Journal of Teacher Education and Educators
Volume 14, Number 1, 2025, 3–18
Original Article

Teacher Trainees' Academic Confidence and Ratings of Learning Demands and Lecturer Support

(Received on January 14, 2025 – Accepted on April 10, 2025)

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Abstract
This study used a correlational design methodology to examine teacher-trainees academic confidence, their rating of learning demands, and lecturer support at their teacher training college. Data were collected using a survey comprising the Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and the Teacher Support Scales. A total population sampling technique was used to select the teacher trainees who had attended the College for over four years; the rating analysis revealed that the trainees expressed moderate academic confidence and were in moderate agreement with the program's learning demands and lecturer support. Correlational analysis revealed a high direct relationship between academic confidence learning demands and lecturer support, which validates trainees' perceptions of the higher education learning environment. The program's Feasibility was the best predictor of academic confidence among the teacher trainees. This study provided significant insights into the program operations and can be instructive in developing program delivery at the teachers' college.

Keywords: academic confidence, learning demands, lecturer support, student-teacher, teachers' college.

Introduction

The scope and goals of teacher training institutions are defined by the support given to trainees to develop pedagogy and academic confidence through a collaborative learning environment where they experience success in achieving learning outcomes. It is, therefore, imperative that teacher preparation programs be considered a key component of any education system (Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2016) that is aimed at adjusting to the rigors and hardships connected to temporary issues within society (Manzano-Sánchez et al., 2021). The learning demands of these programs and the support offered by the lecturers can influence the attitudes of aspiring and developing teachers, in some instances resulting in adverse effects on academic confidence and culminating in academic dropouts (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2019). On the other hand, a supportive learning environment can increase academic confidence. Sharma (2016) contested that academic confidence is associated with increased academic performance, and Sadler (2013) indicated that this may even influence the teacher's ability to enhance the academic performance of their future students. Andreas (2015) claims that academic confidence is a key component of teacher training to sufficiently strengthen the teacher pedagogy in dealing with future challenges and adversities. Notwithstanding, there can also be an area of misunderstanding in the perceived learning demands and lecturers' support in the teacher training program, which can impact the level of effective student learning and their academic confidence. Therefore, it is crucial to have a precise conception of the

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relationship between the student's learning experience and their academic confidence and its consequences.

The factors that influence overall student performance can be at the school level, program level or student-related. The complex nature of these factors requires a comprehensive examination of their influence on academic performance in higher Education. Therefore, capturing the perspectives of the student-teachers who received the teacher training program is essential. They are best positioned to provide greater clarity on their learning processes and support the importance of evidence-based practice in teaching and learning. This study delves into three critical dimensions: the demands of learning environments, the support provided by lecturers, and the academic confidence that student-teachers develop over time. Understanding how these elements interact offers valuable insights for enhancing educational methodologies and institutional support systems. By critically examining these perceptions, the research aims to illuminate pathways to improve academic outcomes, fostering personal and professional growth among future educators. Ultimately, this investigation contributes to a broader dialogue on pedagogical effectiveness and the systemic factors that shape the educational experiences of student-teachers within diverse academic landscapes.

In the dominion of teacher education, the rigors of the program and the support offered for completion can be transferred to cohesive fundamental indicators of future teacher effectiveness and competence in the classroom. It reflects a student-teacher's understanding of pedagogical theories and influences their ability to navigate the complexities of educational settings. A well-founded grasp of learning demands is crucial; student-teachers who recognize the necessity for independent study and critical evaluation are better equipped to cultivate these skills in their future students. However, discrepancies often exist between students' and lecturers' expectations, as recent research highlights differing perspectives on what constitutes academic success. For instance, while lecturers prioritize critical evaluation and independent study, students may place more value on feedback and support. This divergence underscores the necessity for comprehensive lecturer support, as it can significantly enhance the academic confidence of student-teachers, ultimately shaping their performance and efficacy as educators (Hassel & Rideout, 2018). Such findings accentuate the significance of fostering a supportive academic environment to bridge these gaps and enhance educational outcomes.

Research indicates that student perceptions of the learning process are critical in shaping their educational experiences. For instance, Lufri et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of understanding students' perceptions of the learning models applied by lecturers, suggesting that these perceptions can significantly impact their engagement and motivation in the learning process. Similarly, Chien (2014) highlights that students' insights provide valuable information for educators to comprehend their cognitive processes and classroom dynamics, thereby allowing for more tailored instructional strategies. This alignment between teaching methods and student perceptions is essential for fostering an effective learning environment.

Lecturers at a teachers' college necessitate a nuanced understanding of the various challenges that student-teachers face, particularly in balancing rigorous curriculum expectations and practical teaching experiences. Macalisang et al. (2024) noted that effective learning reinforcement from educators is crucial in shaping students' self-efficacy and motivation to navigate these demands successfully. When students perceive that instructors employ diverse reinforcement strategies, they develop a stronger belief in their abilities, which fosters persistence in their academic endeavors.

Hence, the present study examines the relationships between academic confidence, lecturer support, and learning demand among trainee teachers to develop a robust understanding of the relationship. The study was guided by the following research questions to achieve its aim:

RQ1: What are student-teachers' ratings of i) their academic confidence, ii) the program

learning demands, and iii) the lecturer's support in meeting the objectives of the Teacher Education Program.

RQ2: Are there significant relationships between student-teacher ratings of the program learning demands, lecturer support, and their academic confidence?

RQ3: What factor of learning demands or lecturer support best predicts student-teacher academic confidence?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is organized and guided by the supposition that there is a direct relationship between student-teacher perceptions of the teacher education program's learning demands, lecturers' support and their academic confidence, as shown in Figure 1. Student-teachers can speculate on the type of support provided by lecturers in their training programs and the desirability and feasibility of the program learning demands. These speculations can connect with their belief in their ability. This interrelationship can influence teachers' academic achievement in higher education, leading to improvements in the quality of their teaching. This improvement can only result from positive perceptions of the learning demands, lecturer support and academic confidence. In addition, as Bandura (1986) postulated in the Social Cognitive Theory and Federici and Skaalvik (2014) highlighted that teachers who have shown to provide psycho-social and academic support are firmly positioned to drive students to complete and master their learning tasks and generate greater confidence in capabilities.

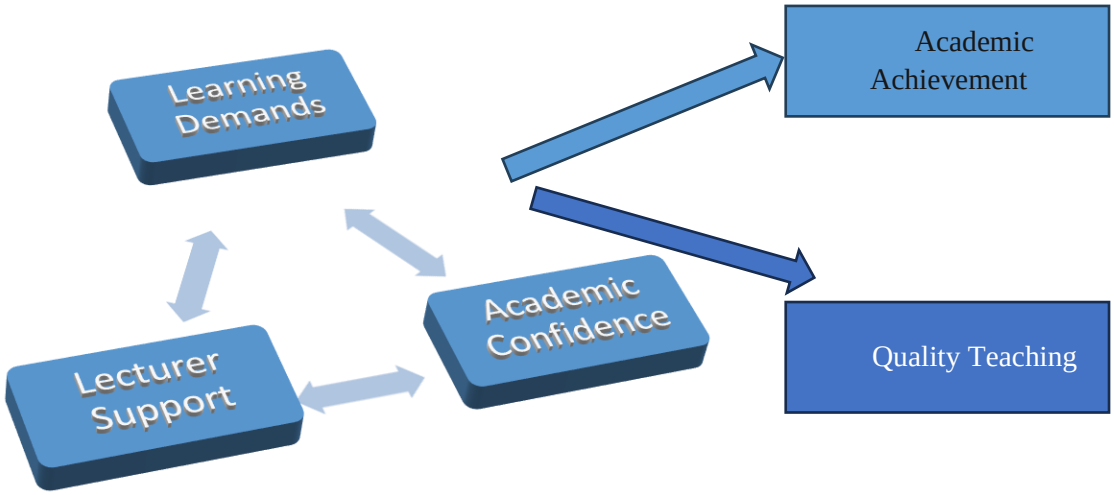

Figure 1. The interrelationship between learning demands, lecturer support and academic confidence

Academic Confidence

Rosenberg (1965, p.4) noted that confidence is an individual's evaluation of self, and that academic confidence is an essential competency in the academic world. According to Sander and Sanders (2003), academic confidence is 'how students differ to the extent to which they have a strong belief, firm trust or sure expectation of what higher education has to offer'.

Academic confidence is an essential factor of the academic self-concept (ASC) (Granero-Gallegos et al., 2021; Matovu, 2014), as it is one of the critical factors in the quality of teaching since the perceptions that students have about their academic abilities, internalize them and condition certain attitudes (Engels et al., 2004). Gallegos et al. (2022) and Sadler (2013) unearth evidence that suggests that students with high academic confidence record high academic achievement and are more actively involved in learning activities. In Gallegos et al. (2022) study, pre-service teachers' academic confidence directly correlates to their academic performance and tendency to initiate curriculum innovations in their pedagogy. Bénabou and Tirole (2002) showed that self-confidence strongly influences learning

performance, indicating that when learners' self-confidence is low, it leads to poor performance in learning outcomes.

Academic confidence is consequential to the development of student-teachers' teaching experiences and practices, especially as they must be subservient to the rigorous activities of their training program. Understanding the interconnection between academic confidence and resistance to adversities is critical to realizing how student-teachers deal with the complexities and demands of the academic program of teacher education. Student-teachers with high academic confidence are likely to participate more actively in the theoretical and practical components of the teacher education program, allowing them to reflect on their pedagogical practices and overall development. This notion is strongly supported by Spittle et al. (2023), who illustrated that student-teachers' inspiration and academic confidence are intimately linked to their perceptions of teacher efficacy. Fuente et al. (2021) found that students with higher academic confidence are more likely to employ effective coping strategies and less likely to procrastinate. This analysis suggests that developing academic confidence can support students' competency in dealing with challenging situations or adversities, thereby maintaining a focus on achieving academic goals. Moreover, as student-teachers' feelings of competence increase, so will their engagement in learning activities. Nasar and Kaleka (2020) further indicated that using constructive feedback and positive reinforcement significantly improves student-teacher confidence and teaching skills during practice teaching.

Learning Demands

According to Doménech-Betoret et al. (2019, p.4), "Learning demands refer to a specific subject in the classroom context, and basically to the tasks that students have to complete (procedural demands) and the contents they have to study (conceptual demands) to fulfill the programmed objectives and pass the subject". In this study, learning demands apply to the teacher education program rather than a specific subject.

The learning demands of the teacher education program are critical to molding academic confidence in student teachers. Urhahne et al. (2011) state that applying academic pressure to program workload can influence students' self-concept and motivation, resulting in instances where extreme pressure may lead to anxiety and the deterioration of academic confidence. On the other hand, Lima-Vargas et al. (2021) noted that a supportive learning program that mitigates stress can enhance students' resilience and confidence.

Student-teachers often face significant learning demands during their training, particularly in practicum settings where they are expected to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. Studies have shown that in some instances, many student-teachers lose academic confidence, particularly in the management of classrooms, in cases where they are faced with unplanned situations during teaching practice. Sathappan and Sathappan (2018) suggested that lecturers, supervisors, or mentors provided additional support to students after their findings reported that the student-teachers perceived themselves as unrehearsed in handling classroom management. Consequentially, these teachers' quality of teaching will be affected as their perceived learning demands of the teaching program influence their teacher's sense of efficacy.

Together with Lecturer Support, the learning demands of the teacher education program can impact student-teacher academic performance. There can be some degree of variability in student-teacher perceptions of the learning demands. Canrinus and Fokkens-Bruinsma's (2013) exploration of student teachers' motives and perceptions of their educational environment and their commitment and self-efficacy found varying degrees in the student teachers' perceptions. They further noted a relationship that suggests that when student-teachers perceive the demands of their coursework as manageable and supported by their lecturers, they are more likely to succeed academically.

The teacher education program's perceived learning demands, including the theoretical and practical components, can influence the student-teachers' perceptions of their capabilities. According to

Abdelmounaim et al. (2022), when high expectations are communicated to the student-teachers and a challenging curriculum is managed effectively, this reduces the possibilities for academic stress and teacher burnout. In such situations, the student-teachers will perceive the learning demands of the teacher education program to be surmountable. Once provided with adequate lecturer support, there is a strong chance for nurturing academic confidence (Martínez-Líbano & Cabrera, 2023). Martínez-Líbano and Cabrera's study revealed that emotional exhaustion among trainees during the COVID-19 pandemic was closely linked to their perceptions of learning demands and the support they received.

Lecturer Support

In this study, lecturers' support refers to the instructional support provided by lecturers geared at simplifying the teacher trainees' knowledge of the training program and the affective support provided by lecturers to satisfy students' psychological needs. It is constructed within the training domain (Doménech-Betoret et al., 2019), both of which aim to contribute to achieving the learning demands of the teacher trainees.

Orr et al. (2012) contend that there can be feelings of alienation from the teaching profession in student-teachers due to experiencing isolation within the first year or two of the higher education experience. Therefore, lecturers must intervene to provide dependable, positive and intuitive support in such circumstances to control the social and cognitive challenges encountered by the student-teachers. This support can take the form of readily available mentorship and constructive feedback to build resilience and academic confidence in the trainees. In so doing, Dunne et al. (2015) posit that the trainees will develop attachment and a sense of confidence to deal with the multifaceted challenges associated with the learning demands of the program, eventually leading to the advancement in their pedagogical practices. On the other hand, failure to provide support can foster anxiety and coping mechanisms rather than focusing on learning, leading to stagnation in professional development.

Dwivedi et al. (2023) contend that employing lecturer support can increase efficiency and indulge in a more transformative learning agenda, especially in practical training. This view can be developed further by Luxton-Reilly et al. (2018), who documented that educational systems have focused on the needs of assorted learning demands by utilizing immediate constructive feedback to alleviate student-teacher difficulties. Furthermore, Passanisi et al. (2021) advocated that lecturers should shape a supportive learning environment that fosters autonomy and facilitates engagement, which will ultimately construct a more positive self-concept and academic confidence.

Hagenauer and Volet's (2013) findings suggest that lecturer support should encourage engaging the student-teachers in a realm that involves the psycho-social domains as the trainees frequently encounter situations involving the display of emotions, influencing student perceptions of learning demands. Lecturers must be best positioned to express their emotions through personal engagements with the trainees. Moreover, the relationship between student-teachers and their lecturers is pivotal in shaping academic performance. Meroño et al. (2018) argue that fostering positive emotional relationships between lecturers and students can have a consequential improvement in meeting the learning demands of the training program, leading to academic growth. However, the quality of these relationships is often influenced by the perceived support provided by lecturers, which can either facilitate or hinder student engagement and motivation. Wal-Maris et al. (2018) note that not all student teachers are equally affected by their learning environments, indicating that individual perceptions can lead to varied academic outcomes.

Another key component of lecturer support is the use of effective communication. Elshami et al.'s (2021) study on remote learning revealed that students favored it when lecturers avail themselves of online conversations and an operative feedback mechanism. Likewise, Kporyi's (2020) study suggests that accessible lecturers who help students result in higher student engagement in learning. The lecturers' accessibility enhances academic performance and contributes to a sense of security and confidence among student-teachers. According to Fitriyani (2021), this outcome is consistent with the literature on

student engagement, which concluded that students will be more motivated, have higher confidence levels, and achieve better academic performances once they experience feelings of lecturer support and understanding from their lecturers. In addition, Dankwah et al. (2021) purported that using constructive feedback and inspiration from lecturers can alleviate the lack of confidence and anxiety about learning demands, which are experiences shared by student-teachers in the multiplicities of challenges within teacher education programs.

Moreover, Liu (2024) contends that when lecturers build positive relationships with their students, the likelihood of students' high expectations and increased academic engagement will be nurtured. The quality of the relationship between the lecturer and the student teachers is fundamental in modeling academic confidence and academic learning. The conception that lecturers' emotional and psychological support is needed for student realization of the learning demands of the program is further supported by Kariuki and Mbugua (2018), whose findings revealed that lecturers who build positive relationships with their students impact the student's academic confidence, motivation and academic performance.

Passanisi et al. (2021) and Abdelmounaim et al. (2022) posit that student teachers develop a resilient and adaptable attitude towards the challenges of learning demands in the teacher education program when they feel supported by their lecturers. Moreover, Qian et al. (2019) noted that student teachers' academic confidence reflects their lecturers' pedagogical practices, and the experiences gained from interacting with the training course demands.

In summary, student-teachers are called upon to internalize the structure and functions of varying instructional practices and theories, much of which will influence their academic confidence levels as they are challenged to meet the learning demands of the teacher education program while receiving support from their lecturers. This interrelationship substantiates diverse situations where varying levels of academic confidence are entangled with the need for academic achievement. A perceived challenging course's resulting forces can create a crossroad for students. At one point, they may have to meet the learning demands of the training program at the same time, feel the pressures of anxiety and self-doubt, conditions that grow stronger, mainly when feelings of inadequate support exist. It is imperative, then, that the mediate force of lecturer support emerge to sustain growth in academic performance and confidence.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive quantitative correlational study design to explore the relationship between the variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), this nonexperimental form of research involves using correlational statistics to describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores.

The study used a population of teachers who received training over four years. These teachers attended the College for two years for full-time students and three years for part-time students. The population comprised four cohorts of teachers who received early Childhood and primary education training. Using a total population sampling technique, these teachers were informed of the study, and their consent was sought from participants. Within this population, 126 teachers responded in the affirmative. Hard copies of the instrument to collect data were provided to the teachers, and they were given two weeks to respond and return the questionnaire document. The descriptive details of the study population are provided in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographic Details of the Participants

Cohort	Category of Teaching Experience				Total
	Novice Teachers	Inexperienced Teachers	Mid-career Teachers	Experienced Teachers	
Primary part-time	5	16	18	9	48
Early Childhood full- time	9	10	10	1	30
Early Childhood part-time	13	14	16	5	48
Total	27	40	44	15	126

The data were collected from a questionnaire comprised of four scales and a section that compiles the participants' demographic details. The Learning Demands Scale and the Lecturer's Support Scale were adapted from Doménech-Betoret et al. (2020) Educational Situation Quality Model (acronym in Spanish MOCSE-LDS) "Learning Demands Scale" and the "Teacher Support Questionnaire" (MOCSE-TSQ). The Academic Confidence Scale was adopted by Sander and Sanders (2003). Permission was sought from the developers of the scales to utilize the instruments.

The Learning Demands Scale measures the desirability and the Feasibility of the tasks to be completed in the teacher training program. Participants must rate statements by responding to a Likert-type scale with ratings of 1 for total disagreement to 6 for strong agreement on two subscales: the Desirability subscale (6 items) and the Feasibility subscale (6 items). A rating of 6 was interpreted as strong agreement, 5 – agreement, 4 as moderate agreement, three as moderate disagreement, two as disagreement and one as strong disagreement with the statements. Likewise, the same responses were offered and interpreted for the Lecturer Support Scale. This scale uses seven of the ten subscales from the original instrument with seven items in each scale: Content Comprehension (7 items), Relatedness and Accessibility (7 items), autonomy (6 items), Awakening Interest (5 items), Guiding Learning (4 items), Self-Competency (5 items), and Providing Resources (4 items).

The Academic Confidence Scale required the teachers to respond to statements that begin with the stem: While attending Teachers' College, how confident were you that you were able to. The teachers responded to 24 questions using a rating scale ranging from 1, not at all confident, to 6, very confident. The ratings were interpreted as 6-very confident, 5 – confident, 4- moderately confident, 3 – moderately unconfident, two unconfident, and one very unconfident.

The instrument was provided to university lecturers and educational psychology experts for validation. Pilot testing was done on 12 teachers who recently completed the training program. The reliability of the scales is reported in Table 2. As indicated in the table, the scales had good internal reliability (Academic Confidence $\alpha = .856$; Learning Demands $\alpha = .879$, and Lecturer support $\alpha = .822$)

Table 2.

The Reliability Statistics for the Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and Lecturer Support Scales.

Scale	Participants	Items used	Cronbach Alpha
Academic Confidence	126	24	.856
Learning Demands	126	11	.879
Desirability	126	5	.826
Feasibility	126	6	.899
Lecturer Support	126	49	.822
Content Comprehension	126	7	.859
Relatedness/ Accessibility	126	7	.802
Autonomy	126	7	.789
Awakening Interest	126	7	.795
Guiding Learning	126	7	.869
Self-Competency	126	7	.872
Providing Resources	126	7	.811

The mean and standard deviation scores were used to interpret the teacher trainees' ratings on the Academic Confidence Scale, the Learning Demands and the Lecturer Support Scales. This process provided answers to research question 1. The overall mean ratings on the Academic Confidence Scale were interpreted as follows: 124.5 -144.0-very confident, 104.5- 124.4 – confident, 84.5- 104.4-moderately confident, 64.5- 84.5 – moderately unconfident, 44.5 – 64.4 unconfident, and 24.0 - 44.4 very unconfident.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine the relationship between Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and lecturer support. The test determined the nature of the relationship that existed between those three variables as perceived by the teacher trainees. According to Burns (2000), the procedure for determining the type of relationship exists is as follows: 0.9 – 1.0 is very high, 0.7 – 0.89 is high, 0.4 – 0.69 is moderate, 0.2 – 0.39 is low and < 0.2 is slight.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the answer for Research Question 3. Standard multiple regression was used, where the predictor variables (components of Learning Demands (2 variables) and Lecturers Support (7 variables) were used simultaneously in the equation. According to (Pallant, 2020), the researcher considered the following when conducting the test: the size of the sample, extreme scores, the relationship among the independent variables, features of the sample dispersion, and the structure of the fundamental relationship between the variables. In the final analysis, three models comprising four predictor variables were used to avoid issues with violations of multicollinearity assumptions.

Findings

Student-Teacher Ratings of Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and Lecturer Support

The means and standard deviation for the ratings of student-teachers on their academic confidence, the learning demands of the teacher education program and the support provided by the lecturers are displayed in Table 3. The student-teachers expressed moderate academic confidence (M= 99.39, SD=22.37) and agreed with the Learning Demands of the program and the Feasibility component, though they expressed moderate agreement with the Desirability component. The student-teachers agreed moderately with Lecturer Support and its components except for autonomy, where they expressed moderate disagreement.

Table 3.

Means and Standard Deviations for Student-Teachers' Ratings of Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and Lecturers' Support.

Variables		N	M	SD
Academic Confidence			99.39	22.37
Learning Demands			53.91	9.78
	Desirability		25.48	6.44
	Feasibility		28.42	5.08
Lecturers' Support			141.92	37.04
	Content Comprehension	126	24.18	6.70
	Relatedness and Accessibility		28.62	7.59
	Autonomy		20.50	6.64
	Awakening Interest		19.76	6.13
	Guiding Learning		14.08	4.93
	Self-Competency		19.72	5.47
	Providing Resources		15.06	4.61

Relationship Between Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and Lecturers Support

Table 4 depicts the correlation matrix for Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and Lecturers' Support. All relationships were found to be significant at the .01 level. High direct relationships were reported between Academic Confidence and Learning Demands, r = 0.769, p < 0.0005) and Academic Confidence and Lecturer Support (r = 0.738, p< 0.0005). Moderate direct relationships were observed in Academic Confidence in the components of Learning Demands (Desirability: r = 0.657, p< 0.0005, and Feasibility: r = 0.647, p< 0.0005). Similar findings were observed for the relationships between Academic Confidence and the components of Lecturer Support (Content Comprehension r = 0.676, p< 0.0005, Relatedness / Accessibility r = 0.658, p< 0.0005, Autonomy r = 0.679, p< 0.0005, Awakening Interest r = 0.538, p< 0.0005, Guiding Learning r = 0.629, p< 0.0005, Self-Competence r = 0.692, p< 0.0005, and Providing Resources r = 0.672, p< 0.0005).

Table 4

Correlation Matrix for Academic Confidence, Learning Demands and Lecturers' Support

VARIABLES	Academic Confidence	Learning Demands	Desirability	Feasibility	Lecturers' Support	Content Comprehension	Relatedness Accessibility	Autonomy	Awakening Interest	Guiding Learning	Self-Competency
Learning Demands	.769										
Desirability	.657	.884									
Feasibility	.647	.805	.434								
Lecturers' Support	.738	.730	.665	.562							
Content Comprehension	.676	.665	.627	.485	.876						
Relatedness /Accessibility	.658	.604	.545	.472	.917	.881					
Autonomy	.679	.694	.558	.628	.840	.671	.662				
Awakening Interest	.538	.605	.574	.437	.855	.599	.701	.729			
Guiding Learning	.629	.637	.580	.490	.896	.672	.764	.756	.824		
Self-Competency	.692	.605	.592	.415	.886	.707	.796	.620	.749	.840	
Providing Resources	.672	.696	.641	.528	.894	.812	.791	.729	.697	.714	.807

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Similarly, Learning Demands shared a high direct relationship with lecturer Support r = 0.73, p< 0.0005), and its component Providing Resources r = 0.696, p< 0.0005, but shared a moderate direct relationship with the other components (Content Comprehension r = 0.665, p< 0.0005, Relatedness /

Accessibility r = 0.604, p< 0.0005, autonomy r = 0.694, p< 0.0005, Awakening Interest r = 0.605, p< 0.0005, Guiding Learning r = 0.637, p< 0.0005, Self-Competence r = 0.605, p< 0.0005).

Predicting Academic Confidence

Three models were developed with four predictor variables to avoid violating multicollinearity assumptions. Model 1 comprised of Desirability Demands, Feasibility Demands, Content Comprehension Support, and Awakening Interest Support as predictors, and it explained 41.2% of the variance in Academic Confidence. The model was significant: F (4,124) = 57.01; p < .0005. Model 2 was also found to be significant F (4,124) = 54.01; p < .0005, and it comprised Desirability Demands, Feasibility Demands, Content Comprehension Support, and Self Competency Support as predictors, explaining 38.1% of the variance in Academic Confidence. Model 3 comprised Feasibility Demands, Relatedness Accessibility Support, Guiding Learning Support and Providing Resources Support as predictors, explained 36.9% of the variance in Academic Confidence. It was statistically significant: F (4,124) = 51.22; p < .0005.

The results of the multiple regression analysis are displayed in Table 5. From Model 1, it was determined that Feasibility Demands were the best predictor (β = .382, p <.0005). From Model 2, it was determined that Feasibility Demand was the best predictor (β = .361, p <.0005). From Model 3, it was determined that Feasibility Demand was the best predictor (β = .379, p <.0005). These findings suggest that the student teachers point to the Feasibility Demands of the Teacher Education Program as the best predictor of their Academic Confidence.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Models for Predictors of Academic Confidence in a Sample of 124 Student Teachers.

	Predictors	β	t	Tolerance	VIF
Model 1	Desirability Demands	.355*	4.728	.487	2.052
	Feasibility Demands	**.382***	6.065	.542	1.844
	Content Comprehension Support	.264*	3.477	.500	2.000
	Awakening Interest Support	-.016	-.228	.487	2.052
Model 2	Desirability Demands	.275*	3.947	.520	1.923
	Feasibility Demands	**.361***	6.154	.731	1.369
	Content Comprehension Support	.119	1.511	.409	2.448
	Self-Competency Support	.282*	3.796	.457	2.187
Model 3	Feasibility Demands	**.379***	5.447	.682	1.467
	Relatedness Accessibility Support	.189	1.781	.294	3.400
	Guiding Learning Support	.125	1.344	.383	2.611
	Providing Resources Support	.228*	2.251	.323	3.099

*Significant at the .05 level. Better predictors highlighted in bold β scores

Discussion

The student-teachers rated their academic confidence as moderate, indicating self-doubt in their academic abilities. This finding may be the result of teacher trainees having a moderate level of academic performance and engagement with the teacher education program at the College, as Gallegos et al. (2022) point to research that supports the claim that lower levels of academic confidence correlate positively with low academic performance and engagement in learning activities. Engels et al. (2004) explain that the study's teachers are likely to display moderate quality in their teaching as their academic confidence can influence their perceptions of their teaching abilities and attitudes towards teaching. In considering the level of the teachers' academic confidence, the Ministry of Education should provide more significant support in implementing new programs and innovations in teaching, as Gallegos et al.

(2022) highlight that academic confidence is linked to teachers' willingness to adopt innovative teaching methods. Furthermore, in a highly stressful teaching environment, schools must engage in strategies to improve teachers' academic confidence, as Fuente et al. (2021) advocate that students with higher academic confidence are more likely to employ effective coping strategies.

The student-teachers agreed with the Learning Demands of the program, but it was not a firm agreement. The expression of agreement to the Feasibility component of the Learning Demands Scale indicates that the teachers perceived the program to be demanding on their efforts to pass the theory and practical aspects of the program, on the workload and objectives to be fulfilled and on the evaluation criteria to pass the program. However, the student-teachers expressed moderate agreement with the Desirability component, indicating that the training program was moderately interesting, appealing, satisfying their curiosity and related to their personal and professional goals. This finding suggests that the students perceived the procedural and conceptual content of the teacher education program to be demanding. This revelation indicates that the student-teachers perceive the demands of their coursework as practicable, meaning they are more likely to succeed academically in the training program. According to Canrinus and Fokkens-Bruinsma (2013), these teachers are more likely to succeed in the training program as their perceptions of their educational environment can affect their commitment and self-efficacy.

The student-teachers agreed moderately with Lecturer Support and its components except for autonomy, where they expressed moderate disagreement. This finding indicates that the student-teachers perceived the provision of instructional support provided by lecturers geared at simplifying the teacher trainees' knowledge of the training program and the affective support provided by lecturers directed to satisfy students' psychological needs and wishes within the training domain to be at a minimum and somewhat nonexistence regarding the opportunities for student teachers to self-organize, making their own decisions, selecting tasks and activities and working independently. The student-teachers likely believe that the academic environment at the College is not highly supportive, as Passanisi et al. (2021) concluded that a supportive educational environment encourages autonomy and facilitates engagement. The relationship quality between student-teachers and lecturers is likely not the best, as it can be assumed that the perceived support provided by lecturers often influences the quality of these relationships. This notion is supported by Meroño et al. (2018), who argue that positive affective relationships between teachers and students can enhance the learning experience and promote better academic performance.

Lecturers at the teachers' colleges must understand that they are pivotal in shaping the educational experiences of student-teachers. Their support can significantly influence the professional development of these future educators. For instance, the role of mentors in Further Education has been shown to enhance the professional learning of lecturers, thereby improving the overall quality of teacher education (Husband, 2020). Mentoring relationships fosters collaboration and provide essential guidance, crucial in teacher training where practical experience is paramount (Bhebhe, 2022). The findings from these studies suggest that effective mentoring can alleviate the anxieties of pre-service teachers, enhancing their confidence and skills (Grima-Farrell, 2015).

Alluding to the study's findings and the conclusion drawn from Orr et al. (2012), it is therefore vital that the College seeks to improve the support provided by the lecturers to avoid developing or harnessing senses of isolation and feelings of alienation from professional practice and to enhance academic confidence and teaching skills.

The significant interconnections between academic confidence and learning demands and lecturer support explain where efforts can be placed to effect positive movement in these variables. These interconnections require the College and the Ministry of Education to collaborate and search for ways to improve the teacher training program and the student teachers' efficacy in teaching. Consequently, the trained teachers will become more impactful in delivering the curriculum to their students.

The study suggests that the demands of the teacher education program environment can play a crucial role in shaping academic confidence, as indicated by the survey by Urhahne et al. (2011). In the Caribbean context, where educational systems vary widely, supportive teachers can create an environment conducive to learning and self-development. Teacher trainees who feel supported are more likely to develop a positive self-image and confidence in their teaching abilities. Furthermore, studies have shown that teacher-pupil interactions significantly influence students' self-esteem and academic success, highlighting the need for effective communication and support within educational settings (Šašić et al., 2021).

The study's findings suggest that the student teachers' ratings revealed the Feasibility Demands of the Teacher Education Program as the best predictor of their Academic Confidence. Teachers' perceptions of their training program's difficulty level and whether they will successfully achieve its goals determine their academic confidence. The more teachers perceive the possibilities of successfully overcoming the rigorousness of their training program, the more likely they will transmit their academic successes to influence their future students. This new knowledge indicates that the level of their efforts to pass the theory and practical aspects of the program, the workload and objectives to be fulfilled, and the evaluation criteria to pass the program serve as the best predictor of the student teachers' academic confidence. It, therefore, means that the student-teachers believe that the rigors of the teacher education program can be related to their academic confidence. The study confirms that a challenging or rigorous teacher training curriculum can impact student-teachers' perceptions of their academic confidence. The more complex the training curriculum is, the more likely students will perceive their academic confidence as weak. It would be intuitive for the teacher's College to provide more outstanding lecturer support to mitigate these circumstances. This notion aligns with the findings of Huang (2023), who illustrates that teacher support can significantly enhance students' self-efficacy, particularly in challenging learning environments such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interplay between teacher support and academic self-efficacy is critical, as it mediates the relationship between perceived support and academic achievement.

Trainees who feel supported by their lecturers are more likely to approach learning demands with a positive mindset, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles (Passanisi et al., 2021; Abdelmounaim et al., 2022). This perspective is crucial, as it fosters resilience and adaptability—essential for effective teaching. Additionally, trainees' perceptions of their learning environment significantly influence their academic engagement and motivation. As Qian et al. (2019) highlighted, teachers' confidence in their training is often shaped by their experiences with the curriculum and the instructional methods employed by their lecturers.

Conclusion

Educational programs must provide structured mentorship and resources that address these multifaceted challenges, enabling trainees to transition from merely coping with the demands to developing as informed educators. The student-teachers expressed moderate academic confidence, indicating self-doubt in their academic abilities. These findings necessitate a structured approach to boosting academic confidence through a support system while implementing a challenging and rigorous curriculum.

The study findings support the view that when coupled with robust support from lecturers, heightened academic demands bolster student engagement and motivation, ultimately enhancing their performance. Conversely, excessive demands without adequate support can lead to feelings of inadequacy, undermining students' confidence. The implications of the study findings are critical for program administrators and educators, suggesting that a balanced approach to academic rigor, alongside a structured support system, is essential for fostering an environment conducive to learning.

The study faces a few limitations, including the drawback of self-reporting instruments and the nature of quantitative analyses, which do not comprehensively explain the findings. In addition, the sample size is limited to teachers who recently completed the training program at the teachers' colleges. A larger sample size would have allowed for additional statistical analysis to provide a more profound understanding of the issue locally. Consequently, there is a need to do follow-up studies using qualitative and mixed methodologies to provide richer details and knowledge on the teacher education curriculum, lecturers' support and academic confidence of teachers.

The following recommendations are necessary:

1. The school system should consider the quality of support given to teachers in implementing new teaching programs and innovations.
2. The teachers' training colleges should engage in strategies to improve teachers' academic confidence.
3. The teachers' training college should strengthen the instructional support provided by lecturers, which is geared toward simplifying the teacher trainees' knowledge of the training program, and the affective support provided by lecturers, which is directed at satisfying students' psychological needs.
4. Further research is needed to apply to the general teaching population of qualified or trained teachers.

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