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Review article

From the university classroom to the real classroom: teacher self-efficacy in initial teacher education. A systematic review

Del aula universitaria al aula real: autoeficacia docente en la formación inicial. Revisión sistemática

Da sala de aula universitária à sala de aula real: autoeficácia docente na formação inicial. Revisão sistemática

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ABSTRACT

Teacher self-efficacy, understood as the belief in one's own capacity to teach, is largely built during initial teacher education, although recent Latin American research on the topic remained scattered. The aim of this study was to analyze the Latin American scientific output published between 2021 and 2026 on the teacher self-efficacy of students in Education programs, with emphasis on the role of the pre-professional practicum. A systematic review was conducted following international guidelines for reporting systematic reviews, with searches in SciELO, Redalyc and Dialnet and a complementary search. Thirteen studies were included, and their findings were synthesized according to the four sources of self-efficacy of social cognitive theory. Cross-sectional designs predominated; only two studies measured changes before and after a training experience. The practicum

strengthened self-efficacy, especially when it was accompanied by feedback from mentors and peers and by reference teaching models. The lowest levels were found in inclusion, school coexistence and classroom management, and emotional states were barely studied. It is concluded that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy depended less on the practicum itself than on the quality of the support surrounding it; therefore, mentor training and attention to diversity should be central to initial teacher education programs. Longitudinal studies and greater participation of the countries currently absent from this research are needed.

Keywords: teacher self-efficacy; initial teacher education; pre-service teachers; pre-professional practicum; systematic review; mentoring.

RESUMEN

La autoeficacia docente, entendida como la creencia en la propia capacidad para enseñar, se construye en gran medida durante la formación inicial, aunque la investigación latinoamericana reciente sobre el tema permanecía dispersa. El objetivo de este trabajo fue analizar la producción científica latinoamericana publicada entre 2021 y 2026 sobre la autoeficacia docente de estudiantes de carreras de Educación, con énfasis en el papel de la práctica preprofesional. Se realizó una revisión sistemática orientada por las directrices internacionales para la publicación de revisiones sistemáticas, con búsquedas en SciELO, Redalyc y Dialnet y una búsqueda complementaria. Se incluyeron trece estudios, cuyos hallazgos se sintetizaron según las cuatro fuentes de autoeficacia de la teoría social cognitiva. Predominaron los diseños transversales; solo dos estudios midieron cambios antes y después de una experiencia formativa. La práctica fortaleció la autoeficacia, sobre todo cuando se acompañó de retroalimentación de tutores y pares y de modelos docentes de referencia. Los niveles más bajos se observaron en inclusión, convivencia escolar y manejo del aula, y los estados emocionales apenas fueron estudiados. Se concluye que la autoeficacia de los futuros docentes dependió menos de la práctica en sí que de la calidad del acompañamiento que la rodeó, por lo que la formación de tutores y la atención a la diversidad deben ocupar un lugar central en los programas de formación inicial. Se requieren estudios longitudinales y una mayor presencia de los países hoy ausentes de la producción.

Palabras clave: autoeficacia docente; formación inicial docente; futuros docentes; práctica preprofesional; revisión sistemática; tutoría.

RESUMO

A autoeficácia docente, entendida como a crença na própria capacidade para ensinar, constrói-se em grande medida durante a formação inicial, embora a pesquisa latino-americana recente sobre o tema permanecesse dispersa. O objetivo deste trabalho foi analisar a produção científica latino-americana publicada entre 2021 e 2026 sobre a autoeficácia docente de estudantes de cursos de Educação, com ênfase no papel do estágio pré-profissional. Realizou-se uma revisão sistemática orientada pelas diretrizes internacionais para a publicação de revisões sistemáticas, com buscas em SciELO, Redalyc e Dialnet e uma busca complementar. Foram incluídos treze estudos, cujos achados foram sintetizados segundo as quatro fontes de autoeficácia da teoria social cognitiva. Predominaram os desenhos transversais; apenas dois estudos mediram mudanças antes e depois de uma experiência formativa. O estágio fortaleceu a autoeficácia, sobretudo quando foi acompanhado de feedback de tutores e pares e de modelos docentes de referência. Os níveis mais baixos foram observados em inclusão, convivência escolar e gestão da sala de aula, e os estados emocionais quase não foram estudados. Conclui-se que a autoeficácia dos futuros docentes dependeu menos do estágio em si do que da qualidade do acompanhamento que o rodeou, pelo que a formação de tutores e a atenção à diversidade devem ocupar um lugar central nos programas de formação inicial. São necessários estudos longitudinais e uma maior presença dos países hoje ausentes da produção.

Palavras-chave: autoeficácia docente; formação inicial docente; futuros docentes; estágio pré-profissional; revisão sistemática; tutoria.

INTRODUCTION

Training a good teacher is not just a matter of teaching them what to teach and how to teach it. Those who enter a classroom for the first time also need to believe that they are capable of sustaining a lesson, of capturing the attention of a diverse group and of reacting when things do not go as planned. That conviction has a name in social cognitive theory: self-efficacy, understood as a person's belief in their capacity to organize and execute the actions required by a specific task (Bandura,

1997). Applied to the craft of teaching, the concept is known as teacher self-efficacy and is usually analyzed in three areas: the use of instructional strategies, classroom management and student engagement in their own learning (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Interest in this variable is not merely theoretical. Four decades of research show that teachers with higher self-efficacy try out more varied methods, persist with the students who pose the greatest difficulties and report greater professional well-being (Klassen et al., 2011; Zee & Koomen, 2016). A recent meta-analysis adds that teacher self-efficacy and teacher resilience tend to grow together (Mu et al., 2024), and international evidence confirms that the construct depends both on personal factors and on the institutional conditions in which the profession is practiced (Fackler et al., 2021).

According to Bandura (1997), these beliefs are nourished by four sources: mastery experiences, that is, having succeeded at the task; vicarious experience, which arises from observing others; verbal persuasion from significant people; and the physiological and emotional states that accompany action. Initial teacher education is the period in which these sources act most strongly, because beliefs have not yet been consolidated (Morris et al., 2017). Therein lies its importance and also its risk: Woolfolk Hoy and Burke Spero (2005) observed that the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers, high at the end of the degree, declines during the first year of teaching, when the real complexity of the classroom replaces the imagined one. The pre-professional practicum is therefore the bridge where this adjustment can take place with support. The good news is that self-efficacy responds to intervention: the most recent meta-analyses report moderate effects of programs designed to strengthen it, especially when they include feedback on lesson planning (Mok et al., 2023; Täschner et al., 2025).

In Latin America, the topic has gained ground, albeit unevenly. Early Chilean studies already noted that the supervision style of the cooperating teacher and the quality of the teaching that he or she models are associated with student teachers' self-efficacy (Montecinos et al., 2011). Since then, several teams have adapted and validated the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy scale in Spanish with Chilean and Mexican samples (Covarrubias-Apablaza & Mendoza-Lira, 2016; Gálvez-Nieto et al., 2023; Salas-Rodríguez et al., 2021), which now makes it possible to measure the construct with reliable instruments in the region. Even so, Latin American output has been described as incipient and scattered (Yevilao Alarcón, 2020), and authors such as Vega Rodríguez and Vizcaíno Escobar (2023), in their study published in the journal *Mendive*, have pointed out the need to rethink which dimensions of teacher self-efficacy are assessed in higher education.

The most comprehensive review of pre-service teachers in the Ibero-American context covered the period up to 2021 and concluded that practical training is what most influences their sense of self-efficacy (Bueno-Álvarez et al., 2022). However, it combined studies from Spain and Latin America, and its end date coincided with the pandemic, which profoundly altered pre-professional practicums and forced many students to teach for the first time in virtual environments (Gallardo-Contreras et al., 2023). A later review, focused on the region, was limited to pre-service mathematics teachers (Soler-Álvarez & Valencia-Vallejo, 2025). Meanwhile, pre-professional practicum models continue to change in several countries, including Ecuador (Pinto Ayala et al., 2024).

There is therefore no up-to-date synthesis that brings together what recent Latin American research says about the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers of all specialties and about the place of the practicum in its development.

In response to this gap, the objective of this study is to analyze the Latin American scientific output published between 2021 and 2026 on the teacher self-efficacy of students in Education programs, with emphasis on the role of the pre-professional practicum. Knowing what has been researched, how it has been done and what remains to be studied offers initial teacher education programs concrete criteria for designing practicums that not only teach how to teach, but also educate teachers who feel capable of doing so.

A systematic literature review was conducted, guided by the principles of the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021). The review addressed four questions: (a) how the output is distributed by year, country and journal; (b) which designs and instruments are used to study teacher self-efficacy; (c) which factors of initial teacher education are associated with it and what role the pre-professional practicum plays; and (d) which gaps remain.

The inclusion criteria were: peer-reviewed scientific articles published between 2021 and 2026; participants who were students in Education or Pedagogy programs in Latin American and Caribbean countries, even when the sample was shared with another country; the study of teacher self-efficacy, that is, self-efficacy referring to the capacity to teach; written in Spanish, Portuguese or English; and access to the full text or, at least, to the abstract and complete metadata in the original source. Studies with in-service teachers or teacher educators and those addressing other types of self-efficacy, such as academic or research self-efficacy, were excluded, as were theses, conference papers and conference abstracts.

The systematic search was carried out in SciELO, Redalyc and Dialnet, and not directly in the Scopus or Web of Science interfaces. This does not mean that the evidence analyzed lies outside those databases: six of the 13 included studies were published in journals indexed in Scopus (*Retos*, *Formación Universitaria* and *PNA*), and the theoretical framework draws on works from journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, such as *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Review of Educational Research*, *Educational Psychology Review* and *Educational Research Review*. Fifteen queries were run combining the terms *autoeficacia*, *autoeficácia*, *self-efficacy* and *eficacia docente* with *formación inicial*, *docentes en formación*, *futuros docentes*, *estudiantes de pedagogía*, *estudiantes normalistas*, *licenciandos*, *práctica preprofesional* and *pre-service teachers*.

Each query was run through an academic search engine with a domain filter restricted to each database, and the first ten results were reviewed, which yielded 150 links. In addition, the reference lists of two previous reviews (Bueno-Álvarez et al., 2022; Soler-Álvarez & Valencia-Vallejo, 2025) were examined and free searches were conducted with the same terms to locate articles published after the period they covered.

Selection was carried out in two phases. In the first, duplicates and records that did not address the teacher self-efficacy of pre-service teachers were discarded on the basis of title and abstract. In the second, 28 articles were assessed in detail, based on their full text or, when this was not available, on their abstract and metadata in the original source; in all cases, the year of publication, country, participants and study variable were verified. Of these, 13 met all the criteria: four from the databases and nine from the complementary search. The remaining 15 were excluded because they worked with in-service teachers or teacher educators (n = 2), did not measure teacher self-efficacy (n = 2), were theses or conference papers (n = 2), had samples from outside the region (n = 3), were published before 2021 (n = 5) or focused on academic self-efficacy (n = 1). The selection process is summarized in Figure 1.

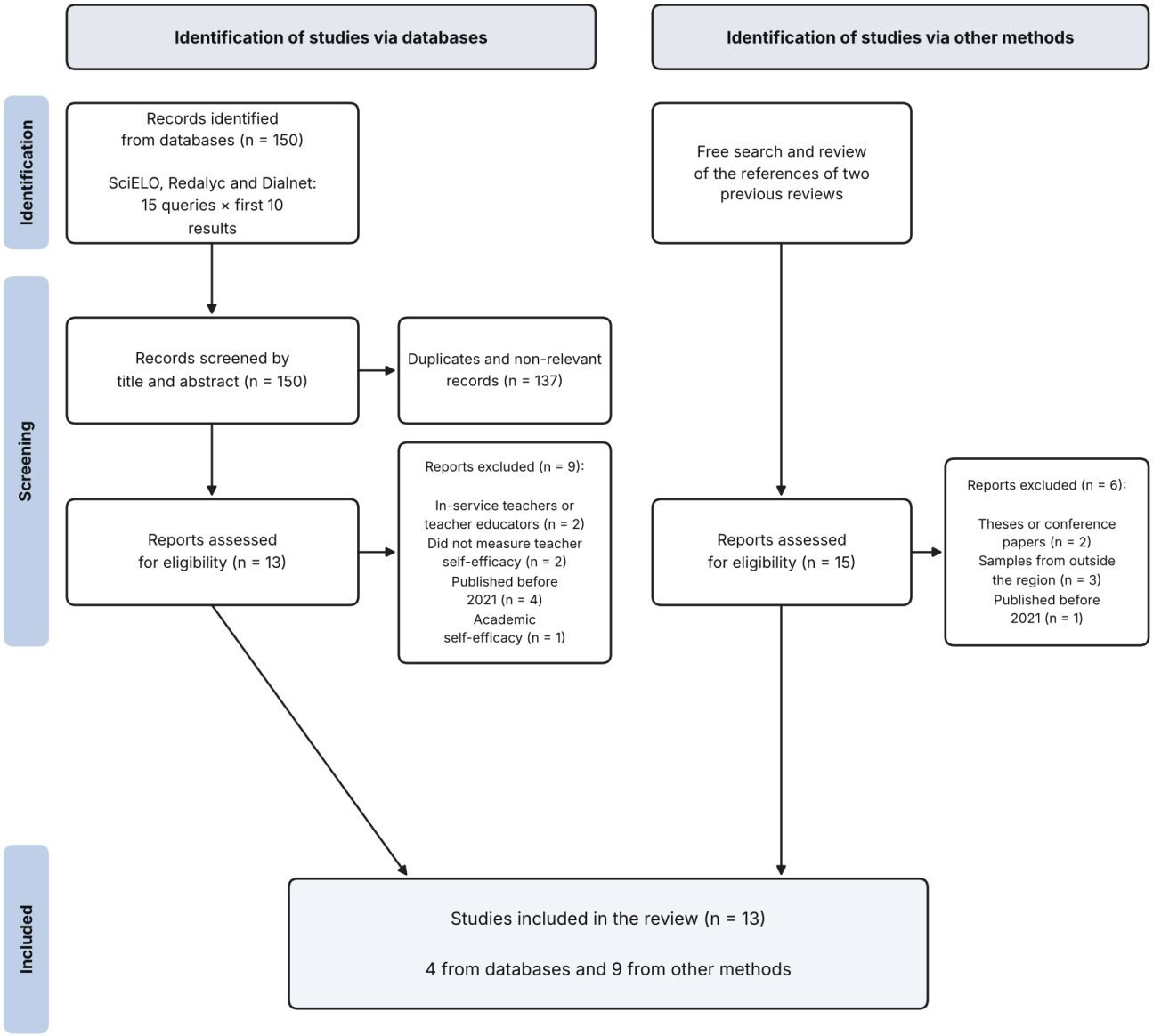


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the study identification and selection process

Source: Own elaboration

From each study, the following data were extracted into a matrix designed for this purpose: authorship, year, country, journal, design, sample size, teaching specialty, instrument and main findings. The analysis combined a quantitative description of the output with a thematic synthesis of

the findings, organized around Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy and the dimensions of the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) model.

As a limitation of the procedure, it is acknowledged that only the first results of each query were reviewed, so some relevant studies may not have been identified; the complementary search described above was used to mitigate this bias. As this research used publicly accessible secondary sources, approval from an ethics committee was not required.

DEVELOPMENT

Characteristics of the output

The 13 included studies were published between 2021 and 2026, with one peak in 2023 (five articles) and another in 2025 (four). Chile is involved in six of them, five of its own and one multinational study shared with Argentina and Uruguay; it is followed by Brazil and Ecuador, with two each, and Mexico, Colombia and the Dominican Republic, with one. No studies from Cuba, Peru, Central America or the rest of the Caribbean that met the criteria were located. Two journals account for almost half of the output: *Retos* (three articles) and *Formación Universitaria* (two). By specialty, Physical Education and Mathematics predominate, with three studies each, followed by Natural Sciences (two) and English as a foreign language (one); the remaining four worked with pedagogy students from different programs. Table 1 summarizes the studies.

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies included in the review

Authors (year)	Country	Design and sample	Specialty	Main finding
Segarra et al. (2021)	Ecuador and Spain	Comparative quantitative	Mathematics (primary)	Differences in self-efficacy between universities, attributed to the curriculum
Rojas-Díaz and Nail (2022)	Chile	Instrumental; n = 115	Pedagogy (various)	Self-efficacy scale for school coexistence with three factors: inclusion, collaboration and democracy
Gallardo-Contreras et al. (2023)	Chile	Cross-sectional quantitative; n = 150	Pedagogy (various)	They feel capable in adverse contexts; less confidence to teach all students and to use ICT with few resources

Carcamo (2023)	Chile	Mixed, with pre- and post-measurement	English	A Service-Learning experience raised the three dimensions of self-efficacy
Martínez-Angulo et al. (2023)	Chile	Quantitative; final year	Physical Education	Moderate-to-high self-efficacy toward inclusion
Monzalve-Macaya et al. (2023)	Chile	Descriptive; n = 88	Pedagogy (various)	Training perceived as insufficient in behavior management and support
Menezes (2023)	Brazil	Correlational; n = 63	Biological Sciences	Positive affect is associated with self-efficacy, satisfaction and enthusiasm in the practicum
Soberanes Cespedes and Sotelo Bahena (2025)	Mexico	Survey; n = 50	Teacher training college	High self-efficacy linked to practice, mentoring and pupils' achievements
Martínez-Angulo et al. (2025)	Argentina, Chile and Uruguay	Descriptive-comparative; n = 90	Physical Education	Moderate-to-high self-efficacy for inclusion, with differences between countries
Lopes and Lüdke (2025)	Brazil	Mixed; n = 47	Science and Chemistry	Verbal persuasion was the only source associated with having completed the practicum
Soler-Álvarez and Valencia-Vallejo (2025)	Colombia (region)	Documentary review; 9 studies	Mathematics	The sources combine; mentor feedback is decisive; emotions are not studied
Santana and Peña Solis (2026)	Dominican Republic	Descriptive-comparative; n = 203	Mathematics (primary)	The medium level predominates; about 16% at a low level; no differences by gender
Méndez-Urresta et al. (2026)	Ecuador	Quasi-experimental pre-post; n = 147	Physical Education and Basic Education	Problem-based learning raised self-efficacy in its three dimensions

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the studies reviewed

Designs and instruments

Nine studies used cross-sectional quantitative designs, one of them instrumental in nature; two combined quantitative and qualitative methods; one was quasi-experimental and one was a documentary review. Only two studies measured changes in self-efficacy before and after a training

experience (Carcamo, 2023; Méndez-Urresta et al., 2026), and none followed students throughout the entire pre-professional practicum or during their entry into the profession. Samples ranged from 47 to 203 participants. Only Méndez-Urresta et al. (2026) applied the Spanish version of the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) scale; the other studies used domain-specific instruments, such as those on inclusion, school coexistence or mathematics teaching, questionnaires developed for the study or scales focused on the sources of self-efficacy.

Sources of self-efficacy and the role of the practicum

The direct experience of teaching consistently appears as a driver of self-efficacy. A teaching experience within a Service-Learning project raised the self-efficacy of pre-service English teachers in its three dimensions (Carcamo, 2023), and a problem-based learning program produced similar increases in Ecuadorian students (Méndez-Urresta et al., 2026). In a Mexican teacher training college, high self-efficacy was related to professional practice, mentoring and the learning achievements that student teachers observed in their own pupils (Soberanes Cespedes & Sotelo Bahena, 2025). Even the practicum in virtual mode during the pandemic left Chilean pre-service teachers feeling capable of teaching in adverse contexts (Gallardo-Contreras et al., 2023).

However, direct experience does not act alone. In the Brazilian study by Lopes and Lüdke (2025), verbal persuasion was the only source significantly associated with having completed the practicum and with progress through the degree, although in the interviews the students highlighted above all their experiences of success. The review by Soler-Álvarez and Valencia-Vallejo (2025) reaches a convergent conclusion: the practicum yields more when it is combined with feedback from advisors, mentors and peers, and with teaching models that serve as a reference, that is, with verbal persuasion and vicarious experience. The same review notes that self-efficacy increases when the advising style matches the mentor's pedagogical model. As for emotional states, only one study addressed them directly: positive affect during the practicum was associated with greater self-efficacy, satisfaction and enthusiasm (Menezes, 2023). Emotions when teaching also emerged as a theme in the reflections analyzed by Carcamo (2023), and Soler-Álvarez and Valencia-Vallejo (2025) point out that in the region there is no research on this source in practical training.

Areas of lower self-efficacy

The studies agree that pre-service teachers' confidence is lower in tasks involving diversity and conflict. In Physical Education, self-efficacy toward inclusion was moderate to high, but with

difficulties in guaranteeing safe environments for students with visual impairment and with differences between countries (Martínez-Angulo et al., 2023, 2025). Most of the Chilean students assessed by Monzalve-Macaya et al. (2023) rated their training in behavior management and support as insufficient, and relied mainly on verbal praise in response to disruptive behavior. Rojas-Díaz and Nail (2022) developed a specific scale for school coexistence that distinguishes three dimensions: inclusion, collaboration and democracy. In Mathematics, about one in six Dominican pre-service teachers showed low self-efficacy (Santana & Peña Solis, 2026), and the comparison between an Ecuadorian and a Spanish university suggests that the teacher education curriculum influences these beliefs (Segarra et al., 2021). Finally, the use of technologies to teach students from contexts with scarce resources was the aspect with the lowest self-efficacy in the study by Gallardo-Contreras et al. (2023).

Interpretation of the findings

The central finding of this review is that the pre-professional practicum strengthens pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, but does not do so merely by taking place. What makes the difference is the quality of the mediation that accompanies it: feedback from mentors and peers, the models the student observes and the way in which he or she is helped to interpret successes and failures. This result qualifies the idea, present in the previous literature, that practical training is in itself the main source of self-efficacy (Bueno-Álvarez et al., 2022), and brings it closer to the reconceptualization by Morris et al. (2017), for whom the sources do not act in isolation, but through the interpretation that teachers themselves make of their experience.

This reading is consistent with international evidence on interventions. Mok et al. (2023) found that feedback on lesson planning is one of the support activities with the greatest effect on pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, and Täschner et al. (2025) confirmed that programs designed to strengthen it work both in initial teacher education and in service. In Latin America, the earlier work of Montecinos et al. (2011) already showed that the supervision style of the cooperating teacher conditions student teachers' self-efficacy. The fact that, more than a decade later, verbal persuasion continues to appear as the source with the greatest weight (Lopes & Lüdke, 2025; Soler-Álvarez & Valencia-Vallejo, 2025) indicates that the figure of the mentor remains the key piece and, at the same time, the most neglected one in the design of practicums.

The moderate and high levels of self-efficacy reported by most of the studies should be read with caution. Measured at the end of the degree or during the practicum, they may reflect a confidence not yet tested against the complexity of the real classroom; this is precisely the phenomenon that Woolfolk Hoy and Burke Spero (2005) documented when they observed its decline in the first year of teaching. The study by Gallardo-Contreras et al. (2023) illustrates this tension: after teaching during the pandemic, student teachers felt capable of facing adverse contexts, but less sure of being able to teach all their students. From the perspective of this review, high self-efficacy is not always well-calibrated self-efficacy, and teacher education programs would do well to help their students adjust it on the basis of evidence of their own performance.

The areas of lower self-efficacy, such as inclusion, coexistence and behavior management, do not appear to be a weakness of the students, but of the curricula. When pre-service teachers themselves rate their preparation in behavior management as insufficient (Monzalve-Macaya et al., 2023), responsibility lies with the curriculum, as the comparison between universities by Segarra et al. (2021) also suggests. These are, moreover, the situations that most often wear down novice teachers, which makes this gap an issue that goes beyond initial teacher education.

Methodologically, the regional evidence is still fragile. Cross-sectional designs predominate, only two studies measured changes and none followed students throughout the complete practicum. Furthermore, although the region already has validated versions of the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy scale (Gálvez-Nieto et al., 2023; Salas-Rodríguez et al., 2021), most of the studies resorted to their own instruments, which makes it difficult to compare results across countries. The authors of the only quasi-experimental study themselves warn that the magnitude of the change observed should be interpreted with caution because of the absence of a control group (Méndez-Urresta et al., 2026). Added to this is an output concentrated in Chile and almost non-existent in Cuba, Peru and Central America, which is consistent with the incipient and scattered character already described for the region (Yevilao Alarcón, 2020).

Implications, limitations and future lines of research

Concrete practical implications for Education programs follow from these results. The first is to train practicum mentors in feedback and in the modeling of good practices, since their word and their example carry as much weight as direct experience. The second is to include in training simulated or supported situations involving diversity, conflict and the use of technologies in low-resource contexts,

which is where confidence is lowest. The third is to incorporate the measurement of self-efficacy as a formative tool at the beginning and at the end of each practicum, so that students can contrast what they believe they can do with what they actually achieve. Along these lines, the reflection on which dimensions to assess, raised for university teaching staff (Vega Rodríguez & Vizcaíno Escobar, 2023), is equally relevant for pre-service teachers.

The research has limitations that should be considered. The systematic search was carried out in SciELO, Redalyc and Dialnet and was limited to the first results of each query, complemented by an additional search from which most of the included studies came; although six of them were published in journals indexed in Scopus, a direct search in that database and in Web of Science could broaden the corpus. Nor was a formal assessment of the methodological quality of each study applied. Even so, the coherence of the findings across countries and specialties suggests that the patterns identified are consistent. For future research, longitudinal studies that follow students from the beginning of the practicum to their first year of teaching are recommended, together with the use of the validated versions of the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy scale to facilitate regional comparison, the study of emotional states as a source of self-efficacy and a greater presence of the countries currently absent from this output.

With regard to the stated objective, the findings made it possible to characterize recent Latin American output, identify its predominant designs and instruments, specify the role of the pre-professional practicum and point out the gaps that future research should address, aspects that are synthesized in the conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent Latin American research makes it possible to affirm that the pre-professional practicum is the decisive space for building teacher self-efficacy, but that its effect depends on how it is supported. Feedback from mentors, the models students observe and the way they interpret their first classroom experiences carry as much weight as the experience of teaching itself.

Pre-service teachers in the region feel less capable when faced with diversity, conflict and classroom management, which points to specific areas that curricula should reinforce. At the same time, the available evidence is still limited: it is concentrated in a few countries, relies on cross-sectional

designs and heterogeneous instruments, and barely explores the emotional dimension of the practicum.

Strengthening the training of mentors, incorporating the measurement of self-efficacy as a formative tool and undertaking longitudinal studies that follow students through to their first year of teaching are priority tasks if the confidence built in the university classroom is to withstand the transition to the real classroom.

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