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Effective autoethnographic exploration to enhance an educational doctoral researcher's self-efficacy

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SECTION 2

Enlarging doctoral study and supervision with autoethnography

Introduction

Deborah L. Mulligan

Doctoral study and doctoral supervision are layered and multifaceted phenomena. Both processes begin with uncertainty and an element of risk. Students can only guess at the many and varied doctoral study tensions and how these will affect their personal and professional lives. Supervisors, whether novice or veteran, must interact with each student as an individual with unique needs. Both processes are relational and require a high degree of reflexivity. The student needs to feel comfortable with the supervisor and vice versa. Both processes require an intense collaboration in order to effect a successful outcome. The doctorate is a long-term aspiration and, as such, student and supervisor need to have shared goals and planned pathways to meet these goals. The eight chapters in this section of the handbook elucidate the successes and challenges of the doctoral journey on the part of both student and supervisor.

In Chapter 7, Aruna Devi writes explicitly about her self-efficacy as a doctoral researcher. She describes the tensions of life as a doctoral student such as inconsistent productivity, time management, feedback from supervisors and work/life balance. Through autoethnographic profiling processes, the author collates for the reader how she overcame these stressors and facilitated her researcher self-efficacy. These strategies included opportunities for mastery experience, positive role modelling by others to provide vicarious experiences, the encouragement provided by social and verbal persuasion, and attention to her physiological and affective states.

In Chapter 8, Karl Matthews introduces the reader to the use of the Mandala method for visual data collection and analysis when conducting autoethnographic research. He discusses his implementation of this method when performing his doctoral project, and then he leads the reader into a retrospective analysis of the manner in which he aligned his conscious/subconscious insights. The author commends this form of visual analysis for data gathering, and concludes that it has merit for those who are exploring novel questions in their research.

In Chapter 9, Nona Press and Dolene Rossi illustrate the use of two qualitative research methodologies and offer suggestions about the “methodological fusion” of phenomenography and collaborative autoethnography within one study. They contend that this blending of methodological practices could be potentially useful in inquiring into doctoral supervision in diverse academic disciplines. The authors highlight that this technique may prove useful to doctoral supervisors seeking ways to frame/reframe their own supervisory contexts and practices. Reflexive, collaborative research of this nature promotes transparency both individually and collectively.
In Chapter 10, Deborah L. Mulligan tells the story of the reasoning behind her pursuit of a doctorate. She relates the emotional insecurity that she experienced after the death of her teenage son, and the manner in which her academic experience facilitated a resurgence of her sense of agency and self-efficacy that had been lost as a result of overwhelming grief. The author maintains that the structure of the doctoral process, the connections made with other academics and the emotional support of her supervisors provided the assistance that she needed to enact her grief work more effectively.

In Chapter 11, Meg Forbes employs autoethnography to explore her personal journey through PTSD and then to transcend these negative experiences through education. She recounts her experience as a teacher of university students with mental health issues and their reluctance to admit their struggles. Without disclosure from students and understanding from educators, student failure is a very real outcome. Her story demonstrates that with encouragement and patience from those in positions of power this situation can be remedied. The author implores educators to recognise individual differences and to remember that “not everyone’s ‘trying’ looks the same”.

In Chapter 12, Naomi Ryan and Deborah L. Mulligan present an autoethnographic perspective on the generally unwritten contract that connects supervisor(s) (advisors) and student into one of the most intense, long-term, collaborative partnerships in academia, that of attaining a doctorate. The authors attempt to drill down into the heart of best practice, not only for the supervisor but also for the student, and to view the act of supervision through the experiential lens of a supervisor and a student. They posit that, at its most basic, the success of the relationship requires honesty and a collaborative will.

In Chapter 13, Jennifer Clutterbuck explores the intriguing notion of hybrid identities. She relates her story of the identity interconnection that others forced upon her when she was working and researching within an Australian education department to introduce a newly implemented data infrastructure in schools. Her story highlights the importance of identity and the meaning that others attribute to our professionality. The author concludes with a series of challenges for the reader to do with identity diffraction.

Finally in this section of the handbook, in Chapter 14, Sheila Trahar reminds the reader that there continue to be expectations around the methodological usage and implications of autoethnography. The author invites us to witness her lived experience of supervising and examining autoethnographic doctorates, and of reviewing such texts submitted for publication. She utilises the metaphor of the perils and threats that abound in snowy landscapes to recall the manner in which her interpretation and use of autoethnography enable her to evaluate others’ work using criteria that she has synthesised from a range of sources, and that reflect her own values and expectations.
EFFECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION TO ENHANCE AN EDUCATIONAL DOCTORAL RESEARCHER'S SELF-EFFICACY

Journey to becoming a researcher

Aruna Devi

Introduction

I focus on autoethnography as a qualitative method (Denzin, 2006) considered to be a self-focused approach (Ngunjiri et al., 2010), where the “researcher is at the center of the investigation as a ‘subject’ (the researcher who performs the investigation) and an ‘object’ (a/the participant who is investigated)” (p. 2). Sparkes (1996) states that autoethnographies “are highly personalised accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher for the purpose of extending sociological understanding” (p. 21). The purpose of writing this autoethnography is to explore the structural and the personal enablers (Laslett, 1999) of my self-efficacy as these were the factors that empowered me to develop into a researcher through my doctorate research.

Using autoethnography as a writing style aims to provide access to wider and more diverse audiences than traditional research does, making social and personal change possible for most people (Ellis et al., 2010). Autoethnography ensures that this work would be accessible to a more diverse audience to promote a better understanding of how researchers develop self-efficacy. Furthermore, it is also believed that writers may find therapeutic value in writing personal stories (Ellis et al., 2010). Additionally, the need for authenticity in an autoethnographic approach has been emphasised by Etherington (2004). Therefore, I need to ensure that I share a believable account of my experience openly and candidly to engage the readers. According to Hamdan (2012), autoethnography “act as a source of privileged knowledge” (p. 585). An autoethnography that I present here discusses my self-efficacy beliefs that have helped me gain a deeper understanding of myself and provide further context for other researchers.

As Chang (2008) points out, the main benefit of autoethnography as a method of research is that self-reflection leads to self-transformation through understanding. Similarly, the reader
autoethnography is an excellent instructional tool to help not only social scientists
but also practitioners – such as teachers, medical personnel, counsellors, and human
services workers – gain profound understanding of self and others and function more
effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds.

(Chang, 2008, p. 13)

This chapter, which is contextualised in a doctoral research project (Devi, 2019) will allow
me to share my own perspective on self-efficacy, which has been very important to my
career decisions and journey as a doctoral student. Owing to their varying backgrounds
and career goals, becoming an independent researcher in higher education can be a difficult
endeavour for most students as it has been with my own research journey.

In addition to the above viewpoints, I have noted that the work of Ellis (2007) states that:
“to write an effective autoethnography demands showing perceived warts and bruises as well as
the accolades and successes; thus risking this kind of criticism comes with the territory” (p. 17).
To start an autoethnographic study, one must acknowledge their own feelings and actions. This
autoethnography of developing the self-efficacy to become a researcher has implications for
higher education research students.

Through autoethnography I hope to gain some insight into myself to help inform my
future professional development as well as my personal development. My own self-efficacy as
a teacher of students with autism prompted me to consider the self-efficacy of other teachers
of students with ASD. This led to my doctoral research on teachers’ preparedness and self-
efficacy to teach students with autism in an inclusive environment, which was an exploratory
study. This chapter provides a literature review of self-efficacy and the sources of self-efficacy,
followed by my autoethnography that describes my journey into doctoral research and the
factors that influenced my research self-efficacy.

**Literature review**

Self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of succeeding in certain circumstances or achieving
success (Bandura, 1977). This belief is crucial for achieving goals. In the context of teaching
students with autism, self-efficacy is associated with hands-on experiences, mentorship from
the more experienced teachers, ongoing support that is provided from teacher-aides and the
administrative section of schools, liaison with parents or other educational professionals as well
as building a strong rapport with students and pursuing specific coursework studies (Devi &
Ganguly, 2022). The expectation of personal efficacy determines whether or not coping behav-
iour is initiated, the amount of effort used, and the length of time it will be sustained as a result
of obstacles and aversive experiences (Bandura, 1977, p. 104). The importance of self-efficacy
in research has been explored previously in psychology and counselling (Bieschke, 2006; Kahn,
2001). Self-efficacy research shows the importance of shaping one’s goals and interests (Lent
et al., 1994). An individual may have a higher level of self-efficacy in one domain and a lower
level of self-efficacy in another domain (Niehaus et al., 2018). For example, an academic sense
of self-efficacy in teaching is different from that in research.

According to Åkerlind (2003), confidence is “not just proficiency in your field, but also
confidence in the direction of your research” (p. 246). Therefore, self-efficacy guides how we
Effective autoethnographic exploration to enhance feel, think, and behave in certain contexts (Bandura, 1977). In addition, it plays an important role in decision-making, goal-setting, and academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). As depicted in Figure 7.1, Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy beliefs was attributed to four primary sources.

**Mastery experiences**

According to Bandura (1997), *mastery experiences* are the past successes and failure experiences. Mastery experiences, “are the most influential sources of efficacy relevant information because they can provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can master what it takes to succeed” (p. 80). In general, one’s ability to accomplish a task successfully is evaluated based on their previous performances. Success builds your confidence, but failure weakens it (Bandura, 1997). An individual’s sense of self-efficacy can also be affected by the difficulty of the task and the efforts made to achieve success (Hendricks, 2016).

**Vicarious experiences**

In respect to self-efficacy, *vicarious experiences* are gained by seeing others succeeding. In other words, self-efficacy is gained by modelling the behaviours of others. Bandura (1997) indicated that, “seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities” (p. 87). When the learner sees that someone is capable of learning, then the learner believes that she or he is also capable of learning. Therefore, *vicarious experience* is most influential tool in learning when the learners are not sure about their abilities (Bandura, 1986).

**Social and verbal persuasion**

*Social and verbal persuasion* are also factors related to self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), “people who are persuaded verbally that they are capable of mastering given tasks are likely to mobilise greater effort and sustain it than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficulties arise” (p. 101). For example, getting evaluative feedback from colleagues, mentors, teachers, and family members can alter learners’ confidence. *Social persuasion and verbal persuasion* is regularly used to sway one’s behaviour, since it is simple to use and
readily available (Bandura, 1977). When praises are perceived as authentic and realistic, learners try harder to succeed in response to positive feedback (Fong & Krause, 2014). While it is fairly logical that positive feedback encourages self-efficacy, any negative feedback can potentially lower one’s self-efficacy beliefs.

**Physiological and affective states**

Physiological and affective states are a fourth source of self-efficacy which could be interpreted as stress, anxiety, fatigue or mood that might negatively affect one’s ability to perform (Bandura, 1997). Anxiety can make learners believe that they are not capable of completing a task. However, if the learner feels positive about completing the task and achieving success, then these feelings may positively affect the learner’s self-efficacy. Additionally, a negative feeling towards the achievement of a task can negatively affect the self-efficacy of the learner. According to Bandura (1997), understanding the physiological and affective states can enable the individual to improve on his or her “physical status, reduce stress levels and negative emotional proclivities, and correct misinterpretations of bodily states” (p. 106).

According to Gelso et al. (1996), students usually begin their research studies with low levels of self-efficacy; however, this level is likely to elevate as they get more exposed to their research environment. Another study by Lambie et al. (2014) explored research self-efficacy in PhD students and found that students who had more interest in research and had a strong sense of research knowledge were more likely to display higher levels of research self-efficacy. Career aspirations also correlate to positive research self-efficacy (Niehaus et al., 2018). The research doctorate journey is obviously a long one, and it can be filled with unexpected events (Brydon & Fleming, 2011) and challenges. The following autoethnography explores the author’s journey to self-efficacy as a researcher. The author discusses her past experiences in a journey of career development (Devi, 2019; Devi & Ganguly, 2022) and provides insights into how self-efficacy has been essential to her journey toward becoming a researcher.

**My autoethnography**

**Background**

During the early stages of my career, I have worked as a main classroom teacher and had the pleasure to teach students with special needs, albeit with a rather inadequate amount of knowledge or skills in teaching these cohorts. In the absence of such skills, I ended up teaching these students through a trial-and-error process, which made me feel that my teaching was somewhat ineffective. My inner instincts told me that I was not providing equal learning opportunities to my students with special needs, as I felt less qualified and incompetent in my ability to provide a quality education. There were quite a few occasions when I felt like quitting my teaching profession, since it gave me a lot of pressure and anxiety because of my inability to teach students with special needs. I used to have long conversations with my husband about my career change, while at the same time I knew that if I changed my career, it would not be so easy. I thus decided to stay in the teaching profession and further upgrade my qualification and skills to work with students of special needs.

In order to qualify myself to work with individuals with special needs, I undertook a Master of Educational Studies in the learning support area. While studying for the Master’s program, I completed courses that were designed to assist in building my confidence in working with individuals with special needs. A few examples of such courses that ultimately elevated my
Effective autoethnographic exploration to enhance self-efficacy included: issues in special education, learning and diversity, role of a support teacher and the developmental processes and disability. After completing the Master’s program, I had a broader understanding and awareness of the different types of disabilities, and approaches to provide equal learning opportunities to students within a mainstream classroom. I was also fortunate to work as a teacher in various special schools and inclusive classrooms (as a learning support teacher). Collectively, these helped enhance my skills and abilities in working with students of special needs.

At one instance, I remember a casual relief teaching work in one of the schools asking me to provide support to two students with autism in an inclusive classroom. While one of those students worked well with me, the other became very distressed. I knew that most students with autism do not prefer notable changes to their normal routines, and since I was a new face to this student, he was uncomfortable working with me. Despite an upgrade to my qualifications, I felt I had limited skills to accommodate students with autism within my classroom. This was partly because most of the courses I studied during the Master’s program only covered general disabilities, and perhaps, a greater knowledge and skills in autism was required to handle such students within mainstream classrooms.

From memory, the very first time I heard about autism was in 2006 when I had first begun my teaching career in Australia. Having an undergraduate teacher qualification from Fiji, I had never heard about autism during my initial teacher education programs. As the undergraduate degree did not cover any aspect of special education, a lack of awareness and diagnosis back in those days made me feel incompetent. Also, I was trained as a general classroom teacher and hence I did not learn about teaching students with special needs or from other diverse backgrounds. As I began to teach in Australia, there were major difficulties in accommodating the varied learning characteristics and the specific needs of students requiring special attention, and especially those diagnosed with autism.

Amongst all special education students, the particular learners with autism are portrayed as one of the most challenging groups to teach (White et al., 2012). I was lucky to have a teacher-aide support in my classroom, which was a blessing for me and my students. Even though I received the right support in the classroom, I still faced challenges in planning day-to-day activities for these students. This provoked some thoughts and I asked myself, “If I have low self-efficacy in teaching students with autism, I wonder what other teachers feel like when it comes to teaching students with autism”. Most of the teachers I knew were teaching in inclusive classrooms were mainly trained as general classroom teaching. The questioning of my own and the other teachers’ self-efficacy and preparedness in teaching students with autism, actually ultimately led me to pursue the doctoral research program in this area.

An account of the beginning of my doctoral research

I commenced the Doctor of Education degree (Devi, 2019) with some coursework and a major research component in 2013 as a part-time and online research student. I had selected this mode of study as it enabled a greater flexibility to balance the lifestyle against my work commitments. This doctoral research was inspired by my own personal experiences and future interests in teaching students with special needs, mainly those diagnosed with autism. Given that I had a somewhat had low self-efficacy belief in teaching students with autism, I saw some of the other classroom teachers, like myself, who also felt less confident to teach. I recall a time when I went for a relief teaching in a nearby school in my area. I was given a class which contained one student who had a high spectrum of autism, and another teacher who was relieving a different classroom said to me; “Good luck, I had a very challenging experience
when I was in your class last time”. I explored literature to find out about teaching students with autism, and I found that a prior research evidence about teaching students with autism showing teachers’ perceptions towards teaching these student cohorts that were generally undesirable (Humphrey & Hourcade, 2010). These teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach such groups of students (Finch et al., 2013), and it was possible that this could have an impact on teacher job satisfaction and higher teacher attrition rates.

The study of Bandura (1997) said that, “peoples’ level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). Therefore, inadequate teacher preparedness is a factor that may likely influence a teacher’s self-efficacy (Lastrapes & Negishi, 2012). All these readings guided me to explore the pre-service teachers and the recent teacher graduates’ self-efficacy and preparedness in teaching students with autism. I therefore decided to select these group of teachers for my research study as they have a fragile character and are more likely to face certain challenges in their early careers given their limited experience. If this is so, such teachers are more likely to leave their teaching profession (Paniagua & Sánchez-Martí, 2018). Considering my own personal experiences and my low self-efficacy and preparation to teach students with autism, I decided to embark on the doctoral research journey to identify the voices of such teachers.

It is interesting for me to reflect on how my research area was decided. Reflecting on my own individual self-efficacy as a teacher of students with autism ultimately guided me to explore the other teachers’ view about teaching this group of students. While pursuing my doctorate study, I began to question my own self-efficacy in becoming a researcher. Comprehending the whole process of research design was a “daunting task” initially, because of my limited skills in research. I recall that in the year 2010, I enrolled for a doctorate program and after a couple of months I withdrew myself from it. This is mainly because I had less confidence in myself. I knew that the whole process of becoming an independent researcher will not be so easy. Even though there are many factors to consider in becoming an independent researcher, the fundamental component of research progression is the development of a research self-efficacy (Niehaus et al., 2018). The following subsections discusses the development of my self-efficacy in fully becoming a researcher in education.

**My journey into the doctoral research and my self-efficacy**

As I stated previously, I began my doctoral degree in 2013. It consisted of four coursework-based subjects followed by a major research component. The two compulsory courses that I studied were “Foundations of Contemporary Educational Research” and “Effective and Ethical Educational Research”. These were the two major courses in which I learned about the basics of research methodology, ethics and politics of research, data collection and analysis. The other two courses were an elective. I had no problem with the coursework component of my doctoral program; however, when it came to the research component, I began to doubt whether I would be able to meet the benchmark. I have initially learned that a period of doctoral research could be lengthy and challenging and that it may not go as planned. I also faced a lot of anxiety and low research self-efficacy, leading to questions such as:

How will I design my research, how will I write-up my proposal for approval, what will be my supervisors will like, how expert my supervisors in research, how will I apply for ethics application, how will I recruit participants, and how will I analyse the data.
These were only some of the questions floating in my mind when I thought how to accomplish my doctoral goals. I knew that everything would fall in its place when time nears; however I still felt an enormous amount of anxiety and low self-efficacy in myself. Initially, I never expected to pursue a doctoral degree. The very idea of having a “Dr” title added to my name was not on my mental radar. My parents sent me to a university to attain an undergraduate degree, which was a big thing back then. My mother never went to school and my father completed only a primary school education. My siblings have completed high school, but never entered the university. So I was the first one in my nuclear family to reach university-level studies. I believe it was mainly because of my siblings and my parents’ interruption in education as well as the average socio-economic status of my parents and siblings that forced me to pursue university studies.

It so appeared that I was lucky enough to get married to a person who had completed a PhD degree and was an expert researcher himself. He inspired me to pursue my doctorate. On numerous occasions, my husband said, “so and so can do it, why can’t you. You just have to be consistent and do some research work every day and you will complete your doctorate”. He also gave examples of people who managed to complete their PhD successfully despite many challenges. To become an independent researcher, it is important to possess research self-efficacy. Bieschke et al. (2006) said that is “the degree to which an individual believes she or he has the ability to complete various research tasks” (p. 60). Notably, research self-efficacy is an important predictor of future research outputs (Niehaus et al., 2018). In particular, a low level of self-efficacy can inhibit a students’ training in research and willingness to conduct the research (Love et al., 2007). I knew that if I want to be successful, I must address issues related to the causes of my anxiety and I must start believing in myself, so that I can learn and master the research skills.

My doctoral journey had a steep learning curve with hurdles in the research design process, the choice of methodology and the recruitment of participants. There were hardships as well as happiness on certain days of research. However, most of these days I was worried and rather stressed as I worked towards my doctoral journey. The happy days were those days when I felt I had accomplished something and when I got good feedback from my supervisors. I did not have any financial stress as my doctoral study was completed under the university’s Research and Training Scheme funding, and I offer my special “thank you” to the university where I was enrolled. I was more worried about managing my time, writing my thesis, looking after my family and my future employment. Though I had a continuing job, I also had a dream and a hope of becoming a faculty academic in a university, which I knew was not easy to secure.

Although I was enrolled as a part-time student, there were numerous occasions where I felt like I had enrolled as a full-time doctoral student, particularly based on the amount of workload. On the weekends, I would do my research; whenever I went on my holidays, I would take my laptop with me so that I could do at least some work each day. Doing my research work over the holiday period avoided a degree of guilt for not having made any contributions towards the doctoral studies. There were numerous factors that improved my self-efficacy in becoming a researcher, and I would like to discuss those below. The summary of the factors is displayed in Figure 7.2.

Even though I had no prior research experience and skills, my mastery experience in research was established through a personal experience of positive outcomes (Bandura, 1997) through the coursework component of my doctoral study. The first course that I studied was the “Foundations of Contemporary Educational Research”, learning about the philosophical and the theoretical debates in contemporary research, including the elements and applications of a research design. The other course, “Effective and Ethical Educational Research”, taught me the politics of educational research, data collection and analysis techniques. These two courses assisted me to develop further skills and confidence in conducting educational research. I
accomplished the coursework component very successfully with an excellent grade, and this further influenced my self-efficacy to continue with the doctoral research.

The other factor that influenced my research self-efficacy were the vicarious experiences, where the learning occurred through observation and comparing myself to the actions and behaviours of others (Bandura, 1997). For instance, I modelled my husband, who is himself an expert researcher. Seeing him performing successfully in his research area raised my own research self-efficacy. I relied on my husband’s research skills by using social comparisons rather than “direct evidence of personal accomplishments” (Bandura, 1977, p. 197). My self-efficacy also increased after reading about others’ accomplishments in their doctoral research, reading their success stories in social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, which further motivated me to accomplish the same research journey. Therefore, by observing and comparing the successful researchers and by reading their publications improved my own self-efficacy. According to a research study by Vrugt (2004), those individuals who “compared themselves to better colleagues tended to pursue relatively high goals, resulting in many scientific publications, with performance of colleagues acting as motivation to take self-improvement measures” (p. 155).

My self-efficacy as a researcher was also influenced by Social and Verbal Persuasion. Getting that sense of confidence that I was on the right path with my research journey enhanced my self-efficacy. Getting timely feedback from my doctoral supervisor, in the form of both verbal and social persuasion, was very helpful. Encouraging comments such as, “onwards and upwards!” further motivated me to accomplish my goal in research. My supervisors were experienced in research knowledge and skills and being mentored by them increased the level of my research competencies. They supported me with their encouragement and acknowledgement of my voice, while simultaneously provided guidance with their ideas, opinions, and views. This is endorsed by a study conducted by Overall et al. (2011), in which it is found that the more research mentors encourage and support their student’s autonomy, the greater the student’s self-efficacy in a wide range of research activities.

I also received a lot of support and motivational discussion about my research journey with my husband, who always believed in me. Hence my doctoral learning journey has...
been an empowering experience. Receiving positive comments and constructive feedback, influenced my self-efficacy, and I began to try even harder to achieve my goal. On a similar note, Palmer (2006) stated that, “if a person is told that he/she does possess the capabilities to succeed in the task, then that person will be encouraged to try hard to succeed” (p. 338). I also recall having regular meetings with my supervisors to discuss my progress and to receive feedback and suggestions from them. Consistency and cross-checking your progress with expert researchers are a crucial aspect of increasing the value and experience of your learning journeys. There was no delay in obtaining feedback from my supervisors, so I feel blessed to have them as my mentors. The great supervision I received further enhanced my self-efficacy. Literature evidence also demonstrates that research into self-efficacy is shaped by the kind of supervision students receive (Overall et al., 2011). Other researchers reported that positive appraisals of students’ work and supervisory relationship are related to higher self-efficacy, which leads, in turn, to more interest in research productivity (Bishop & Bieschke, 1998; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002). Hence, good mentorship from research supervisors predict greater self-efficacy in research students (Paglis et al., 2006) and this was the case for me.

The fourth source of self-efficacy includes my physiological and affective states. My doctoral research journey was like a roller-coaster ride. There were happy and sad times as well. I remember I was devastated when I did not get enough participants for the online survey component of my research. I used to check the survey responses twice a day; however, the number of responses remained low despite numerous remainders. I also ‘felt bad’ in reminding the busy students to answer the survey questions. The participants of the survey were pre-service teachers, so I also felt very hesitant in requesting their course coordinators to post the remainders on the Moodle site or even to send emails to the pre-service teachers. This episode of data collection was a very depressing moment for me.

Because of the failure in not getting enough response for the online survey, I started feeling negative about my research, which led to a low level of self-efficacy. I knew that having low self-efficacy can be a serious problem in accomplishing my goal. I remember that when I spoke to my supervisors about the survey count, one of my supervisors suggested focusing on the qualitative aspect of the research. It took me one week to decide whether I would go for a qualitative research only, or for both qualitative and quantitative. I did lots of research and read about qualitative research design and methods. Since I wanted to complete my doctorate research on time and focus on my career and I already had bad experience in collecting data through survey, I opted for qualitative research and began recruiting participants for an interview. My self-efficacy improved when I had enough participants to conduct interviews and when I felt that the data I had collected has reached its saturation.

Finally, my self-efficacy towards my doctoral research was expanded to my own locus of control. I refer to the work of Rotter (1966), who defined a locus of control as an individual’s belief about the underlying causes of events in their lives. I would say that during my doctorate journey, I developed a very strong internal locus of control, meaning that I was in control of my decisions and outcomes (Boyd & Bee, 2009). I knew that my supervisors were there to guide and support me, but “it is up to me”, and “I am responsible for learning”, no matter how difficult it can become. “It is my goal and my journey, and I have to accomplish it within the time frame”. I knew there was luck and there was no fate, I just had to work hard with consistent effort. During the final year of my doctorate journey, I realised that I have developed a strong interest in doing research and at present I place a high value on continuing research work in my current career as an academic. The findings from my doctoral journey have subsequently been reported fully in Devi (2019) and also partly reported in Devi & Ganguly (2022).
Conclusion

In this chapter presenting an autoethnographic profile of myself as a researcher, I have presented a reflective account of my self-efficacy beliefs developed within and towards the doctoral research journey. I began my doctoral studies (Devi, 2019) with the aim of exploring the teachers’ experiences of self-efficacy and preparedness in teaching students with autism. As a researcher, it is important to understand our own beliefs and any underlying assumptions before exploring someone else’s experiences (Hopkins et al., 2017). While doing my doctoral research, I always evaluated my own research self-efficacy to ensure that I was not off balance; if I feel that I am, then I would explore ways to enhance my efficacy. I feel that I have gained significant understanding that I experienced during my doctoral journey, which has now enabled me to focus on and progress in my career. This also concurs with the recent results emerging from my doctoral project (Devi & Ganguly, 2022). Therefore, starting my research journey was a crucial event in my career, which has helped me grow into the researcher I am today.

References

Effective autoethnographic exploration to enhance


