience(s) that you had before became a school counselor has helped you in this role?



If you have been a school counselor more than a year, what are some previous professional experiences you wished you had before entering this role?