

Teaching reading with heart: A mixed-methods examination of university teacher-student relationships and their impact on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods

by

Savannah Sage Maydew

B.S.E., Emporia State University, 2015
M.S., Emporia State University, 2020

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the impact of university teacher-student relationships on the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), this study explores how faculty interactions support autonomy, competence, and relatedness—three psychological needs essential for motivation and professional development. The research addresses one primary question and two supporting questions: (R1) How do university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses? (R1a) What specific behaviors and interactions characterize positive teacher-student relationships in this context? (R1b) How do university teacher-student relationships foster a sense of autonomy, influence perceptions of competence, and affect overall self-determination?

This mixed-methods study integrates quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews with elementary teacher candidates enrolled in reading methods coursework at a Kansas Board of Regents institution. The study uses descriptive and correlation statistics in SPSS to analyze survey responses and applies open, axial, and selective coding to interview transcripts to identify emergent themes.

Findings indicate that faculty approachability, responsive feedback, mentorship, and instructional modeling significantly influence teacher candidates' self-determination. The study introduces the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming), a conceptual framework that identifies five key dimensions of effective teacher-student relationships: holistic support, enthusiastic engagement, approachability, responsive feedback, and transformative teaching. This model offers a structured approach to enhancing faculty-student interactions in teacher education.

The implications of this study extend to teacher education programs, faculty training, and institutional policies. By fostering relationally supportive teaching practices, universities can help teacher candidates develop confidence, motivation, and instructional competence. These findings underscore the importance of embedding faculty-student relationships into teacher preparation curricula and accreditation frameworks, ensuring that future educators receive both content knowledge and relational support necessary for professional success.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Suzanne Porath

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Dedication

The work of this dissertation is dedicated to three groups of people. First, it is dedicated to the students who knew me as their elementary school teacher. Spending those years in the classroom with you changed me for the better. You are the reason I was inspired to transition to higher education and ultimately gave me the courage to do so. Wherever life takes you, I am confident that you will not only be successful, but you will fulfill your potential with love for those who are lucky enough to be a part of your journey. It is my hope that you can reflect on your days (however fleeting they may have been) with “Mrs. Maydew” and be reminded of the special person you are and all the incredible things you are capable of.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The great Rita Pierson, a renowned American elementary educator, once said, “Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.” This quote perfectly captures the essence of this researcher’s line of inquiry. The key difference here being that my research context is situated against the backdrop of higher education.

In higher education, the nature of teacher-student relationships plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of students. This is particularly evident in teacher education programs, where the nature and quality of interactions between university instructors and teacher candidates can significantly influence the latter's professional development and self-efficacy. The cultivation of strong, supportive relationships is essential for fostering an environment conducive to learning, motivation, and personal growth. Within the context of reading methods courses, these relationships are crucial for developing elementary teacher candidates' confidence and competence in teaching literacy, a foundational skill for early education.

The importance of teacher-student relationships is underscored by the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs that must be satisfied to promote intrinsic motivation and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Positive interactions with instructors can enhance these needs, thereby contributing to the overall self-determination of teacher candidates. However, despite the recognized importance of these relationships, there remains a gap in the literature regarding their specific impact on elementary teacher candidates' experiences and outcomes in reading methods courses.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring how university teacher-student relationships influence the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates within the context of reading methods courses. By examining these relationships through the lens of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), this research seeks to provide insights into how supportive educational environments can be cultivated to enhance teacher candidates' motivation, competence, and professional growth.

Research Problem

The development of effective teaching practices is crucial for preparing future educators to meet the diverse needs of their students. However, elementary teacher candidates often face challenges in developing the necessary confidence and competence to teach reading effectively. This issue is particularly significant in reading methods courses, where the foundational skills for teaching literacy are established. The problem this research aims to address is the lack of understanding regarding how university teacher-student relationships impact the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in these courses. Specifically, it seeks to uncover how these relationships influence candidates' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential components of their professional growth and motivation.

Gap in Literature

While there is substantial research highlighting the importance of teacher-student relationships in higher education, there is an apparent lack of studies focusing on the specific context of reading methods courses for elementary teacher candidates. Existing literature often emphasizes general aspects of teacher-student interactions without diving into the nuanced ways these relationships affect the intrinsic motivation and professional development of teacher candidates in specialized courses. Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly explored

teacher-student relationships from a broad perspective, without integrating the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) to analyze the specific psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed examination of how positive teacher-student relationships within reading methods courses foster elementary teacher candidates' self-determination. By focusing on this specific context and utilizing SDT as a theoretical framework, this research seeks to offer deeper insights into the mechanisms through which supportive relationships enhance teacher candidates' motivation, competence, and readiness to teach literacy effectively. The findings from this study will contribute to the development of more targeted strategies, approaches, and perhaps models for teacher education programs, ultimately supporting the professional growth of future educators.

Research Purpose and Questions

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of university teacher-student relationships on the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates within reading methods courses. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. **Examine** how these relationships influence the autonomy, competence, and relatedness of elementary teacher candidates.
2. **Identify** specific behaviors and interactions that characterize positive teacher-student relationships in the context of reading methods courses.
3. **Explore** how these relationships foster a supportive learning environment that enhances teacher candidates' motivation and professional development.

4. **Analyze** the implications of these relationships for teaching practices and the overall effectiveness of teacher education programs.

Expected Outcomes

This study aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the role university teacher-student relationships play in shaping the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates. By employing a mixed-methods approach and leveraging the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), the research seeks to provide nuanced insights into how these relationships impact candidates' experiences and outcomes in reading methods courses. The expected outcomes include:

1. **Detailed Insights:** Providing in-depth knowledge of how positive teacher-student interactions promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness among elementary teacher candidates.
2. **Practical Recommendations:** Offering actionable recommendations for teacher education programs to enhance the quality of teacher-student relationships, thereby improving the preparation and professional growth of future educators.
3. **Theoretical Contributions:** Contributing to the existing body of literature by integrating SDT into the analysis of teacher-student relationships in higher education, particularly within the specialized context of reading methods courses.
4. **Policy Implications:** Informing educational policies and practices that aim to create supportive learning environments in teacher education programs, ultimately benefiting both teacher candidates and their future students.

Through these outcomes, the study seeks to advance the field of teacher education by highlighting the critical importance of fostering strong, supportive relationships between

university instructors and teacher candidates. By addressing the identified gaps in the literature, this research will contribute valuable knowledge that can enhance the effectiveness of teacher education programs and support the professional development of future educators.

Research Questions

The main research question guiding this study is:

- **R1:** How do university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses?

To explore the primary research question in depth, the following sub-questions are addressed:

- **R1(a):** What specific behaviors and interactions characterize positive teacher-student relationships in this context?
- **R1(b):** How do university teacher-student relationships foster a sense of autonomy, influence elementary teacher candidates' perceptions of competence, and affect their overall self-determination in reading methods courses?

These questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which teacher-student relationships impact the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates, focusing on the key aspects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as outlined by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

Research Hypotheses

There are three research hypotheses that this study will explore via correlation statistical analysis, utilizing SPSS software. The three research hypotheses are:

- **H1:** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of autonomy.

- **H2:** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of competence.
- **H3:** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of relatedness.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1980), is a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation, particularly the conditions that foster intrinsic motivation, psychological growth, and well-being. SDT posits that there are three fundamental psychological needs that must be satisfied for optimal functioning: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

- **Autonomy:** Refers to the need to feel in control of one's own behavior and goals. When individuals feel that their actions are self-determined, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and engaged in their activities.
- **Competence:** Involves the need to feel effective and capable of achieving desired outcomes. Providing opportunities for individuals to develop their skills and experience mastery is crucial for fostering motivation and self-efficacy.
- **Relatedness:** Pertains to the need to feel connected and valued by others. Supportive relationships that offer care and respect can enhance individuals' sense of belonging and motivation.

In the context of this study, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) is relevant as it provides a framework for examining how university teacher-student relationships can influence the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. By exploring how

these relationships satisfy the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, this research seeks to understand the mechanisms through which positive teacher-student interactions enhance teacher candidates' motivation, professional growth, and overall well-being.

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) offers a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the multifaceted impact of teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates. This theoretical approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of how these relationships influence teacher candidates' motivation, professional development, and readiness to teach.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution to academic knowledge by addressing the gap in the literature regarding the impact of university teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. While previous research has explored the importance of teacher-student relationships broadly, there is a lack of in-depth studies focusing on how these relationships specifically affect teacher candidates in specialized courses such as reading methods. By utilizing Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), this research provides a nuanced understanding of how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fostered through positive teacher-student interactions. The findings of this study will enrich the theoretical discourse on motivation and professional development in higher education, offering new insights into the mechanisms through which supportive relationships enhance educational outcomes.

Practical Implications

There are several practical implications worth mentioning from this study, particularly for teacher education programs and professional development initiatives. By sifting out and identifying the specific behaviors and interactions that characterize effective teacher-student

relationships, the study provides actionable recommendations for educators and administrators to foster supportive learning environments. These insights can inform the design and implementation of professional development programs aimed at enhancing the relational skills of university instructors, thereby improving their ability to support and mentor teacher candidates effectively.

Moreover, the findings can guide the development of curricula and teaching practices that prioritize the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, ultimately leading to more motivated and well-prepared future educators. By highlighting the critical role of positive teacher-student relationships in promoting self-determination, this study underscores the importance of investing in relational aspects of teaching to improve the overall quality of teacher education. This research also offers valuable perspectives for policymakers and educational leaders seeking to create policies and practices that support the professional growth of teacher candidates and ensure their readiness to meet the challenges of contemporary classrooms.

Definitions of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout this study, the following key terms are defined:

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** A psychological framework developed by Deci and Ryan (1980) that focuses on the intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being of individuals. It emphasizes the importance of three fundamental needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- **Autonomy:** The need to feel in control of one's own actions and decisions. In the context of this study, it refers to the degree to which elementary teacher candidates feel they have the freedom to make choices about their learning and teaching practices in reading methods courses.

- **Competence:** The need to feel effective and capable of achieving desired outcomes. For this study, it pertains to the teacher candidates' confidence in their ability to successfully teach reading and master the content of reading methods courses.
- **Relatedness:** The need to feel connected and valued by others. In this study, it refers to the sense of belonging and support that teacher candidates experience in their interactions with university instructors.
- **Self-Efficacy:** A concept from Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy (1977), referring to an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific outcomes. In this study, it examines how teacher candidates' confidence in their teaching abilities is influenced by their relationships with university instructors.
- **Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR):** The interactions and bonds formed between university instructors and teacher candidates. This study explores how these relationships impact the self-determination and professional development of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses.
- **Elementary Teacher Candidates:** University students who are enrolled in teacher education programs with the goal of becoming certified elementary school teachers. This study focuses specifically on those taking reading methods courses.
- **Reading Methods Courses:** Specialized courses in teacher education programs that focus on teaching strategies and methodologies for literacy instruction. These courses are crucial for preparing elementary teacher candidates to teach reading effectively.
- **Qualitative Research:** A research approach that seeks to understand phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and

texts. This study employs qualitative methods to explore the experiences and perspectives of elementary teacher candidates.

- **Constructivist Paradigm:** A philosophical approach to research that emphasizes the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. This study adopts a constructivist perspective to understand the complex dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their impact on self-determination.

By defining these key terms, this section aims to provide a clear and consistent understanding of the concepts and language used throughout the study.

Methodology Overview

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore the impact of university teacher-student relationships on the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. A mixed-methods approach is chosen for its ability to capture the nuanced and subjective experiences of participants, providing rich, detailed insights into the phenomena under investigation using descriptive and correlation statistical analysis and individual interviews with study participants. Specifically, for the qualitative side of the inquiry, this study utilizes a case study method, which involves an in-depth examination of a bounded system – in this case, the experiences of elementary teacher candidates within a specific educational context. The case study design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions and relationships that influence self-determination in reading methods courses.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study are collected using two primary methods: digital web-based surveys and semi-structured interviews.

1. **Digital Web-Based Surveys:** A survey consisting of 21 closed-ended questions is administered to elementary teacher candidates enrolled in the "The Science of Reading II" course at a Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) institution. The survey aims to gather quantitative data on participants' perceptions of their relationships with university instructors, focusing on aspects such as approachability, feedback, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The survey is designed to be concise, taking approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and is distributed via the Qualtrics platform to ensure ease of access and convenience for participants.
2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Follow-up semi-structured interviews are conducted with a selected group of participants who have completed the survey and expressed interest in providing more in-depth insights. The interviews are designed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in greater detail, allowing for a deeper understanding of the qualitative aspects of teacher-student relationships. Each interview lasts approximately 30-45 minutes and is audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data collection. The researcher also reserved the right to schedule a single follow-up interview with any participant the researcher deemed necessary to further clarify their responses and/or experiences.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study involves a systematic approach to both quantitative and qualitative data.

1. **Survey Data Analysis:** The survey data are analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to summarize and describe the main features of the collected data. This involves calculating frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each survey item to identify key patterns and trends. In addition to the descriptive survey data, this study also employed a correlation analysis of the relationships between variables defined in the research hypotheses. The results from the survey provide a broad overview of participants' perceptions, which inform the subsequent qualitative phase of the study.
2. **Interview Data Analysis:** The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews are analyzed using a detailed coding process, following the guidelines provided by Saldaña (2016). The analysis involves three key stages:
 - **Open Coding:** Initial coding of the interview transcripts to identify significant phrases, concepts, and themes.
 - **Axial Coding:** Identifying relationships between the codes generated during open coding and organizing them into broader themes and sub-themes.
 - **Selective Coding:** Integrating the core themes into a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions and provides a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

This multi-step analysis process ensures a thorough and nuanced understanding of the data, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. By employing a mixed-methods design and utilizing both surveys and interviews for data collection, this study aims to capture the complex dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their impact on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses.

Delimitations and Limitations

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on exploring the impact of university teacher-student relationships on the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates within the context of reading methods courses. The scope of the study includes:

- **Participants:** Elementary teacher candidates enrolled in "The Science of Reading II" course at a Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) institution.
- **Context:** The study is conducted within the specific educational environment of reading methods courses, which are designed to prepare future elementary teachers for literacy instruction.
- **Relationships:** The study examines the nature and quality of interactions between university instructors and teacher candidates, focusing on how these relationships influence candidates' autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The study will not cover:

- **Other Courses:** It will not investigate teacher-student relationships in courses outside of reading methods.
- **Other Institutions:** The research is limited to a single KBOR institution and does not include data from other universities or colleges.
- **Quantitative Outcomes:** While the study includes a survey to gather quantitative data on perceptions, it does not aim to measure the long-term quantitative outcomes of teacher candidates' professional performance.

Several potential limitations may affect the findings and interpretations of this study:

- **Self-Reported Data:** The study relies on self-reported data from participants, both in the survey and interviews. Self-reported data can be influenced by social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses they believe are expected or favorable. This may impact the authenticity and accuracy of the data collected.
- **Researcher Bias:** Given the researcher's background as an elementary classroom teacher and current role in higher education, there is a possibility of researcher bias influencing the study. The researcher's vested interest in supporting elementary teacher candidates and improving literacy education could shape the interpretation of data and interactions with participants. While reflexivity and the use of a researcher journal are employed to mitigate this bias, complete objectivity is challenging to achieve.
- **Depth Over Breadth:** The qualitative nature of the study allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, but it may limit the breadth of perspectives captured. The focus on detailed narratives means that the study may not capture the full range of experiences and views within the broader population of elementary teacher candidates.

By recognizing these delimitations and limitations, the study maintains transparency and provides a clear framework for understanding the scope and applicability of its findings.

Addressing these limitations also offers valuable insights for future research in this area.

Organization

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, each of which addresses a specific aspect of the research. The structure is designed to systematically guide the reader through the study, from the introduction and theoretical framework to the methodology, findings, and conclusions.

This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, significance, definitions of key terms, methodology overview, delimitations and limitations, and the organization of the dissertation. It sets the stage for the detailed exploration that follows.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature related to university teacher-student relationships and self-determination theory (SDT). It identifies key themes, gaps in the current research, and the theoretical foundations that underpin this study. The literature review serves to contextualize the research and justify the need for the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology employed in the study. It details the mixed-methods approach and case study method, the research setting and participants, data collection methods (surveys and semi-structured interviews), and data analysis procedures. Ethical considerations and measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the research are also discussed.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data collected through surveys and interviews. It includes a detailed analysis of the data, identifying key themes and patterns related to the impact of teacher-student relationships on the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates. The chapter integrates the findings with the theoretical frameworks of SDT, providing a comprehensive understanding of the results.

The final chapter discusses the implications of the findings for teacher education programs and professional development. It reflects on the significance of the study, offers practical recommendations, and suggests directions for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's contributions to academic knowledge and its potential impact on educational practices. This organization ensures a logical and coherent progression through the

research, allowing the reader to follow the development of the study from its inception to its conclusions.

Conclusion

This dissertation explores the critical role of university teacher-student relationships in fostering the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates within the context of reading methods courses. By leveraging the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how these relationships influence candidates' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, ultimately impacting their professional development and readiness to teach literacy effectively.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to fill the existing gaps in the literature, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of teacher education. By focusing on the specific context of reading methods courses and employing a qualitative case study approach, this study aims to generate detailed insights that can inform the design and implementation of more effective teacher education programs.

As this dissertation progresses, the subsequent chapters will explore the relevant literature, elaborate on the research methodology, present and analyze the findings, and discuss their implications for practice and future research. This comprehensive exploration will enhance our understanding of the ways in which supportive teacher-student relationships can be cultivated to promote the self-determination and professional growth of future educators. Through this study, it is my aspiration to contribute valuable knowledge that will support the development of more motivated, competent, and confident elementary teacher candidates, ultimately leading to improved literacy instruction and better educational outcomes for students.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." – William Butler Yeats.

This sentiment illuminates the influence that effective teacher-student relationships can have on igniting a passion for learning and fostering intrinsic motivation. Understanding the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their impact on teacher candidates' self-determination is essential for improving teacher education programs. This literature review explores the interaction between Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan 1980) and teacher-student relationships (TSR) to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how these relationships influence elementary teacher candidates, specifically in reading methods courses.

Purpose and Related Research Question(s)

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive analysis of existing research and theoretical perspectives on the relationship between university teacher-student relationships and elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. By synthesizing relevant literature, this review aims to address the following research questions:

R1: How do university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses?

This question seeks to understand the overall effect of teacher-student interactions on the motivation and engagement of teacher candidates. The literature review will explore the general dynamics of these relationships and their influence on students' intrinsic motivation, drawing on both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies.

R1(a): What specific behaviors and interactions characterize positive teacher-student relationships in this context?

To unpack this sub-question, the review will identify and discuss specific behaviors and interactions that are deemed supportive and effective. This includes behaviors such as mentorship, availability, responsiveness, and constructive feedback, and how these contribute to a positive and motivating educational environment.

R1(b): How do university teacher-student relationships foster a sense of autonomy, influence elementary teacher candidates' perceptions of competence, and affect their overall self-determination in reading methods courses?

This sub-question focuses on the mechanisms through which teacher-student relationships enhance self-determination. The literature review will examine how these relationships support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and the subsequent impact on elementary teacher candidates' self-efficacy and motivation.

By addressing these research questions, this literature review aims to identify the key components and benefits of positive teacher-student relationships in higher education, particularly within the context of reading methods courses. It will also highlight gaps in the current research, providing a foundation for the research and contributing to the development of more effective teacher education practices.

Structure and Organization

This literature review is organized into eight sections to provide a comprehensive exploration of the relevant theories and existing research and literature surrounding the ideas which comprise this research endeavor. Following this introduction, the next section presents the background and research context, detailing the historical and current trends in teacher education and the significance of teacher-student relationships.

The third section introduces the theoretical framework from which this research is situated; the driving theory being Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1980), with the integration of additional relevant and supporting curricular theories to consider within the context of the study. The following section examines teacher-student relationships (TSR), particularly in higher education, discussing their characteristics, impact, and importance.

The next section identifies gaps in the existing literature, highlighting areas where further research is needed. The following section discusses the implications of the study, offering theoretical, practical, and policy insights. The final section concludes the literature review, summarizing key points and linking them to the research questions, while also setting the stage for the following methodology chapter.

Key Claims

This literature review has been developed with the previously mentioned research questions in mind. Additionally, it has been constructed around and organized by the following key claims:

1. SDT is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and engagement among elementary teacher candidates, highlighting the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
2. Positive teacher-student relationships in higher education are fundamental for the academic and personal development of students, emphasizing trust, respect, communication, and support.
3. Specific behaviors and interactions in teacher-student relationships are critical for promoting a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, detailing how mentorship, availability, responsiveness, and constructive feedback play pivotal roles.

By examining the relevant and existing literature pertaining to TSR, particularly within the context of higher education through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), this literature review aims to synthesize existing research, identify gaps, and provide a foundation for the subsequent investigation.

Background and Context

Trends in education tend to come and go, so it is no surprise that literacy education has undergone many transformations over the course of time. These shifts in literacy trends can be attributed to a wide variety of factors. Presently, there is considerable pressure on higher education institutions to ensure that university faculty are adequately preparing elementary teacher candidates to meet the demands of contemporary literacy instruction. This pressure is compounded by the ever-evolving literacy climate, which is characterized by shifting educational standards, diverse student needs, and the integration of new instructional methodologies. However, it is worth noting that these pressures in higher education are not novel. Given this context, it is crucial to understand the historical progression of literacy instruction methods and the factors that have shaped these changes.

History of Teacher Education Program Accreditation

Prior to highlighting the layers of literacy educational trends that have traversed the previous 70 years of education, this researcher finds it necessary to first situate these trends in public education against the history regarding the accreditation of higher education institutions' teacher education programs. Literacy trends in K-12 education on the surface may seem disconnected from instruction at the higher education level. Yet, these trends inherently impact teacher candidates in their development for the profession. After all, teacher education programs

are ultimately charged with preparing teacher candidates for careers within the profession. As such, these trends do in fact impact teacher education programs in higher education.

In 1948, the American Association for Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) was established. While AACTE is currently an educational entity responsible for positive influence and advocacy on the part of American education, it was initially the first accreditation body for higher education institutions (AACTE, 2024). AACTE's (2024) mission statement states, "AACTE elevates education and educator preparation through research, professional practice, advocacy, and collaboration" (para. 3). Though this is the current mission statement of the organization, this has been the sentiment of the organization since its genesis in 1948.

Soon after its creation, AACTE saw a need for an additional accreditation entity for teacher education programs in higher education. In 1954, it played a role in what became known as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE was founded as a governmental accreditation body for institutions of higher education (CAEP, 2023). This organization functioned as the primary accreditation body for teacher education for the better part of the remainder of the twentieth century.

It wasn't until 1997 that the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) was founded, that NCATE had much accreditation competition, per say. As per CAEP's (2023) webpage, TEAC was founded to "...be dedicated to improving academic degree programs for professional educators, those who teach and lead in school pre-K through grade 12" (para. 11). Contextually speaking, it is no coincidence that TEAC's origination occurred just before the 21st century, a time well-known for its emphasis on teacher quality and educational outcomes in public schools.

By the year 2014, NCATE and TEAC no longer functioned as separate accreditation bodies. Instead, they joined forces to become what is now known as the Council for Accreditation of Educator Programs (CAEP) (CAEP, 2023). Currently, CAEP remains the national accreditation entity for institutions of higher education.

This begs the question; how does all this contextual accreditation information relate to the historical progression of literacy education? These accreditation bodies have long been known to align their criteria and standards with national education policies and professional standards. In doing so, they ensure that teacher preparation programs meet the criteria set by national organizations and entities. Even today, CAEP continues this legacy by integrating national standards into its accreditation process (CAEP, 2023). This alignment is essential to understanding the progression of literacy education trends and climate because teacher education is designed to equip future educators with the competencies and skill sets necessary to effectively join the profession. Naturally, the criteria set by accreditation entities have been influenced by the research-backed trends in education, including literacy education.

The following subsection will outline the dominant instructional methods for literacy education and the contextual factors surrounding these trends. Therefore, I found it necessary to frontload this section of text with the historical context of teacher education accreditation to illustrate the interwoven nature of K-12 education and teacher education programs. At this point, it is also worth mentioning that public education, has long concerned itself with the level of knowledge and expertise among its educators, as is evidenced by the long history of teacher education accreditation. It can then be assumed that what has historically motivated the trends of teacher education, according to Deci and Ryan's (1980) SDT, is competence. Or to put it another

way, public education's motivations have long been driven by a desire to know a lot about a lot of things.

Historical Progression of Literacy Education Trends

The 1950s: Emerging Standardization with Basal Readers

The 1950s marked a revolution in literacy instruction with the widespread adoption of basal readers, which provided structured, systematic lessons praised for facilitating learning across diverse educational settings (Staiger, 1958). Advocates like Yoakam (1951) emphasized their role in delivering planned, systematic instruction essential for reading proficiency. The political landscape, including the National Defense Education Act (1958), underscored the importance of education for national security, indirectly influencing literacy education. However, the standardized nature of basal readers limited autonomy for teachers and students, potentially impacting their self-determination.

The 1960s: Emerging Whole Language Teaching

The 1960s introduced the whole language approach, emphasizing meaning and integrating authentic texts to promote reading enjoyment and student engagement (Osborne, 1965; Stahl, 1999). Despite this shift, basal readers remained prevalent due to their structured approach. Social movements and legislation like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) highlighted educational disparities and pushed for more equitable instruction, aligning with SDT's principle of relatedness by fostering inclusion. However, the top-down nature of federal policies sometimes clashed with local autonomy, affecting intrinsic motivation.

The 1970s: Emerging Literature-Based Teaching

The 1970s saw a shift towards literature-based reading instruction, utilizing authentic literature instead of basal readers to foster reading proficiency and critical thinking (Hiebert &

Colt, 1989). Legislation like the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) mandated appropriate education for children with disabilities, influencing literacy instruction by ensuring support for all students. Economic challenges led schools to optimize resources, emphasizing diverse reading materials and support services. This approach promoted autonomy and competence by allowing choice and encouraging critical engagement with texts.

The 1980s: Emerging Balanced Literacy Teaching

The 1980s introduced balanced literacy instruction, merging phonics and whole language approaches to create comprehensive reading instruction (Reutzel, 1998). Emphasis on metacognitive strategies helped students monitor their comprehension processes (Otto, 1985). Influenced by the report "A Nation at Risk" (1983), educational reforms called for higher standards and accountability. This decade's instructional approaches promoted autonomy, competence, and relatedness, aligning with SDT by creating a supportive learning environment that addressed students' psychological needs.

The 1990s: Emerging Standards-Based Reform

The 1990s were marked by the rise of standards-based education reform, influenced by balanced literacy programs and the popularity of reading workshops (Benge-Kletzien & Conway-Hushion, 1992). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) aimed to establish national education standards, emphasizing competence through standardized instruction. Initiatives like the America Reads Challenge highlighted the societal importance of early literacy. The decade's reforms aimed to create a more equitable educational system, setting the stage for continued advancements in literacy education.

The 2000s: National Reading Panel and Evidence-Based Practices

The 2000s saw the impact of the National Reading Panel's (NRP) report (2000), which emphasized evidence-based reading instruction practices, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) mandated standardized testing and accountability, further promoting the use of scientifically based reading instruction. This focus on evidence-based practices aimed to enhance reading competence and foster autonomy by providing clear instructional guidelines. However, the emphasis on testing and accountability sometimes constrained teacher autonomy, affecting intrinsic motivation.

The 2010s: Integration of Technology and Common Core State Standards

The 2010s introduced significant integration of technology in literacy instruction, with digital tools and online resources becoming prevalent. Personalized learning approaches, supported by adaptive learning technologies, allowed for more individualized instruction, aligning with SDT's principles by promoting autonomy and competence. The Common Core State Standards (2010) aimed to provide consistent educational benchmarks, emphasizing critical thinking and comprehension skills. However, debates over the implementation of these standards and their impact on teacher autonomy continued to shape literacy instruction practices.

The 2020s: Emphasis Social-Emotional Learning and the Science of Reading

The 2020s have been characterized by an emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) and the widespread integration of the Science of Reading into literacy instruction and educational policy. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted disparities in educational access, leading to increased focus on addressing these gaps through inclusive and equitable practices. SEL approaches have been integrated into literacy instruction to support students' emotional well-being and foster a sense of relatedness and competence. However, it is The Science of

Reading which has dominated educational conversations across the nation. The Science of Reading synthesizes decades of research on how children learn to read, and has gained traction, promoting evidence-based practices that emphasize phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This focus aims to enhance reading instruction effectiveness and student outcomes by adhering to proven methodologies. However, balancing the numerous other demands of the profession alongside the rigorous demands of the Science of Reading remains an ongoing challenge in creating meaningful teacher-student relationships that support self-determination.

It has been said that hindsight is 20/20, and this is certainly true when examining literacy instructional trends and the inevitable pressures educators face because of them. When looking through these trends in the rearview mirror, it could be argued that literacy instruction has always been like a beloved piece of playground equipment: a seesaw. On one end of that seesaw is the push for standardized instruction and methodologies, which from a motivational standpoint inherently emphasize teacher and student competence above all else. And on the other end of that seesaw is the advocacy for student-centered approaches, which tend to lean into more autonomy and relatedness on the part of both teachers and students alike. And so, literacy instruction can be viewed with this analogy: a seesaw in seemingly constant motion from one end of this instructional spectrum to the other. More often than not, these instructional paradigms have and continue to polarize instructional trends and methodologies, rather than finding a way to work in concert.

Integration of Historical Context and Purpose of Study

Examining the historical progression of literacy instructional trends provides valuable insights into the forces that shape contemporary literacy education. The interplay between

standardized methodologies and student-centered approaches highlights the ongoing tension between ensuring competence and promoting autonomy and relatedness, as posited by Deci and Ryan's (1980) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This study aims to explore how current literacy instruction practices, particularly within the context of higher education, impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. By understanding the historical context and its influence on present-day teaching practices, this research seeks to identify strategies that foster intrinsic motivation and effective teaching practices among future educators, ultimately contributing to the development of more competent and autonomous teachers equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Theoretical Framework

The preceding section provided an in-depth exploration of the historical progression of literacy education trends over the past seventy years. This historical context underscores the connection between standardized methodologies and student-centered approaches, illustrating the ever-evolving nature of literacy instruction. These shifts highlight the ongoing tension between ensuring competence and promoting autonomy and relatedness, as posited by Deci and Ryan's (1980) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Understanding these trends is critical for situating the current study within the broader context of literacy education. This section of the literature review introduces and describes the primary theoretical framework guiding this research: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1980).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1980), is a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation, particularly the role of intrinsic motivation. SDT posits that individuals have three basic psychological needs—autonomy,

competence, and relatedness—that must be satisfied to foster intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being. In educational contexts, SDT emphasizes the importance of creating environments that support these needs to enhance student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. The following subsections explore these components and their application in educational settings, as supported by relevant literature.

Core Components of SDT

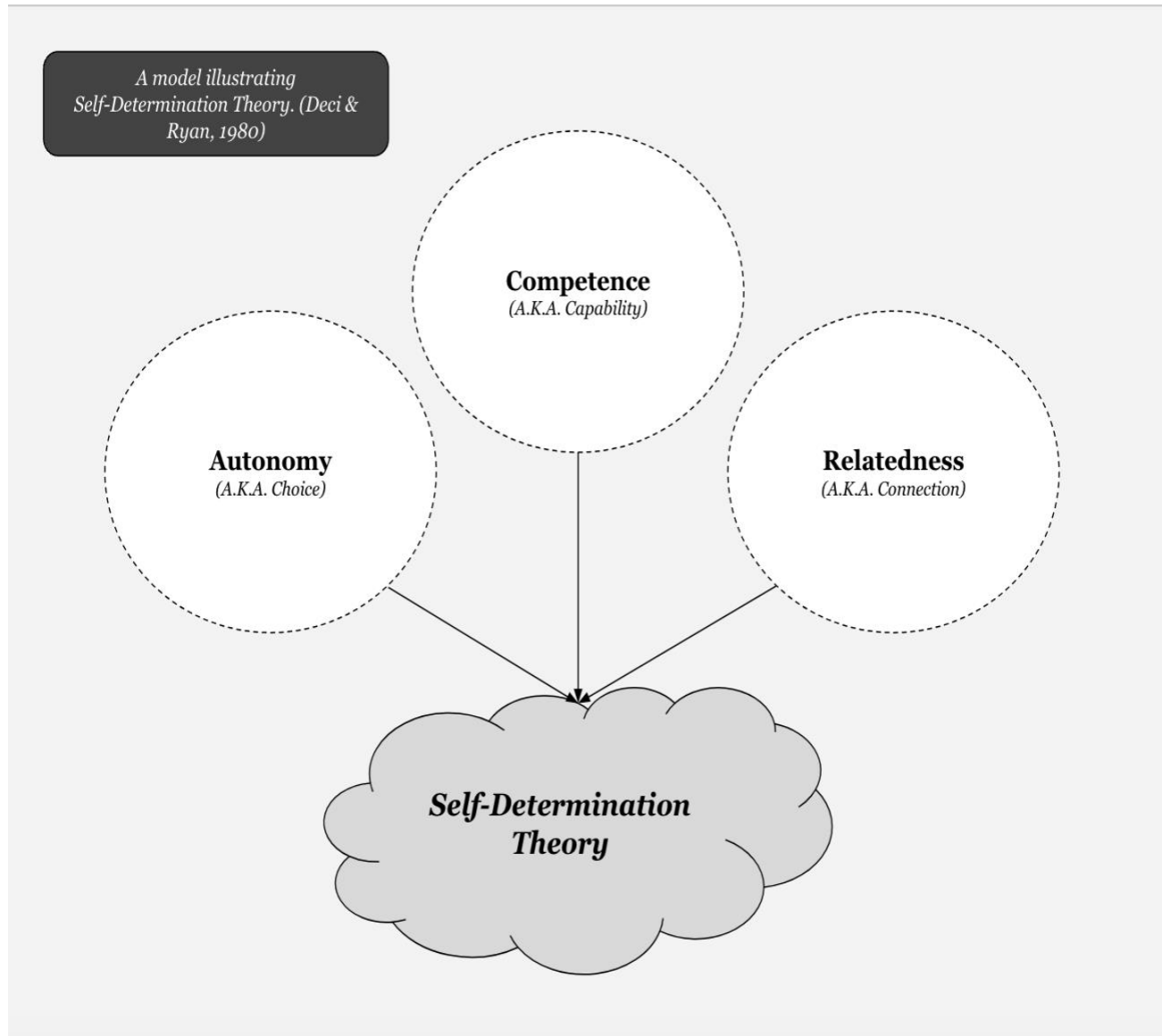
Autonomy. Autonomy reflects the need for self-direction and personal endorsement of their actions. In educational contexts, fostering autonomy means creating an environment where students can exercise choice and take ownership of their learning processes. As Reeve (2006) notes, autonomy-supportive teaching practices satisfy students' need for autonomy and significantly enhance engagement and intrinsic motivation. This perspective was supported by Noels, Clément, & Pelletier (1999), who found a positive correlation between students' perceptions of teachers' support of autonomy and their intrinsic motivation in language learning, specifically. However, this correlation is generalizable to other educational contexts as well.

Competence. Competence involves feeling effective and achieving desired outcomes within one's activities. The significance of developing students' competence is highlighted in the work of Moats (1994), which emphasizes the importance of equipping teachers with a deep understanding of language structure to effectively teach reading. This aligns with SDT's emphasis on providing challenges that match students' skill levels, thereby enhancing their sense of competence and intrinsic motivation to engage with the material.

Relatedness. Relatedness refers to the need for connection and belonging. Phillippo and Stone (2013) highlight the importance of teacher role breadth in supporting students. They show that by meeting students' need for relatedness, supportive teacher-student relationships can

positively influence academic and social outcomes. This is echoed in the findings of Hagenauer at al. (2015), who demonstrate the strong predictive relationship between positive teacher-student relationships and teachers' emotional experiences, thereby underscoring the importance of relatedness in educational settings. Teachers' emotional experiences are important to highlight because the overall well-being of the teacher also plays a role in creating a warm, caring, and open-minded learning environment (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 - A Model Illustrating Self-Determination Theory. (Deci & Ryan, 1980)



Self-Determination Theory in Educational Settings

The application of SDT principles within educational settings offers significant implications for both teaching and learning. Autonomy-supportive teaching practices, as detailed by Reeve (2006), emphasize the value of nurturing students' inner motivational resources, which is critical for achieving self-determined learning. Similarly, Estep and Roberts (2015) highlight the role of teacher immediacy and rapport in predicting student motivation and engagement,

illuminating how these relational dynamics serve to satisfy students' psychological needs, aligning nicely with SDT.

Furthermore, SDT's relevance extends to teacher education programs, which are instrumental in preparing elementary teacher candidates to meet the challenges of modern classrooms. Moats (1994) conducted a foundational study on teachers' knowledge of language structure, revealing that many educators lack the necessary understanding of phonology, morphology, and orthography to provide effective reading instruction. This gap in knowledge is particularly concerning because competence—one of the three core psychological needs in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980)—is essential for both teachers and students to feel capable and successful in their roles.

In the context of teacher preparation, Moats' (1994) findings underscore the necessity of explicit training in language structure to ensure that elementary educators develop the competence required to teach reading effectively. When teachers lack competence, they may experience reduced self-efficacy, which can, in turn, undermine their motivation and ability to foster literacy development in their students. Conversely, when teachers receive adequate training in linguistic concepts and structured literacy approaches, they gain confidence in their instructional strategies, ultimately enhancing their sense of self-determination in the classroom.

By incorporating Moats' (1994) findings into the discussion, this section highlights the direct link between teacher competence and self-determination, reinforcing the broader argument that teacher education programs must prioritize foundational knowledge in language structure. This not only supports teachers' motivation and instructional efficacy but also creates a ripple effect on student learning outcomes, as self-determined teachers are better equipped to foster autonomy-supportive learning environments.

Incorporating SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) within educational practices not only enhances the learning experience by addressing students' fundamental psychological needs but also prepares future educators to create motivating and supportive learning environments. By drawing on the extensive body of literature, including the critical insights of Deci and Ryan (1980), and studies like those by Phillippo and Stone (2013), Moats (1994), and Reeve (2006), this section highlights the transformative potential of SDT in fostering environments that encourage both students and teachers to thrive.

Key Claim #1: Relevance of SDT in Current Literacy Instruction Climate

SDT is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and engagement among elementary teacher candidates in the current literacy instruction climate. As literacy education continues to evolve (i.e., alignment with Science of Reading literature and mandates), the integration of SDT principles can help address the diverse needs of students and educators. By emphasizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness, SDT provides a framework for creating supportive and motivating learning environments that enhance the effectiveness of literacy instruction.

Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR)

The preceding section introduced and described the primary theoretical framework guiding this research: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1980). The following section builds on this concept by first exploring the critical role of teacher-student relationships (TSR) in general, followed by a more targeted exploration of the existing literature regarding TSR in higher education and their influence on the academic and personal development of students, particularly in teacher education programs.

TSR in General Context

Teacher-student relationships (TSR) are a foundational element of the educational experience, influencing numerous aspects of student development and achievement. Positive interpersonal relationships within the school context, including those between teachers and students are crucial for fostering a conducive learning environment (Martin & Dowson, 2009). This section explores the significance of TSR, drawing on key literature to highlight its impact on motivation, engagement, and academic success.

The curiosity surrounding this relational dynamic is not a new one, however there has been a renewed emphasis on this topic within more recent years. Emerging research finds that relationships between teachers and students significantly impact students' motivation, learning, and attitudes toward school (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). This research highlights the centrality of this topic to conceptualizing a more robust framework for high-quality instructional practices in virtually all contexts. Aligning quite nicely with the humanistic theoretical lens (Maslow, 1954; Noddings, 1988; & Roberts, 1977), positive TSRs provide emotional security for students, which is essential for effective learning and development (Collie & Martin, 2023). These relationships help create a supportive and nurturing environment that encourages students to take risks and engage more deeply in their learning activities, again across content and learning environment contexts.

Additionally, according to Pigford (2001), recognizing the importance of positive teacher-student relationships is the first step in planning effective strategies for classroom management and student engagement. Another way of looking at this would be to acknowledge that having a reservoir full of content knowledge to draw from in instruction is excellent. However, the effort of transferring this knowledge will be for naught if proper emphasis is not

first placed on establishing positive TSR. Central to these relationships is the concept of effective communication. Ahmad and Sahak (2009) emphasize that teachers who communicate effectively with their students can provide appropriate and helpful feedback, which is vital for maintaining successful relationships throughout the school year. This interaction not only enhances the academic experience but also supports the emotional well-being of students.

The quality of TSRs also influences teachers' perceptions and behaviors. Brekelmans et al. (2011) found that teacher perceptions of students' teachability strongly predict teacher trust, which is a critical component of a positive learning environment. In other words, this relational capacity has reciprocal benefits for students and teachers alike. Interestingly, these perceptions of teachers also appear to influence student perceptions. Teachers who perceive their role broadly, including the provision of emotional and social support, tend to be more supportive from the students' perspective. Phillippo and Stone (2013) suggest that teachers' perceptions of their role in providing comprehensive support correlate positively with students' perceptions of teacher support and academic press, highlighting the significant role TSRs play in educational outcomes.

Again, teacher-student relationships are not only beneficial for students but also for teachers. Collie and Martin (2023) discuss the link between teacher well-being and TSRs, noting that positive relationships with students contribute to teachers' emotional security and job satisfaction. This reciprocal relationship underscores the importance of fostering healthy interactions in the classroom to promote a positive educational climate for both students and teachers. Particularly within the context of this study, this information is essential to emphasize. When considering meeting the needs of elementary teacher candidates in pedagogical methods courses, this transfer of teacher well-being and positive perceptions of the field which they are entering will be essential as they forge TSRs in their own future classrooms.

In summary, the literature underscores the critical importance of teacher-student relationships in education. Positive TSRs are foundational for creating a supportive and engaging learning environment, enhancing both academic and personal development for students. As teachers navigate the complexities of their roles, understanding and fostering effective TSRs can lead to improved educational outcomes and a more fulfilling teaching experience.

TSR in Higher Education Context

The previous subsection highlighted the importance of positive TSR in the general educational context. This subsection will examine the significance of TSRs in higher education, with a particular focus on their impact within teacher education programs. It will present two key claims: first, that positive TSRs are fundamental for the academic and personal development of students, and second, that specific behaviors and interactions in TSRs are critical for fostering a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among elementary teacher candidates.

Key Claim #2: Positive TSR in Higher Education are Fundamental

Positive teacher-student relationships (TSR) in higher education are essential for fostering both academic success and personal development in students. Research indicates that supportive TSRs contribute to improved academic performance, higher levels of engagement, and increased motivation (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Estep & Roberts, 2015). In teacher education programs, these relationships are particularly crucial as they model effective teaching practices and help teacher candidates develop the skills and confidence necessary for their future careers. When teacher candidates experience positive relationships with their instructors, they are more likely to feel supported, understood, and valued, which enhances their overall learning experience and personal growth (Cornelius-White, 2007). Ultimately, this allows them to

experience the benefits of a positive TSR as a student, thus setting the stage for them to work to establish meaningful relationships with their future students.

Also worth noting is that supportive TSRs promote a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation, which is critical in higher education settings (Tinto, 1993). This sense of belonging is particularly significant in the context of higher education, where students often face the challenge of adjusting to new academic and social environments. Positive interactions with faculty can lead to increased student persistence and retention, as students who feel connected to their instructors are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their educational goals (Kuh & Hu, 2001). While this research addresses the general higher education student population, the statements can be generalized to the target population of this research endeavor: elementary teacher candidates.

It is also important to emphasize the effect that TSRs have on budding teacher candidates' identities as future educators. In other words, effective TSRs contribute to the development of professional identity and teaching efficacy among teacher candidates. Klassen and Tze (2014) found that teacher candidates who experience supportive relationships with their instructors are more likely to develop a strong sense of professional identity and feel confident in their teaching abilities. This development is crucial for future educators, as a strong professional identity and teaching efficacy are associated with greater job satisfaction and commitment to the teaching profession.

These positive TSRs are developed over the course of several interactions between faculty and students, both formal (in the classroom) and informal (outside of the classroom). Faculty who demonstrate care and concern for students positively impact students' motivation and academic self-concept. Komarraju et al. (2010) highlight that students who perceive their

instructors as caring and supportive are more likely to be motivated and have a positive academic self-concept, both inside and outside of the classroom. This perception of care and support is critical in fostering a positive learning environment where students feel valued and encouraged to achieve their academic potential. Additionally, Pascarella (1980) found significant positive associations between the extent and quality of student-faculty informal contact and various student outcomes, including educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, academic achievement, and personal development. He notes that students' satisfaction with college is positively associated with the frequency of informal, non-classroom contact with faculty members (Pascarella, 1980). Lamport (1993) also identified frequent and friendly interactions with faculty as determinants of increased cognitive ability and deeper awareness of personal identity and values. This knowledge is particularly important because it demonstrates that these simple, human interactions have the potential to profoundly impact the trajectory of a collegiate student's experience in college, as well as their perceptions of themselves and their abilities as a future professional.

Not only are these relationships forged by care and interaction, but also by attention and intention on the part of faculty members. Williams and Kooker (1955) emphasize that effective learning is not a passive process and that simply "pouring it in" is not the most promising means of teaching. They argue that teachers must understand where students are intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually to assess whether any change has occurred. To meet students where they are, faculty must first acclimate themselves to their student populations' unique needs, strengths, and background knowledge. Eng (2017) reinforces the necessity of understanding students' needs and levels, comparing it to knowing what customers need in marketing. He asserts, "Teaching starts by knowing your students" (p. 26) and that uncovering the wants and

needs of students is crucial for effective teaching. These insights underscore the importance of personalized interactions and getting to know students personally in fostering meaningful learning experiences.

There is also existing research which addresses the role of emotions and emotional quality within TSRs at the higher education level which are relevant to this research. Tormey (2021) for one, highlights the emotional quality of student-teacher relationships, noting that these relationships significantly influence students' perceptions of their educational experience and their academic performance. He advocates for educational institutions to prioritize the development of positive emotional relationships between students and teachers, as this can lead to improved learning outcomes and greater overall satisfaction (Tormey, 2021). Again, while this research is geared towards higher education in a broader context, this understanding can easily find application within teacher education more specifically.

In reviewing the existing literature on TSRs in higher education, one theme emerged time and again. It's essentially the idea that collegiate students do not simply enter classrooms as empty sponges, ready to absorb all necessary information and content to be successful. Darby and Lang (2019) discuss the importance of instructors going beyond content delivery to support student success. They argue that effective instructors embed support structures within their teaching to help students rise to challenges and persist. They also emphasize the impact of personal outreach and building a person-to-person connection to motivate and guide students (Darby & Lang, 2019). While it is no doubt true that collegiate instructors are responsible for bestowing a great deal of content knowledge and wisdom upon their pupils, the existing literature emphasizes a need for collegiate faculty to not lose sight of the connection students long for with their faculty members.

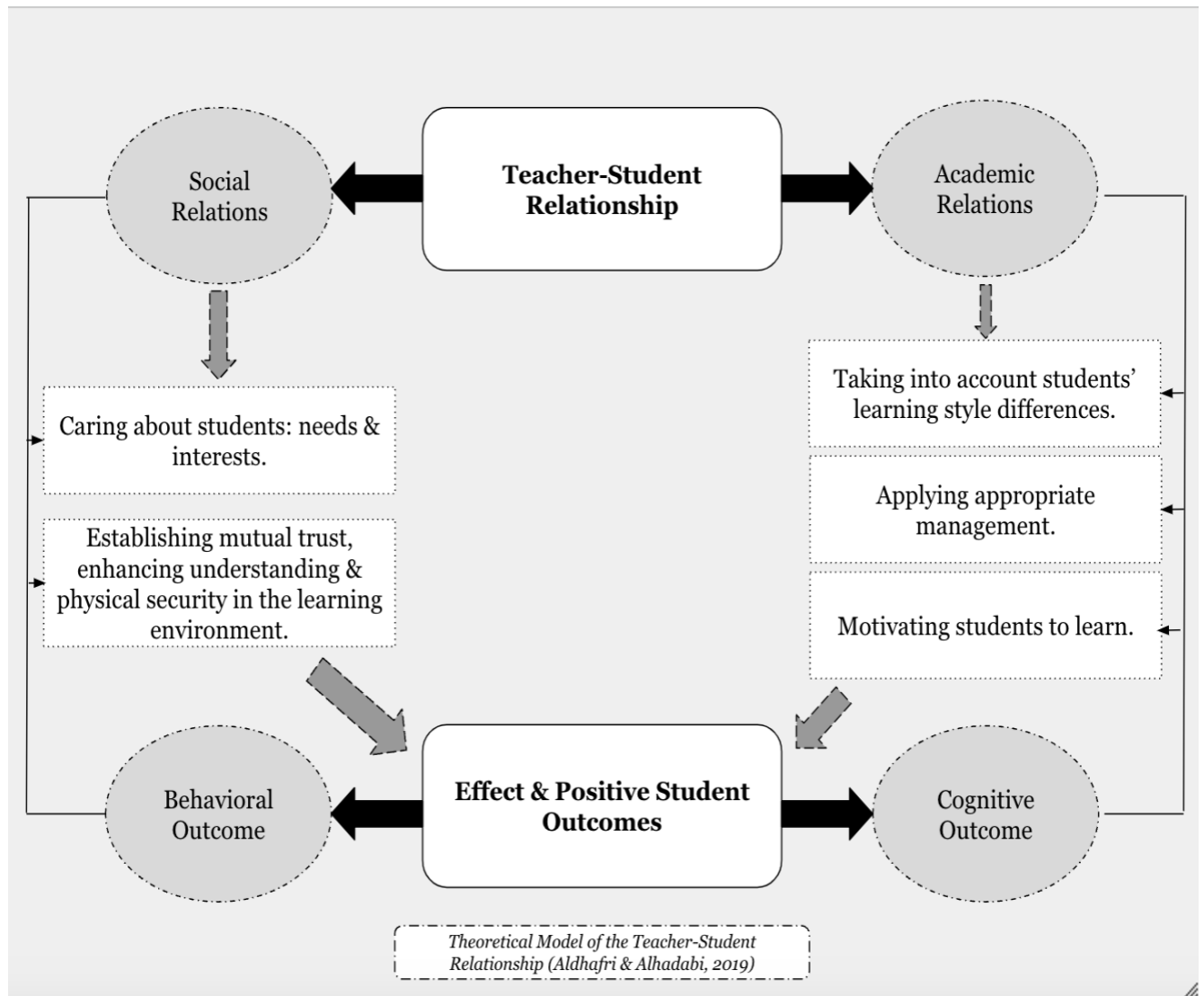
The idea of inclusivity in teaching practices has also gained a great deal of attention and steam in recent years, especially in higher education institutions. One author (Addy et al., 2021) focuses on inclusive teaching practices, stating that inclusive instructors view students as individuals with unique traits and experiences, which are vital to the learning environment. In other words, not only do we need to be aware of the uniqueness of our students; it's the idea that their uniqueness is an essential component of the modern collegiate classroom and should be valued as such. They argue that fostering a sense of social belonging in the classroom leads to increased motivation and improved academic performance (Addy et al., 2021). Additionally, they emphasize the importance of creating student-centered and caring communities that promote social belonging and deeper learning (Addy et al., 2021). At this point it is necessary to highlight that the importance of relatedness within the collegiate classroom cannot be understated. In line with Deci and Ryan's (1980) SDT, all these motivational factors must be acknowledged and honored to encourage and foster the sort of motivation necessary to be successful in life beyond college.

Felten and Lambert (2020) discuss the unmistakable impact of relationships in higher education, stating that peer-to-peer, student-faculty, and student-staff relationships are the foundation of learning, belonging, and achievement. Felten and Lambert (2020) note that meaningful interactions in the classroom are crucial for students to experience welcome and care, be inspired to learn, and build relationships. TSRs are also an integral piece of ensuring students find their path and purpose in college. Xerri et al. (2018) emphasize that teacher-student relationships and students' sense of purpose significantly influence their engagement in academic activities and their perceptions of workload. They argue that fostering positive teacher-student

relationships and clarifying students' sense of purpose are essential strategies for enhancing student engagement and success (Xerri et al., 2018).

Integrating these findings, Aldhafri and Alhadabi (2019) developed a Student-Teacher Relationship Measure (STRM) that highlights the academic and social dimensions of TSRs. Their model emphasizes the importance of both academic relations (AR) and social relations (SR) in fostering positive student outcomes (see Figure 2.2). Teachers establish positive AR by considering students' learning styles, applying appropriate management styles, and motivating students to learn. Positive SR is built through caring about students' needs and interests, establishing mutual trust, and promoting emotional and physical security in the learning environment. This model underscores that high-quality TSRs lead to effective and positive behavioral and cognitive student outcomes, supporting the critical role of TSRs in higher education settings.

Figure 2.2 - A Model Illustrating the Teacher-Student Relationship. (Aldhafri & Alhadabi, p. 4, 2019)



Characteristics and Behaviors of Strong TSR

Key Claim #3: Specific Behaviors TSR are Critical for Fostering SDT

Specific behaviors and interactions within TSRs play a vital role in fostering the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among elementary teacher candidates. For example, instructors who provide constructive feedback, offer choices in learning activities, and create a respectful and inclusive classroom environment can significantly enhance students' sense of autonomy and competence (Reeve, 2006). Additionally, interactions that

emphasize empathy, active listening, and personalized support help build a strong sense of relatedness, making students feel more connected and engaged (Wentzel, 1998).

Positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs) are characterized by specific behaviors and interactions that foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among students. These interactions are crucial for creating an environment where students feel supported, valued, and motivated to engage in the learning process. This subsection highlights key characteristics and behaviors within TSRs and their impact on students, drawing from existing literature.

Klem and Connell (2004) emphasize that students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment with high, clear, and fair expectations are more likely to report engagement in school. This finding underscores the importance of a structured yet supportive classroom environment in fostering student engagement and academic success. The perception of care and support from teachers is critical in encouraging students to actively participate in their learning journey, again aligning well with the theoretical implications from Noddings (1988) theory of care in the classroom. Cooper and Miness (2014) confirm that caring relationships between teachers and students, where teachers understand students as both people and learners, are highly valued by students. The concept of "caring as relation" emphasizes the importance of teachers' understanding and empathy in building strong, supportive relationships that positively impact students' academic and personal development.

Respectful treatment within the classroom is another essential component of positive TSRs. Clemente (2018) found that respectful treatment by teachers led to higher perceptions of teacher competence and fairness, increased students' intentions to improve interpersonal skills and communicate effectively with their professors and reduced negative responses from students.

This highlights the significant role of respect in establishing a positive and productive classroom atmosphere.

There is also existing literature which aligns quite well with Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs Model, which expresses three different tiers of needs that need to be met in order for students to reach the level of self-actualization; and in the case of this research study, the level of self-actualization is feeling prepared to meet the demands of the teaching profession. Tracey and Morrow (2017) for example, summarize the characteristics of high-quality TSRs, noting that these relationships are marked by students' sense that teachers understand and care about them as individuals, support and respect them, and provide a physically and emotionally safe environment. This comprehensive view of TSRs highlights the multifaceted nature of these relationships and their critical role in fostering student success.

It is also important to highlight the role that teachers' perceptions of their students can and do impact the classroom environment. Interviews with teachers conducted by Wilkins (2014) reveal that teachers prefer students who try hard in class, have a sense of humor, are respectful, and communicate with teachers. These findings suggest that *mutual* respect, effort, and open communication are key characteristics of effective TSRs. Teachers' preferences for these behaviors highlight the reciprocal nature of positive relationships in the classroom. And while this study explicitly illuminates teacher perceptions in the classroom environment, the implied relevancy of the study is that these perceptions can impact teachers' demeanors, which impact classroom environments, which in turn impacts the way students feel about being in those classrooms.

Recent research has gone so far as to identify key TSR characteristics that lead to positive student outcomes. Tormey (2021) describes positive student-teacher relationships as being

characterized by mutual respect, compassion, and trust. These attributes are essential for creating a learning environment where students feel safe and supported, and where teachers can effectively engage with their students. Tracey and Morrow (2017) add to this conversation by summarizing the characteristics of high-quality TSRs, as being marked by students' sense that teachers understand and care about them as individuals, support and respect them, and provide a physically and emotionally safe environment. This comprehensive view of TSRs highlights the multifaceted nature of these relationships and their critical role in fostering student success.

The literature consistently emphasizes the importance of specific behaviors and interactions in TSRs, such as creating a caring and structured environment, demonstrating respect and understanding, and building mutual trust and compassion. These characteristics are crucial for fostering a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among students, which are essential components of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980). By understanding and implementing these behaviors, educators can create supportive and engaging learning environments that promote both academic and personal growth for their students.

By integrating the insights from the provided literature, the effectiveness of TSR in higher education is seen as contingent upon a balanced approach that addresses both the affective and cognitive domains of student development. The research serves as a testament to the profound influence of teacher behaviors across these dimensions. Thus, reiterating the necessity for educators to cultivate positive and supportive relationships with their students, underpinned by an understanding of the complex, historical, and motivational factors that influence TSR.

The exploration of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) reveals their profound impact on both academic success and personal development, particularly within higher education and teacher education programs. Positive TSRs are instrumental in creating supportive, engaging,

and motivating learning environments. The literature underscores that specific behaviors and interactions—such as providing constructive feedback, fostering autonomy-supportive teaching practices, demonstrating empathy, and building mutual respect—are crucial for meeting students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These relationships are not only foundational for students' academic performance and motivation but also play a pivotal role in shaping their professional identity and teaching efficacy.

Integrating emotional and instructional support within TSRs highlights the necessity for educators to adopt a holistic approach that addresses both the affective and cognitive domains of student development. Historical perspectives and contemporary research converge to emphasize that meaningful interactions between teachers and students significantly enhance students' educational experiences and outcomes. By cultivating positive and supportive TSRs, educators can create an environment that fosters student engagement, persistence, and overall well-being, ultimately preparing them for success in their future careers.

This comprehensive examination of TSRs provides a robust framework for understanding their critical role in promoting effective and enriching educational experiences. The insights drawn from this exploration will inform the next section, which examines the integration of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) with TSRs, emphasizing how these combined principles can enhance the self-determination of teacher candidates. By examining the intersection of SDT and TSRs, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how supportive educational environments can be created to foster the professional growth and intrinsic motivation of future educators.

Gaps in Literature

Having explored the significance of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in higher education and identified the key behaviors and characteristics that foster positive interactions, it is imperative to acknowledge the gaps in the current body of literature. While substantial research highlights the general importance of TSRs, several areas remain underexplored, particularly within the context of teacher education programs. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of how TSRs can be leveraged to enhance the self-determination and professional growth of teacher candidates. This section will delineate these research gaps, focusing on the need for more targeted studies in teacher education, the integration of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) with TSRs, the practical implementation of theoretical findings, and the impact of TSRs on teacher well-being. By identifying and addressing these gaps, future research can provide valuable insights and actionable strategies to improve the effectiveness of teacher education programs.

Insufficient Focus on Teacher Education Programs

While there is substantial research on teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in general higher education contexts, there is a relative lack of studies specifically focused on TSRs within teacher education programs. Teacher education programs play a unique and critical role in shaping future educators by modeling effective teaching practices and providing experiences that build professional identity and teaching efficacy. Given this unique context, it is essential to understand how TSRs influence the development of teacher candidates' professional identities, teaching efficacy, and instructional practices.

Current literature often generalizes findings from broader higher education contexts, which may not fully capture the specific needs and dynamics present in teacher education

programs. Therefore, more targeted research is needed to explore how TSRs impact the professional growth and preparedness of future teachers, ensuring that they are well-equipped to foster positive relationships with their own students.

Limited Integration of SDT with TSRs

Although Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been widely applied to various educational settings, its specific application to TSRs within teacher education programs remains underexplored. SDT emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster intrinsic motivation and well-being. Research that explicitly integrates SDT principles with TSRs can provide deeper insights into how these relationships foster intrinsic motivation and professional growth among teacher candidates.

Understanding how TSRs can support teacher candidates' autonomy by providing choice and agency, competence by offering constructive feedback and skill development, and relatedness by creating a sense of belonging and support, is crucial. This integration can help in developing strategies that enhance teacher candidates' motivation and commitment to the teaching profession. More research is needed to explore these connections and to understand how SDT can be applied to strengthen TSRs in teacher education programs.

Practical Implementation of Findings

There is a gap in the literature regarding the practical application of research findings on TSRs and SDT in teacher education programs. While theoretical insights and empirical evidence highlight the importance of positive TSRs and the benefits of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), there is limited research on how these findings can be translated into actionable strategies and interventions.

Educators and institutions need practical guidelines and tools to implement these insights effectively. This includes developing training programs for teacher educators on how to foster positive TSRs, designing curriculum and instructional practices that integrate SDT principles, and creating supportive institutional policies that promote the well-being and professional growth of teacher candidates. More studies are needed to test and refine these practical applications, ensuring that they are effective in real-world educational settings and that they can be scaled and sustained over time.

Teacher Well-Being and TSRs

While some research has explored the impact of TSRs on student outcomes, there is less emphasis on how these relationships affect teachers' well-being and professional satisfaction. Teacher well-being is a critical component of a successful educational environment, as teachers who are satisfied and motivated are more likely to create positive and supportive learning experiences for their students (Spilt et al., 2011). Understanding the reciprocal nature of TSRs and their impact on both teachers and students can provide a more holistic view of these relationships.

Research should explore how positive TSRs contribute to teachers' sense of professional fulfillment, reduce burnout, and enhance their overall job satisfaction. Additionally, investigating how institutional support and professional development can help teachers build and maintain positive relationships with their students is essential. This focus on teacher well-being can inform policies and practices that support both teachers and students, creating a more nurturing and effective educational environment.

Addressing these gaps in the literature is crucial for advancing our understanding of TSRs within teacher education programs and their impact on both teacher candidates and

educators. By focusing on the specific context of teacher education programs, integrating SDT principles, exploring practical applications, and considering teacher well-being, future research can provide valuable insights and practical solutions that enhance the quality of teacher education and support the professional growth and intrinsic motivation of future educators. This comprehensive approach will ensure that teacher education programs are equipped to prepare highly motivated, competent, and well-supported teachers who can foster positive relationships with their own students, ultimately contributing to the overall improvement of educational outcomes.

Conclusion

This literature review has provided a comprehensive exploration of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) within the context of higher education, focusing particularly on teacher education programs and the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). By examining the historical progression of literacy education trends, the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, and the specific characteristics and behaviors that define effective TSRs, this review has highlighted the critical role these relationships play in fostering academic success and personal development among teacher candidates. Throughout this review, three key claims have been emphasized:

- 1. SDT is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and engagement among elementary teacher candidates, highlighting the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.*

SDT provides a robust framework for understanding how fulfilling basic psychological needs can enhance motivation and well-being. The application of SDT in educational settings, particularly in teacher education programs, emphasizes creating environments that support

autonomy, competence, and relatedness, ultimately leading to more engaged and motivated teacher candidates.

- 2. Positive teacher-student relationships in higher education are fundamental for the academic and personal development of students, emphasizing trust, respect, communication, and support.*

Research indicates that supportive TSRs contribute significantly to improved academic performance, higher levels of engagement, and increased motivation. In teacher education programs, these relationships model effective teaching practices and help teacher candidates develop the skills and confidence necessary for their future careers.

- 3. Specific behaviors and interactions in teacher-student relationships are critical for promoting a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, detailing how mentorship, availability, responsiveness, and constructive feedback play pivotal roles.*

Effective TSRs are characterized by specific behaviors such as providing constructive feedback, offering choices in learning activities, creating a respectful and inclusive classroom environment, and demonstrating empathy and active listening. These interactions help build strong connections, making students feel more connected and engaged.

Despite the substantial body of research on TSRs in general higher education contexts, significant gaps remain in the literature specifically focused on teacher education programs. This review has identified the need for more targeted studies that explore how TSRs influence the development of teacher candidates' professional identities and instructional practices.

Additionally, there is a lack of research explicitly integrating SDT principles with TSRs in these programs, highlighting the need for future studies to address this gap.

Furthermore, the practical implementation of theoretical findings and the impact of TSRs on teacher well-being are underexplored areas. Educators and institutions need actionable strategies to foster positive TSRs and support teacher candidates' self-determination. Understanding the reciprocal nature of TSRs and their impact on both teachers and students is essential for creating a more holistic view of these relationships.

In conclusion, this literature review provides a robust framework for understanding the critical role of TSRs in promoting effective and enriching educational experiences. The insights drawn from this exploration will inform the next chapter, which explains the methodology of this study. By examining the intersection of SDT and TSRs, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how supportive educational environments can be created to foster the professional growth and intrinsic motivation of future educators. The methodology chapter will outline the research design, data collection methods, and analysis strategies employed in this study, setting the stage for a comprehensive investigation into the impact of TSRs on teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methods employed to investigate the impact of university teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. Building on the review of literature provided in Chapter 2, this study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to explore how these relationships foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among elementary teacher candidates. The theoretical foundation of this study is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1980). It has also been crafted to address the three key claims outlined in the previous chapter.

To review, those three key claims are:

- 1. SDT is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and engagement among elementary teacher candidates, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.*
- 2. Positive teacher-student relationships in higher education are fundamental for the academic and personal development of students, underscoring the significance of trust, respect, communication, and support.*
- 3. Specific behaviors and interactions in teacher-student relationships are critical for promoting a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, detailing how mentorship, availability, responsiveness, and constructive feedback play pivotal roles.*

By outlining and synthesizing relevant literature, Chapter 2 identified the need for more targeted studies on TSR within teacher education programs and the integration of SDT principles to enhance teacher candidates' motivation and professional growth.

Purpose and Structure of Methodology Chapter

The central research question and supporting sub-questions guiding this study are as follows:

R1: How do university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses?

R1(a): What specific behaviors and interactions characterize positive teacher-student relationships in this context?

R1(b): How do university teacher-student relationships foster a sense of autonomy, influence elementary teacher candidates' perceptions of competence, and affect their overall self-determination in reading methods courses?

This methodology chapter is structured to provide a detailed account of the research design, setting, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures employed by this study. By employing mixed-methods, this study aims to capture the nuanced experiences of elementary teacher candidates and the role of university teacher-student relationships in shaping their motivation and professional development, specifically within the context of reading methods coursework. This chapter also addresses the ethical considerations and limitations of the study, ensuring a comprehensive and transparent approach to the research process.

Research Design

In this section, I outline the mixed-methods research design chosen for this study and provide a rationale for its selection. As Butin (2010) suggests, a research method is a tool to help answer research questions, and this chapter will detail how this mixed-methods approach will effectively address the research questions posed in this study.

Mixed-Methods Research Design

Mixed-methods research is particularly well-suited to exploring the complexities of teacher-student relationships and their impact on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination. On the one hand, quantitative data provides more concrete evidence to be used in addressing research questions. For this study, survey research was conducted followed by descriptive and correlation data analysis.

On the other hand, the second step of data collection was to conduct a series of individual interviews with willing participants who participated in the first step of data collection; these interviews provide qualitative insights. Qualitative research focuses on words and stories, addressing the "how" and "why" questions that are central to understanding social phenomena (Butin, 2010). As such, a qualitative approach allowed for data gathering which thoroughly captured nuanced opinions and perspectives of participants that may not initially be visible or obvious. Qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, interpreting phenomena and experiences in terms of the meanings that people bring to them (Bloomberg, 2023). Incorporating a qualitative data collection element to this study allowed the researcher to do just this: study phenomena (teacher-student relationships) experienced by people (students).

Additionally, it is worth noting that this study was grounded in a constructivist philosophical position, which is concerned with how the complexities of the social and cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood within a particular context and at a particular point in time (Bloomberg, 2023). In other words, utilizing a mixed-methods research approach within a constructivist paradigm allowed for an infusion of rich context and experience into the data collection process, which then contributed a more robust analysis of the data, honoring the lived experiences and realities of its participants.

Key Characteristics of Quantitative Research

According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), quantitative research is characterized by several key features:

- Research questions are designed to test specific hypotheses, focusing on measurable variables and their relationships. This structured approach allows for the identification of trends, patterns, and correlations among the data.
- Sample selection is typically conducted through probability sampling methods to ensure that the sample is representative of the population, or in this case, a purposive sample with characteristics aligning with the research focus. The sample size is determined to ensure sufficient power for statistical testing.
- Data collection methods are standardized, with surveys or instruments used to gather data in numerical form. This allows for the objective measurement and analysis of participant responses, often using rating scales or closed-ended questions.
- Analysis is driven by statistical procedures, including descriptive and inferential statistics, which quantify relationships between variables. Common analyses in educational research include correlation, regression, and reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha).
- Objectivity is prioritized, as the researcher seeks to minimize bias and ensure that findings are derived from empirical evidence. The goal is to produce replicable and generalizable results that can inform practice or policy.
- Reliability and validity are critical. Measures such as Cronbach's alpha are used to assess internal consistency, ensuring that the survey items reliably measure the intended constructs (e.g., autonomy, competence, relatedness). Additionally, statistical tests are

applied to ensure the validity of the results, demonstrating that the findings are not due to chance.

Rationale for Quantitative Research Methods

The choice to incorporate quantitative research methods into this study was driven by several factors. First, quantitative research allowed for the objective measurement of variables central to understanding the dynamics of teacher-student relationships. This study aimed to quantify participants' perceptions of teacher behaviors, autonomy, competence, and relatedness—key constructs of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

Second, the use of standardized survey instruments facilitated efficient data collection from a relatively large sample, enabling the exploration of trends and patterns that might not be readily observable through qualitative methods alone. These instruments allowed for the collection of data that was analyzed statistically, providing clear, quantifiable insights into the impact of teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination.

Quantitative research also offered the ability to test hypotheses about the relationships between variables, such as whether students' perceptions of teacher behaviors correlate with their self-perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This hypothesis-driven approach aligns with the study's goals of exploring the predictive power of teacher-student relationships on self-determination outcomes in educational contexts.

Finally, the statistical rigor offered by quantitative methods adds credibility to the study's findings, as the use of techniques such as Pearson correlations and descriptive statistics enabled the identification of significant relationships and general trends across the participant pool. This approach was particularly relevant when examining the extent to which teacher-student

interactions can predict or influence the self-determination of teacher candidates, contributing to broader educational discussions on best practices in teacher education.

Key Characteristics of Qualitative Research

According to Bloomberg (2023) qualitative research is characterized by several key features:

- Research questions are open-ended, allowing for a deeper exploration of the participants' experiences.
- Sample selection is purposeful, ensuring that participants are chosen based on their relevance to the research questions.
- Findings are authentically described from the perspective of the research participants, providing a "thick description" of their experiences.
- The research is multifaceted, involving multiple intersecting components.
- Trustworthiness is addressed through triangulation, ensuring credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Methods

The choice to use qualitative research methods for this study was driven by several factors. First, qualitative research facilitates an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, enabling the collection of rich, context-specific data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was particularly useful for exploring the nuanced dynamics of teacher-student relationships, as it allows participants to share their lived experiences and reflect on their perceptions in an authentic manner. By grounding the data in real-world interactions, qualitative methods offered insight into how these relationships impact

elementary teacher candidates' self-determination, especially within the context of reading methods coursework (Bloomberg, 2023).

Second, the constructivist paradigm underpinning this study aligned with its research goals. As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), social constructivism challenges the assumption that reality is objective and can be easily reduced to its component parts. Instead, it emphasizes that reality is socially constructed, and individuals develop subjective meanings based on their interactions with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is particularly suited to understanding social phenomena such as teacher-student relationships, where meanings and experiences can vary widely based on context (Vygotsky, 1978).

Constructivist researchers often focus on the process of interaction among individuals, recognizing that social and cultural contexts shape how people interpret their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This focus on context and interaction was critical for this study, which aimed to understand how university teacher-student relationships foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among elementary teacher candidates. Stake (1995) also notes that constructivist qualitative research is particularly useful when exploring complex, multifaceted phenomena like teacher-student interactions, which involve a mix of cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions.

Moreover, reflexivity is a key component of constructivist research, as researchers acknowledge that their own cultural, social, and historical backgrounds shape how they interpret the data (Berger, 2015). Recognizing this, the researcher positions themselves within the research, acknowledging their influence on the data collection and analysis process. This reflexivity is essential for maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the findings, ensuring that

the data accurately reflects participants' experiences without undue bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By employing a constructivist perspective, this study provides a comprehensive and context-specific analysis of how teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination. The qualitative design allowed for the exploration of complex relationships, offering valuable insights into how these dynamics foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among teacher candidates (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

Case Study Design Overview and Rationale

This study employed a case study design, which involved an in-depth examination from multiple viewpoints of the richness and complexity of a specific, bounded social phenomenon (Bloomberg, 2023; Yin, 2018). The objective of this approach is to develop a deep understanding and generate insights that can inform professional practices, policy development, and social or community actions (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam, 2009). This design was particularly appropriate for addressing the research questions of this study, which focused on understanding the impact of university teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses.

Case study research is an effective method when the researcher seeks to explore “how” or “why” questions (Yin, 2018), as this study does by investigating the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their influence on motivation and professional growth. Bloomberg (2023) emphasizes that case studies allow for detailed, contextually grounded insights, making them particularly suitable for educational research. Stake (1995) also highlights that case studies provide an opportunity to focus on a specific context and investigate multiple variables in depth.

Case studies can be classified as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. Exploratory case studies investigate situations where the outcomes of the intervention are not clearly defined, while descriptive case studies provide detailed descriptions of the phenomenon and its real-life context (Bloomberg, 2023; Yin, 2018; Merriam, 2009). This study used an exploratory case study approach to dive into the complex and multifaceted nature of teacher-student relationships and their influence on teacher candidates' motivation and professional growth.

Furthermore, case studies can be categorized as intrinsic or instrumental. An intrinsic case study aims to gain a better understanding of a unique case, while an instrumental case study is used to gain insights into an issue or refine a theory (Stake, 1995; Bloomberg, 2023). Given the objectives of this study, an instrumental case study design was selected to enhance understanding of the broader issue of self-determination in teacher education and to refine the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in this context (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

It is also important to note that the goal of case study research is not generalizability but transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bloomberg, 2023). This means that the insights and knowledge gained can be applied to similar contexts and settings, rather than being universally generalizable (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam, 2009). This aligns with the goals of this study, which sought to provide insights applicable to similar educational settings, thereby informing teacher education practices and policies more broadly.

To ensure rigor in case study research, careful attention is paid to distinguishing the phenomenon being studied from its context (Yin, 2018; Bloomberg, 2023). Merriam (2009) stresses the importance of gathering comprehensive and triangulated evidence, ensuring that all relevant data sources are included and alternative explanations considered. As Bloomberg (2023) emphasizes, case studies should involve exhaustive efforts to gather all relevant evidence,

including considering alternative perspectives and rival explanations. This study incorporated different perspectives by exploring alternatives that challenge the initial assumptions, and by presenting diverse cultural views, theories, and variations among research participants. This comprehensive approach ensured a nuanced understanding of teacher-student relationships and their impact on self-determination.

The case study design was selected for this research due to its suitability for exploring complex social phenomena in depth (Stake, 1995; Bloomberg, 2023). By employing an instrumental and exploratory case study approach, this study aimed to generate rich, transferable insights into the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their influence on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination, thereby contributing valuable knowledge to the field of teacher education.

Research Setting and Participants

Description of the Research Site

This study was conducted at a single, public higher education institution within the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) system. The research site included all three campus locations of the institution: the main campus and two satellite campuses. These campuses collectively provided a diverse and comprehensive setting for exploring the dynamics of teacher-student relationships. The participants were elementary teacher candidates actively enrolled in the KBOR mandated course titled "The Science of Reading II," which, in the case of this regent institution, is taken during the junior year of their degree program. This setting offered a rich context for examining the influence of teacher-student relationships on self-determination in a structured and consistent educational environment. It also provided clear boundaries for which the case study research design was employed.

Participant Selection Criteria

Participants in this study were elementary teacher candidates enrolled in "The Science of Reading II" course across the main and distance campuses of the KBOR institution. In total, there were 55 students qualified to participate in this study. The selection criteria for participants were designed to ensure that the study included individuals who were directly engaged in the educational experiences being examined.

Inclusion Criteria

- Enrolled in "The Science of Reading II" course at any of the three campus sites.
- Junior year status in the elementary education program.
- Willing and able to participate in either a web-based survey and/or semi-structured interviews and provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

- Not enrolled in "The Science of Reading II" course.
- Not in the junior year of the elementary education program.
- Unwilling or unable to participate in the study or provide informed consent.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals who have specific characteristics or experiences that are relevant to the research questions (Patton, 2015). In this case, participants were chosen based on their status as elementary teacher candidates and their enrollment in "The Science of Reading II" course, as well as their experiences with university teacher-student relationships.

Demographic Information of Participants

There are demographic pieces of information regarding the participants that are known prior to collecting any data. This included the knowledge that students had reached junior status in their undergraduate degree program. It also included the knowledge that for students to have reached that point in their studies, they had achieved at least a 2.75 cumulative grade point average of all the collegiate coursework up to that point.

In summary, the research setting included a single higher education institution within the Kansas Board of Regents system, focusing on elementary teacher candidates enrolled in "The Science of Reading II" course across the main campus and two distance sites. The use of purposive sampling ensured that the participants selected had relevant experiences and characteristics that aligned with the research objectives.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection for this study involved a two-step process utilizing qualitative research methods to comprehensively explore the research questions. The first step involved a digital web-based survey, and the second step included semi-structured interviews with selected participants.

Instrument #1: Digital Web-Based Survey

The first instrument utilized in data collection is a digital web-based survey consisting of 21 closed-ended questions designed to capture the perspectives of elementary teacher candidates on their relationships with university instructors in the "The Science of Reading II" course. "A closed-ended question format should be used when surveyors want respondents to provide an answer after considering or evaluating a specified set of answer choices" (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 112). As such, the survey was designed in a closed-ended question format to gain efficient data pertaining to the research questions prior to engaging the second step in data collection: the

interviews. By conducting a closed-ended question format survey in step one, this allowed for survey responses to guide the flow of interviews in step two.

Additionally, there were several recommendations and guidelines regarding the development of survey items that were considered during the development of this survey tool. The following guidelines set forth by Dillman et al. (2014) informed the creation of the survey items:

- Ensure that the prompt is asking only one question at a time.
- Usage of simple and familiar words in the construction of survey items.
- Creation of survey items utilizing complete sentences, posed as questions.
- Usage of forced-response items rather than select all that apply.
- Scale lengths chosen for appropriateness to research participants.

There has been a great deal of debate in survey research over the past several decades regarding the use of neutrality midpoint response options in Likert scale-based questions. However, according to Dillman et al., (2024), “The literature suggests that whether one offers a midpoint has little effect on the resulting data quality and conclusions drawn from the data (p. 154). Because of this recommendation, this survey tool has been created to utilize a neutrality midpoint response option on any survey item which is applicable. The survey was designed and distributed via the Qualtrics platform. The survey items were developed to align with the research questions have been organized into a table of specifications (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 - Survey Table of Specifications

Research Question	Survey Item Number	Topic
R1(a)	1-6	Specific behaviors and interactions (e.g., approachability, feedback)

R1(b)	7-11	Autonomy (e.g., choice in assignments, confidence)
R1(b)	12-15	Competence (e.g., ability to succeed, helpful feedback)
R1(b)	16-21	Relatedness (e.g., feeling of connection, support)

The survey was designed to be both efficient and targeted to the sample population, while addressing the research questions. Completion of the survey was expected to take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and was administered online (via Qualtrics) to ensure ease of access and convenience for participants. A complete list of the survey items is detailed in Appendix A.

The survey used a Likert-type scale for each item, ranging from 1 (i.e., Very unapproachable) to 7 (i.e., Very approachable). This coding scheme allowed for subsequent statistical analysis of the relationships between students' perceptions of teacher behaviors/interactions and their self-perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Survey items are grouped into the following categories:

- Specific Behaviors and Interactions (e.g., approachability, feedback)
- Autonomy (e.g., choice in assignments, confidence)
- Competence (e.g., ability to succeed, helpful feedback)
- Relatedness (e.g., feeling of connection, support)

The quantitative coding system was used to convert survey responses into numerical data for statistical analysis. The scale for coding responses is as follows, using the example category of instructor approachability:

- 7 = Very approachable
- 6 = Approachable
- 5 = Slightly approachable

- 4 = Neither approachable nor unapproachable
- 3 = Slightly unapproachable
- 2 = Unapproachable
- 1 = Very unapproachable

Statistical Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data collected from the survey, several statistical techniques were employed using SPSS software:

1. Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of each subscale (Specific Behaviors and Interactions, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness). Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) suggest that an alpha value of 0.70 or higher is acceptable for ensuring the reliability of survey items. This analysis offers confirmation as to whether the items on each subscale reliably measured their intended construct.

2. Descriptive Statistics (Means and Standard Deviations)

Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were computed for each subscale. This provided an overall understanding of participants' average ratings on each dimension of teacher-student relationships and the variability in their responses.

3. Pearson Correlations

Pearson r correlations were used to examine the relationships between the scale mean of Specific Behaviors and Interactions and the scale means of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness. The correlations tested the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of autonomy.

- **H2:** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of competence.
- **H3:** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of relatedness.

A *p-value* of 0.05 or lower was used to determine statistical significance, and a correlation coefficient ($r = 0.30$) or higher was considered meaningful. This threshold was selected based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, which define correlations of $r = 0.10$ as small, $r = 0.30$ as moderate, and $r = 0.50$ as large. A moderate correlation suggests a meaningful relationship while accounting for the complexity of human perceptions and behaviors in educational settings.

The survey aimed to gather quantitative data on various aspects of teacher-student relationships, including approachability, feedback, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While the survey employed closed-ended questions, it serves as an instrument to identify themes and patterns that were further explored in the subsequent interviews.

Pilot Study of Survey Items

Prior to the main study, the survey items were piloted with a small group of four students from a previous cohort. This pilot study aimed to receive preliminary feedback on the survey design, ease of use, readability, and clarity. According to Dillman et al. (2014), pilot testing is a crucial step in survey research as it helps refine the survey items to ensure they are clear and user-friendly. The feedback obtained from the pilot study was used to improve the survey, aligning it with best practices in survey design.

Instrument #2: Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide

The second data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview question guide. These interviews were conducted with students from the survey response pool who expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview to provide a more personal, in-depth lens from which to view the data. These interviews aimed to provide deeper insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives, allowing for a richer understanding of the qualitative aspects of teacher-student relationships.

A qualitative interview question guide is a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses from participants about their experiences, perceptions, and meanings. This guide served as a framework to ensure that all relevant topics are covered while allowing the flexibility to explore emerging themes. As Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend, the construction of this guide began with a clear understanding of the research objectives and overarching research questions, guiding the development of specific interview questions to align with the study's aims.

Additionally, the questions were formulated to be open-ended, encouraging participants to share detailed and rich descriptions. Open-ended questions help avoid limiting responses and enable participants to express their thoughts in their own words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to the main questions, the guide included probing and follow-up questions to dig deeper into specific areas of interest. These probes were used to clarify responses, explore nuances, and encourage elaboration (Patton, 2015).

To facilitate a natural flow of conversation, questions were arranged in a logical order. Typically, interviews start with broad questions to build rapport and gradually move to more specific topics. This sequencing helps participants feel comfortable and encourages a thorough

exploration of the research topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). While the guide provided a structured framework, it remained flexible to adapt to the flow of the conversation. The research could adjust questions or explore new topics that arose during the interview, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participant's perspective(s) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This balance between structure and flexibility is crucial in qualitative research to capture the depth and complexity of participants' experiences.

The interview questions were designed to explore specific themes identified in the survey and to gather detailed narratives about the participants' interactions with their instructors within the context of reading methods coursework. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data collection. The complete interview question guide is provided in Appendix B.

Interview Question Guide Overview

The interview questions were crafted to address the overall impact of teacher-student relationships on self-determination in reading methods courses, focusing on support, mentorship, communication, feedback, and the influence on learning and application. The questions also explored how these relationships foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which align with the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) theoretical framework.

Table 3.2 - Interview Question Guide Table of Specifications

Research Question	Interview Question Number	Topic
R1	1-14	Overall impact on self-determination: support, mentorship, communication, feedback, learning application, motivation, decision-making, overcoming challenges, attitudes toward instruction, encouragement to innovate, reflective practices, confidence, preparedness, suggestions for improvement

R1(a)	1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11	Specific positive interactions: support, mentorship, effective communication, helpful feedback, influence on learning, encouragement to innovate, reflective practices
R1(b)	6, 7, 8, 12, 13	Autonomy, competence, and self-determination: motivation, decision-making, overcoming challenges, confidence, preparedness

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection for this study involved a systematic approach using two main instruments: a digital web-based survey and semi-structured interviews. This section outlines the procedures used in administering these instruments to ensure consistency and reliability in data collection.

Step 1: Digital Web-Based Survey

Participant Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited from elementary teacher candidates enrolled in the "The Science of Reading II" course. To build trust with potential participants and facilitate recruitment, the researcher shared information about herself and her study with each of the Science of Reading II courses at all three campus sites. This engagement aimed to establish a rapport with the students, making them more likely to participate in the study.

Following this initial contact, an invitation announcement (see Appendix E) was shared with the potential participants via Canvas (the university’s LMS). This announcement clearly explained the purpose of the study, detailed the nature of their involvement, and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses. To further encourage participation, students were asked to complete the survey at the beginning of a class session. This approach leveraged their familiarity with completing end-of-course surveys during class time, thus integrating the study seamlessly into their routine and motivating them to participate.

The invitation announcement contained a link to the digital survey hosted on the Qualtrics platform. Additionally, the announcement outlined the benefits of their participation, emphasizing how their input would help improve the program for their peers and future cohorts. To further incentivize participation, their names were entered into a drawing for one of three \$50 gift cards given to randomized participants upon completion of the second step (interview) of the study. By entering their names after completing the interview, this ensured motivation to participate in step one (the survey). These motivational strategies were employed to boost engagement and ensure a high response rate (Dillman et al., 2014).

Survey Administration

The administration of the survey involved several key steps to ensure efficient data collection. The survey, composed of 21 closed-ended questions, was designed to be completed within 15-20 minutes, ensuring it was concise and manageable for participants. Before accessing the survey questions, participants were required to read and electronically sign an informed consent form. This step ensured that participants are fully aware of the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Though class time was provided for the students to complete the survey, the survey was made available online for a period of two weeks. This provided participants with the flexibility to complete it at their convenience, as well as include any students who may have been absent during the class in which the survey was completed. This extended window aimed to accommodate the varied schedules of the elementary teacher candidates, thereby enhancing the likelihood of their participation. To further encourage timely responses, reminder emails were sent out one week before the survey closes. These reminders served to prompt participants who

may have initially overlooked the survey or who were absent during the class in which the survey was administered, thus helping to maximize the response rate.

Data Collection and Storage

Survey responses were automatically recorded and securely stored within the Qualtrics system. To ensure confidentiality, data were anonymized by assigning unique identification numbers to each participant. This process guarantees that individual responses cannot be traced back to specific participants, thereby maintaining their privacy.

Once anonymized, the data were downloaded and stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only to the researcher. This secure storage method ensures that the data remain protected from unauthorized access, thereby upholding the ethical standards of the research.

Step 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

Participant Selection

From the pool of survey respondents, participants who expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview were selected. To ensure a manageable and in-depth exploration of experiences, ten students were chosen for the interviews. The selection process aimed to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives, focusing on capturing a wide range of experiences with teacher-student relationships in the "The Science of Reading II" course. If more than ten students expressed interest in participating in the interviews, the researcher would have selected ten of them at random to ensure all the interested participants had an equal chance of being selected for the interviews.

By selecting participants for the interview based on their participation in the survey, it was possible to ensure that the participants still met the research criteria. This approach allowed

for a more targeted and relevant discussion, aligning the interview data closely with the study's objectives and providing a comprehensive understanding of the different dynamics and nuances present within these relationships.

Interview Scheduling

Interested participants were contacted via email to schedule a convenient time for their interviews. This personalized approach ensured that the interview timing accommodated the participants' schedules, making it easier for them to engage fully in the discussion.

To further ensure accessibility and convenience, the interviews were conducted via Zoom. This online platform allowed for flexible scheduling and reduced the need for travel, thereby making it easier for participants to take part in the study from their preferred location.

Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. To ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes, an interview question guide (Appendix B) was used. This guide helped maintain a structured framework for the conversation and enabled the interviewer to probe deeper into areas of interest as they arose. If it became apparent that a follow-up interview was necessary for any individual participant, the researcher reserved the right to request additional time to meet again with the participant (at their convenience).

With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Recording the interviews allowed for precise capture of the participants' responses, facilitating a thorough and detailed examination of the data during the analysis phase.

Data Collection and Storage

Audio recordings from the interviews were securely stored on a password-protected device, ensuring that the data remains protected from unauthorized access. The initial interview transcripts were captured using Zoom's embedded transcript feature. However, the researcher carefully reviewed the automated transcripts against the recordings to ensure accuracy and authenticity. This meticulous review process was crucial to maintaining the integrity of the data.

Once the recordings were verified, transcriptions were finalized by the researcher, ensuring confidentiality by anonymizing participant information. This step involved removing any identifying details to protect the participants' privacy. The transcribed data was then stored in a secure, encrypted database accessible only to the researcher.

By following these procedures, the study ensured that data collection was systematic, ethical, and aligned with the research objectives. The combination of a digital survey and in-depth interviews allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, providing both breadth and depth in understanding the participants' experiences and perspectives.

The data collection process was conducted over a period of six weeks. The following timeline outlines the key phases of research:

Table 3.3 - Timeline of Data Collection

Timeline of Data Collection	
Week 1	-Finalize survey and interview materials based on pilot study feedback.
Week 2	-Distribute the digital web-based survey to participants. -Allow time for participants to complete the survey.
Week 3	-Begin preliminary analysis of survey data. -Identify and contact interview participants.
Week 4	-Conduct semi-structured interviews with selected participants.
Week 5	-Conduct semi-structured interviews with selected participants.

Week 6	-Finalize interview transcripts and begin data analysis.
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Data Analysis Procedures

In this study, data collection was conducted in two steps: a digital web-based survey and semi-structured interviews. The first step involved gathering quantitative data through a survey consisting of 21 closed-ended questions, designed to capture the perspectives of elementary teacher candidates on their relationships with university instructors in the "The Science of Reading II" course. The second step involved conducting semi-structured interviews with selected participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions.

Step 1: Survey Data Analysis

The survey data, once collected, were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to summarize and describe the main features of the collected data. This method involved calculating frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each survey item. Descriptive statistics provides a clear overview of the data by highlighting patterns and trends. For instance, frequencies show how often certain responses occur, which can indicate common perspectives or experiences among the participants. Means give an average score for survey items, helping to identify general attitudes or perceptions. Standard deviations measure the variability of responses, indicating how much participants' views differ from the average.

By using descriptive statistics, the analysis revealed key themes and areas of interest that are relevant to the research questions. For example, if a high mean score was observed for items related to instructor approachability, this may suggest that elementary teacher candidates generally perceive their instructors as approachable. Such findings informed the interview phase by identifying specific topics to explore further. This preliminary analysis was crucial as it set the stage for a deeper qualitative exploration during the interview phase of data collection.

Once the descriptive statistical analysis was complete, the data was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the survey items. Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 were considered acceptable indicators of reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This step ensured that the survey items consistently measured their intended constructs, strengthening the validity of the findings.

Following the reliability analysis, correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between key survey variables. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength and direction of associations between variables such as instructor support, student motivation, and self-efficacy. Identifying significant correlations helped clarify the interplay between different factors influencing elementary teacher candidates' self-determination and instructional experiences.

This quantitative analysis provided a foundation for the subsequent qualitative phase, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of patterns observed in the survey data. By integrating statistical findings with qualitative insights, the study aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping teacher candidates' experiences.

Step 2: Interview Data Analysis

After the interview transcripts were finalized, the qualitative data analysis commenced. This process involved three key coding stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, following the guidelines provided by Saldaña (2016).

Open Coding

Open coding was the first step in the qualitative data analysis process. During this stage, the transcripts were reviewed line by line to identify significant phrases, concepts, and themes. Each segment of data was labeled with codes that represented different ideas or categories

(Saldaña, 2016). This initial coding phase was essential for breaking down the data into manageable parts and beginning to understand the underlying patterns and themes present in the participants' responses.

Axial Coding

In the axial coding stage, the focus shifted to identifying relationships between the codes generated during open coding. This involved reassembling the data in new ways by exploring connections and interactions among the identified categories (Saldaña, 2016). Axial coding helps to refine and organize the initial codes into broader themes and sub-themes, providing a more structured understanding of the data. During this axial coding stage, the open codes were aligned with the three elements of SDT: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This step was critical for developing a cohesive framework that illustrates how different concepts are interrelated.

Selective Coding

Selective coding was the final stage of the coding process, where the core themes that emerged from the axial coding were integrated into a coherent narrative. This involved selecting the central themes that are most relevant to the research questions and systematically relating them to the other identified themes (Saldaña, 2016). The purpose of selective coding is to build a comprehensive and unified storyline that captures the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. This final stage ensured that the analysis was focused and aligned with the study's objectives.

In summary, the data analysis procedures for this study involved a systematic approach to both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive and correlation statistical methods in SPSS to provide an overview of key patterns and trends. The interview data underwent a detailed coding process, including open, axial, and selective coding

as outlined by Saldaña (2016), to uncover in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. This multi-step analysis process was designed to ensure a thorough and nuanced understanding of the data, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study on the relationships between elementary teacher candidates and their university instructors in the "The Science of Reading II" course, ethical considerations were made to ensure the study maintained the highest degree of integrity and relevancy. The study involved a two-step data collection process: a digital web-based survey followed by semi-structured interviews. Additionally, ensuring ethical integrity throughout these stages was essential to protect the rights and welfare of the participants.

IRB Approval

Before commencing the study, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the research adheres to ethical guidelines and standards. The IRB reviewed the research proposal, including the data collection methods, informed consent process, and measures for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. The approval from the IRB signifies that the study met the ethical requirements necessary to protect participants.

Informed Consent Documents

Informed consent is a crucial aspect of ethical research. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits before agreeing to participate. The informed consent documents, copies of which are attached in the appendices, ensure that participants were fully aware of their rights, including the voluntary nature of participation and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

(Diener & Crandall, 1978). The consent forms provide detailed information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality measures. For the survey, participants were required to read and acknowledge the informed consent form before accessing the survey (see Appendix C). For the interviews, participants read and signed the informed consent form before the interview began (see Appendix D).

The key elements of informed consent for this study were as follows:

- Voluntary participation with the option to withdraw at any time.
- Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.
- Explanation of the study's purpose and procedures.
- Contact information for the researcher and the research ethics board for any questions or concerns.

Confidentiality and Anonymity of Participants

Maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is critical. Survey responses were anonymized by assigning unique identification numbers to each participant, ensuring that their identities remain confidential (Babbie, 2016). During the interviews, participants' names and any identifying information were omitted or altered in the transcriptions to protect their privacy. All data was securely stored on password-protected devices and encrypted databases accessible only to the researcher (Gibbs, 2007).

Data Management

Effective data management practices were implemented to safeguard the integrity and confidentiality of the data. Survey responses were automatically recorded and securely stored within the Qualtrics system. Audio recordings of interviews were securely stored on a password-protected device, and transcripts were carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy. The transcribed

data was stored in a secure, encrypted database. Data will be retained for a three-year period as per the IRB guidelines and will be permanently deleted thereafter.

Participant Communication

Clear and ongoing communication with participants was maintained throughout the study. Initial recruitment and invitation communication provided comprehensive information about the study. Participants were informed about the study's progress and any significant developments. Upon completion of the study, participants were provided with a summary of the findings, if they expressed interest (Dillman et al., 2014). This transparency fostered trust and respects participants' contributions.

Researcher Conduct and Reflexivity

The researcher committed to conducting the study with the highest level of integrity and ethical responsibility. This included avoiding any conflicts of interest and ensuring that the research was conducted honestly and transparently (Israel & Hay, 2006). Reflexivity was also an integral part of the research process, where the researcher continuously reflected on their role and potential biases that could have influenced the study (Berger, 2015). By being aware of and addressing these biases, the researcher aimed to maintain objectivity and uphold ethical standards.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Following the discussion on ethical considerations, it is essential to address the trustworthiness and rigor of this study. Ensuring trustworthiness in mixed-methods research involves demonstrating credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This section focuses on the strategies employed to enhance the credibility and transferability of the research findings.

Credibility in research refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations of them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It involves ensuring that the findings accurately represent the participants' perspectives and experiences. Transferability, on the other hand, pertains to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By providing a detailed description of the research context and participants, other researchers can determine the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

Strategies for Credibility and Transferability

Several strategies were employed in this study to enhance credibility and transferability, and they are as follows:

- **Pilot Study for Survey Items and Interview Guide**
 - A pilot study was conducted to refine the survey items, and another pilot study was conducted for the interview guide. This preliminary step involved a small group of participants from previous cohorts, providing valuable feedback on the clarity and relevance of the questions. According to Dillman et al. (2014), pilot testing is crucial for identifying and rectifying potential issues, thereby ensuring that the tools effectively capture the intended data.

- **Researcher Journal**
 - Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a reflective journal to document thoughts, decisions, and potential biases. This practice of reflexivity, as described by Berger (2015), helps researchers remain aware of their influence on the study and allows for greater transparency in the research process. By continually reflecting on their role and interactions with the data, the researcher can enhance the credibility of the findings.

- **Member Checking**

- Member checking involves returning the data or interpretations to the participants for verification. This strategy ensures that the participants' perspectives are accurately represented and provides an opportunity for them to confirm or clarify their responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, preliminary findings and interpretations were shared with participants to validate the accuracy of the data and enhance the credibility of the results.

By implementing these strategies, the study aimed to achieve a high level of trustworthiness and rigor, ensuring that the findings were both credible and transferable.

As I have established the methodologies to ensure trustworthiness and rigor in this study, it is equally important to recognize the role of the researcher's positionality in qualitative research. The perspectives, experiences, and potential biases of the researcher play a crucial part in shaping the research process and outcomes. Understanding the researcher's background provides context for the interpretations and insights derived from the study. Therefore, the following section will dive into my personal and professional journey, highlighting the experiences and motivations that influenced my approach to this research.

Researcher Positionality

Understanding the researcher's positionality is crucial in qualitative research, as it shapes the perspective and interpretation of the data. My journey into education is deeply rooted in my family background, as I come from a family of teachers. This foundation instilled in me a passion for education and a commitment to fostering learning environments that support student growth and development.

I spent six years as an elementary classroom teacher, which provided me with firsthand experience in teaching and managing a classroom. In 2022, I transitioned to higher education, focusing on teacher preparation. Currently, I teach literacy and reading methods courses at a Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) institution, where I also supervise student-teaching interns in their placements. This role allows me to bridge theory and practice, guiding elementary teacher candidates as they navigate and reflect on their initial teaching experiences.

My work in higher education has coincided with the implementation of added Science of Reading mandates and pressures, which I have seen and felt the impact of firsthand. These mandates have significantly influenced how literacy is taught and assessed, presenting both challenges and opportunities for educators and students alike.

With a vested interest in learning how to better support my students, I am driven by a desire to help them achieve their goals. My experiences have fueled a commitment to professional growth, as I strive to be the best version of myself as an instructor. This study is not only an academic endeavor but also a personal mission to enhance my teaching practices and better serve the needs of my students.

By reflecting on my positionality, I acknowledge the potential biases and perspectives I bring to this research. My background and experiences inform my approach to data collection and analysis, shaping the questions I ask and the interpretations I make. Recognizing this, I am committed to maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process, ensuring that my findings are grounded in the participants' perspectives while remaining mindful of my own influence.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations that may affect the study's outcomes and interpretation. This section identifies potential limitations, discusses

their impact on the study, and outlines strategies for mitigating these limitations. Several potential limitations could influence the findings and interpretations of this study, and they are as follows:

Depth Over Breadth

A common limitation on the qualitative research side of a mixed-methods study is the focus on depth rather than breadth. This study's design, which involved detailed semi-structured interviews with a small number of participants, allows for rich, in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of elementary teacher candidates. However, this focus on detailed narratives means that the findings may not capture the full range of experiences and views within the broader population of elementary teacher candidates. While this approach is valuable for exploring specific contexts and experiences, it inherently limits the study's general applicability to other settings or groups.

Potential Researcher Bias

Given my background as an elementary classroom teacher and current role in higher education, there is a possibility of researcher bias influencing the study. My vested interest in supporting elementary teacher candidates and improving literacy education could shape the way I interpret data and interact with participants. Although reflexivity and the use of a researcher journal are employed to mitigate this bias, complete objectivity is challenging to achieve. This inherent subjectivity must be considered when evaluating the study's findings.

Self-Reported Data

The study relied heavily on self-reported data from participants, both in the survey and interview phases. Self-reported data can be influenced by participants' desire to present themselves in a favorable light or their perceptions of what the researcher wants to hear. This

social desirability bias can affect the accuracy and authenticity of the responses. While measures such as ensuring confidentiality and using well-structured questions aim to minimize this bias, it remains a potential limitation.

By recognizing these limitations, the study maintains transparency and provides a clear framework for understanding the scope and applicability of its findings. Addressing these limitations also offers valuable insights for future research in this area.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the comprehensive methodology employed in this study to investigate the impact of university teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) and informed by key claims from the literature, this study utilized a mixed-methods case study approach to explore how these relationships foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among teacher candidates.

The chapter began by detailing the mixed-methods research design chosen for this study, emphasizing its appropriateness for capturing the complex and nuanced experiences of the participants. The constructivist paradigm underlying this research supports an in-depth exploration of the social phenomena being studied, recognizing the subjective meanings participants bring to their experiences.

A case study design was selected to allow for a thorough examination of the specific context of "The Science of Reading II" course across three campus sites of a Kansas Board of Regents institution. This design facilitates a detailed understanding of how teacher-student relationships influence self-determination in a structured and consistent educational environment.

Data collection was conducted in two steps: a digital web-based survey followed by semi-structured interviews. The survey provided quantitative data on participants' perspectives, which were analyzed using descriptive and correlation statistics to identify key patterns and themes. These findings informed the subsequent qualitative phase, where in-depth interviews provided richer insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. To ensure the rigor and credibility of the data collection tools, pilot studies were conducted for both the survey and interview guides. This iterative process helped refine the instruments, ensuring they effectively captured the intended data.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Survey data were analyzed using SPSS to summarize the main features and identify trends, as well as to explore what, if any correlations exist between the data and the stated research hypotheses. Qualitative data from the interviews underwent a detailed coding process, following Saldaña's (2016) guidelines for open, axial, and selective coding. This multi-step analysis ensured a comprehensive understanding of the data, contributing to the study's overarching research questions.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. IRB approval was obtained to ensure compliance with ethical standards, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Measures to maintain confidentiality and anonymity were strictly adhered to, and effective data management practices were implemented to safeguard the integrity of the data.

To enhance the study's credibility and transferability, several strategies were employed. This included pilot testing the data collection tools, maintaining a researcher journal for reflexivity, and conducting member checks to validate the findings with participants. These

measures ensured that the research findings accurately represented the participants' perspectives and could be applied to similar contexts.

Reflecting on the researcher's positionality, this chapter acknowledged the potential biases and perspectives brought to the study. The researcher's background as an elementary classroom teacher and current role in higher education were highlighted, emphasizing a commitment to reflexivity and maintaining the integrity of the research process.

Finally, the chapter addressed the limitations of the study, recognizing the potential constraints that may affect the findings. These included the focus on depth over breadth, potential researcher bias, and the reliance on self-reported data. By acknowledging these limitations, the study maintains transparency and provides a clear framework for understanding its scope and applicability.

Having established the methodological framework and addressed the ethical, positional, and procedural considerations in this chapter, I now transition to Chapter 4. In the next chapter, the focus will shift to presenting and analyzing the data collected from the surveys and interviews. This analysis will provide insights into how university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses, ultimately addressing the central research questions of this study.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research conducted to explore how university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination within reading methods courses. This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine both quantitative and qualitative data, aiming to understand how students' perceptions of teacher behaviors influence their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core constructs of self-determination theory.

In Chapter 1, the rationale for this study was established, identifying the significance of teacher-student relationships in fostering a supportive educational environment and enhancing self-determination. The research questions guiding this inquiry were also introduced, focusing on how specific teacher behaviors correlate with students' perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive review of the literature on self-determination theory, teacher-student relationships, and their impact on motivation and learning in educational contexts. This literature review underscored the importance of supportive teacher behaviors in promoting intrinsic motivation and engagement, establishing a theoretical framework that guided the interpretation of this study's findings.

In Chapter 3, the mixed-methods approach was outlined, detailing the quantitative survey used to measure students' self-perceptions across key constructs and the qualitative interviews conducted to capture in-depth perspectives. The third chapter also discussed the reliability and validity considerations, the data collection process, and the statistical and thematic analysis techniques applied to interpret the findings.

Building on this foundation, Chapter 4 is structured into three main sections. The first section details the quantitative findings from the survey data, including reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, and correlation results. These findings provide an overview of how various teacher behaviors correlate with student-reported levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, addressing the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3.

The second section presents the qualitative findings, based on thematic analysis of interview transcripts, which capture students' experiences and perceptions of supportive teacher-student interactions. This qualitative analysis uncovers recurring themes, such as the importance of personalized feedback, consistent communication, and encouragement in fostering a positive learning environment.

In the third section, an integrated analysis synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings, providing a cohesive interpretation of how these data converge to inform our understanding of effective teacher-student relationships in a reading methods course context. This integration highlights where quantitative trends align with the qualitative themes, reinforcing the robustness of the findings. The chapter concludes with a summary that will bridge to the discussion in Chapter 5, where the implications of these findings will be explored in greater depth.

Quantitative Findings

Review of Quantitative Methodology

To quantitatively explore the relationship between teacher-student interactions and self-determination, a survey instrument was developed based on constructs from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) and prior research on teacher-student relationships (e.g., Reeve, 2013). The survey included items assessing:

- *Specific Behaviors and Interactions*: Questions on teacher approachability, feedback, and support, which are essential in fostering positive educational relationships (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). For example, one item asked, “How approachable do you find your reading methods instructor when you need help with assignments?”
- *Autonomy*: Items evaluating students' independence and capacity for choice in learning, a core component of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A sample item for this construct was, “How often does your reading methods instructor allow you to make choices about how to complete assignments?”
- *Competence*: Items reflecting self-efficacy and skill perception, which are central to motivating learning (Bandura, 1997). An example item included, “How confident do you feel about mastering the content in this reading methods course?”
- *Relatedness*: Items assessing students' sense of connection with their instructors, supported by literature on relational aspects of learning (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For instance, one item asked, “How connected do you feel with your reading methods instructor in this course?”

The survey's reliability and internal consistency were confirmed through Cronbach's alpha calculations, with values above 0.70 generally accepted as indicators of good reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). The survey was distributed to N = 55 potential participants, with n = 38 completing the survey, resulting in a 69% response rate. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were calculated to examine central tendencies and test hypotheses, following established guidelines for educational research (Cohen et al., 2017). These results will be outlined in a later section of this chapter.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability testing is a crucial step in survey-based research, particularly when measuring constructs related to perceptions and attitudes. To ensure that the constructs in this study—Specific Behaviors and Interactions, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness—were internally consistent and reliably capture students' perceptions, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each. Cronbach's alpha is a widely recognized statistical measure used to assess the internal consistency of survey items within a construct. According to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach's alpha values are generally interpreted as follows: values above 0.7 indicate “good” reliability, values above 0.8 reflect “very good” reliability, and values above 0.9 are considered “excellent”.

The importance of internal consistency lies in ensuring that the items within each construct are measuring the same underlying concept. For instance, all items within the “Autonomy” construct should consistently reflect students' self-perceived independence in their learning environment. A high Cronbach's alpha score indicates that respondents interpreted and responded to these items in a similar manner, suggesting that the construct is measured reliably across items (DeVellis, 2016). This statistical approach supports the validity of subsequent analyses, as the consistency within constructs reinforces the reliability of the data.

Results of the Reliability Analysis

- **Specific Behaviors and Interactions:** The reliability coefficient for this construct was 0.79, indicating good reliability. This value suggests that the items concerning teacher behaviors, such as approachability and feedback, are internally consistent in capturing students' perceptions of these behaviors. Research on teacher-student interactions (Pianta et al., 2012) highlights the importance of specific supportive behaviors—like

approachability and constructive feedback—in creating a positive learning environment. Such behaviors are associated with increased student engagement and are essential to developing trust and motivation within the classroom.

- **Autonomy:** The autonomy construct showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, reflecting very good reliability. This score suggests that items designed to measure students' self-perceived autonomy in the learning environment are cohesively aligned, accurately capturing their sense of independence. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), autonomy is a core psychological need that supports motivation and engagement in educational settings. By allowing students to make choices and encouraging independent thinking, educators fulfill this need, promoting intrinsic motivation and deeper learning.
- **Competence:** With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, the competence construct demonstrated excellent reliability. This high value indicates that items related to students' self-perceived competence are highly consistent, ensuring the construct robustly captures confidence in their academic abilities. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy posits that competence, or the belief in one's capability to succeed in specific tasks, is central to motivation. When students feel competent, they are more likely to engage fully and persist in challenging tasks, making competence a vital construct in the study of student motivation and performance.
- **Relatedness:** The relatedness construct yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, also indicating very good reliability. This result suggests that items designed to assess students' perceived connectedness with their instructors consistently reflect this aspect of the student-teacher relationship. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that relatedness, or

the need to feel connected to others, is a fundamental human motivation. In educational settings, positive relationships with instructors fulfill this need, contributing to a supportive and inclusive learning environment that enhances students' sense of belonging and engagement.

To present these results visually, Table 4.1 provides an overview of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each construct. This table offers a quick reference for understanding the internal consistency of each survey construct and supports the reliability of the findings in this study.

Table 4.1 - Survey Instrument Reliability Analysis

Survey Construct	Questions	# of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Measure
Specific Behaviors and Interactions	(Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6)	N=6	0.79	Good
Autonomy	(Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11)	N=5	0.85	Very good
Competence	(Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15)	N=4	0.93	Excellent
Relatedness	(Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21)	N=6	0.85	Very good

Supporting Sources and Context

Cronbach's alpha is a foundational tool in reliability analysis, particularly in social sciences, where constructs are often abstract and multidimensional. As recommended by Tavakol and Dennick (2011), Cronbach's alpha values provide insight into how well items correlate within each construct, thereby validating the internal structure of the survey instrument. This reliability analysis ensures that the data gathered from students about their perceptions of teacher behaviors, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are consistent, enabling meaningful interpretation of these constructs in later sections of the study.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics offer a preliminary look at the distribution of responses within each construct, revealing general trends and levels of consensus among participants. Calculating mean scores and standard deviations for each survey item provides insight into the central tendencies and variability in students' perceptions, laying the groundwork for more nuanced analysis (Field, 2018). The mean indicates the average perception of respondents, whereas the standard deviation reveals the degree of variation around this average, helping to identify areas of strong agreement versus those with diverse responses.

Mean Scores

Overall, high mean scores were observed across most items, suggesting that students generally rated their instructors favorably on aspects related to approachability, support, and respect. This trend aligns with previous findings in educational research, where positive teacher-student interactions are often linked to higher engagement and satisfaction among students (Hattie, 2009). These high mean scores highlight that the instructors in the sample were perceived as supportive and respectful, key factors in fostering a positive learning environment (Pianta et al., 2012).

Table 4.2 presents the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for each survey item across the constructs of Specific Behaviors and Interactions, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness. Generally, high mean scores across most items indicate that students rated their instructors favorably on qualities related to approachability, support, and respect. For instance, items such as *Specific Behaviors and Interactions* (Q1: $M = 6.76$, $SD = 0.49$) demonstrate strong consensus among students, as indicated by low standard deviation values. High consensus items

likely reflect shared positive experiences with instructor behaviors that students view as supportive and engaging.

Table 4.2 - Descriptive Statistical Report

Survey Construct	Q #	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
<i>Specific Behaviors and Interactions</i>	1	6.76	7	7	0.49
	2	6.45	7	7	0.8
	3	6.78	7	7	0.42
	4	6.61	7	7	0.55
	5	6.58	7	7	0.64
	6	4.61	5	5	0.59
<i>Autonomy</i>	7	5.84	6	6	1.13
	8	5.82	6	7	1.27
	9	6.65	7	7	0.54
	10	3.95	4	4	0.76
	11	6.53	7	7	0.80
<i>Competence</i>	12	6.42	7	7	0.95
	13	6.50	7	7	0.83
	14	6.55	7	7	0.69
	15	6.37	7	7	0.85
<i>Relatedness</i>	16	6.29	7	7	1.06

	17	6.79	7	7	0.41
	18	6.66	7	7	0.58
	19	6.82	7	7	0.39
	20	6.82	7	7	0.39
	21	6.58	7	7	0.60

**Note: SD < 0.50 indicates low variation and high consensus among respondents, while SD > 1.00 indicates higher variation and lower consensus.*

**Note: Q6 and Q10 were the only survey items that utilized a 5-point Likert scale. All other survey items utilized a 7-point Likert scale.*

Standard Deviation

Standard deviation values provide additional insight by indicating the degree of variability in student responses. For items such as *instructor approachability* (SD = 0.49) and *interest in learning* (SD = 0.42), the low standard deviations reflect a high level of consensus, with students showing strong agreement on their positive perceptions of these behaviors. This high consensus is particularly significant in the context of teacher-student relationships, as it suggests a shared perception of supportive behaviors that contribute to a stable and predictable learning environment (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Conversely, higher standard deviations on items such as *allowing choices in assignment completion* (SD = 1.13) and *confidence in expressing ideas* (SD = 1.27) suggest more diverse experiences among students. This variability could indicate differing levels of perceived autonomy, with some students feeling empowered by their instructors to make choices, while others may feel more constrained. Such diversity in responses may reflect varying classroom practices or individual differences in how autonomy is encouraged, a factor that previous

research has identified as influential in student motivation and self-determination (Reeve, 2013).

Table 4.3 highlights the questions with the lowest standard deviations and the highest standard deviations, which may provide grounds for additional examination and interpretation. Below

Table 4.3, a series of histograms visually illustrate the distribution for each of these items.

Table 4.3 - Survey Items with Greatest and Least SD

Q#	Survey Question	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	How approachable or unapproachable is your reading methods instructor?	<i>0.49</i>	Item with <i>higher consensus</i> relative to survey respondents.
3	How interested or uninterested is your reading methods instructor in your learning and development?	<i>0.42</i>	
17	How caring or uncaring is your reading methods instructor about your academic well-being and success?	<i>0.41</i>	
19	How respectful or disrespectful do you feel that your reading methods instructor is towards you?	<i>0.39</i>	
20	How respectful or disrespectful do you feel that you are towards your reading methods instructor?	<i>0.39</i>	
7	How frequently or infrequently does your reading methods instructor allow you to make choices about how to complete assignments?	<i>1.13</i>	Item with <i>lower consensus</i> relative to survey respondents.
8	How confident or insecure do you feel about expressing your ideas and opinions in this reading methods course?	<i>1.27</i>	
16	How connected or disconnected do you feel with the instructor of this reading methods course?	<i>1.06</i>	

The survey items listed in Table 4.3 highlight areas of both strong consensus and diverse perspectives among respondents. Items with **lower standard deviations**, such as *instructor approachability* (SD = 0.49) and *interest in student learning* (SD = 0.42), indicate a relatively consistent perception among students, suggesting a shared agreement on these aspects of faculty-

student relationships. Conversely, items with higher standard deviations, including *student confidence in expressing ideas* (SD = 1.27) and *frequency of choice in assignments* (SD = 1.13), reveal greater variability in responses, suggesting more varied student experiences.

To further illustrate these findings, the following histograms (Figures 4.1–4.8) display the distribution of responses for each of these survey items. These visual representations provide deeper insight into whether responses were clustered around a particular perception or dispersed across a broader range of experiences. In particular, the histograms for lower SD items are expected to show more concentrated distributions, while those for higher SD items may exhibit greater spread or skewness, reflecting differences in student perspectives.

Figure 4.1 - Question #1: Perceived Reading Faculty Approachability

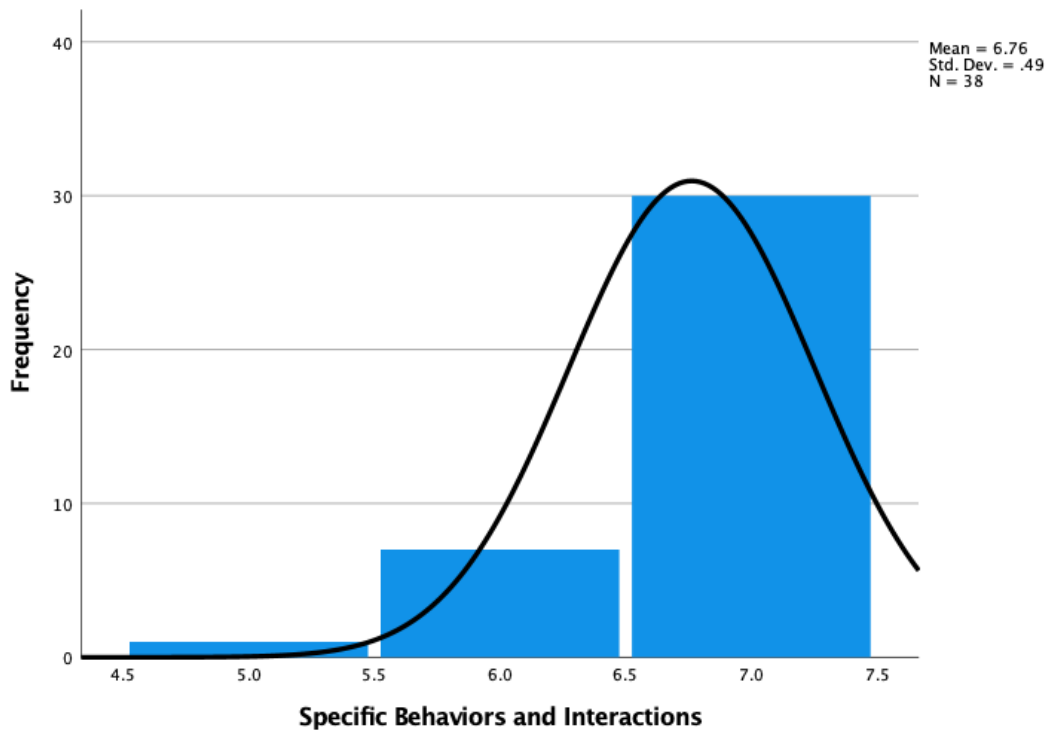


Figure 4.2- Question #3: Perceived Faculty Interest in Student Learning & Development

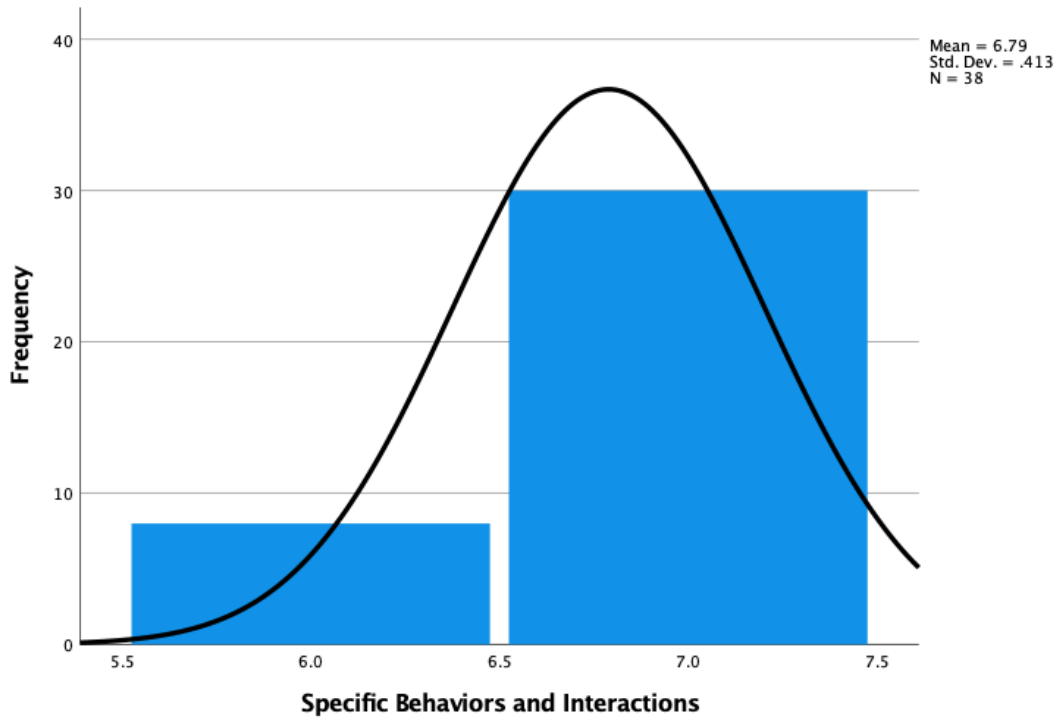


Figure 4.3- Question #17: Perceived Level of Faculty Care in Student Success & Well-Being

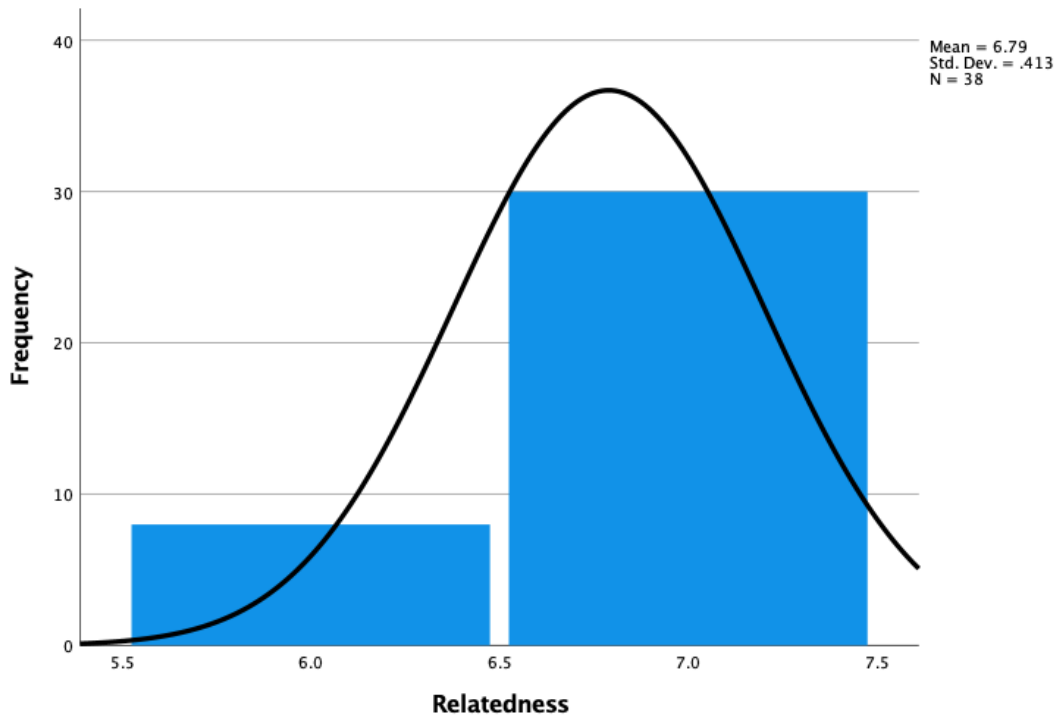


Figure 4.4 - Question #19: Faculty Respectfulness Towards Student

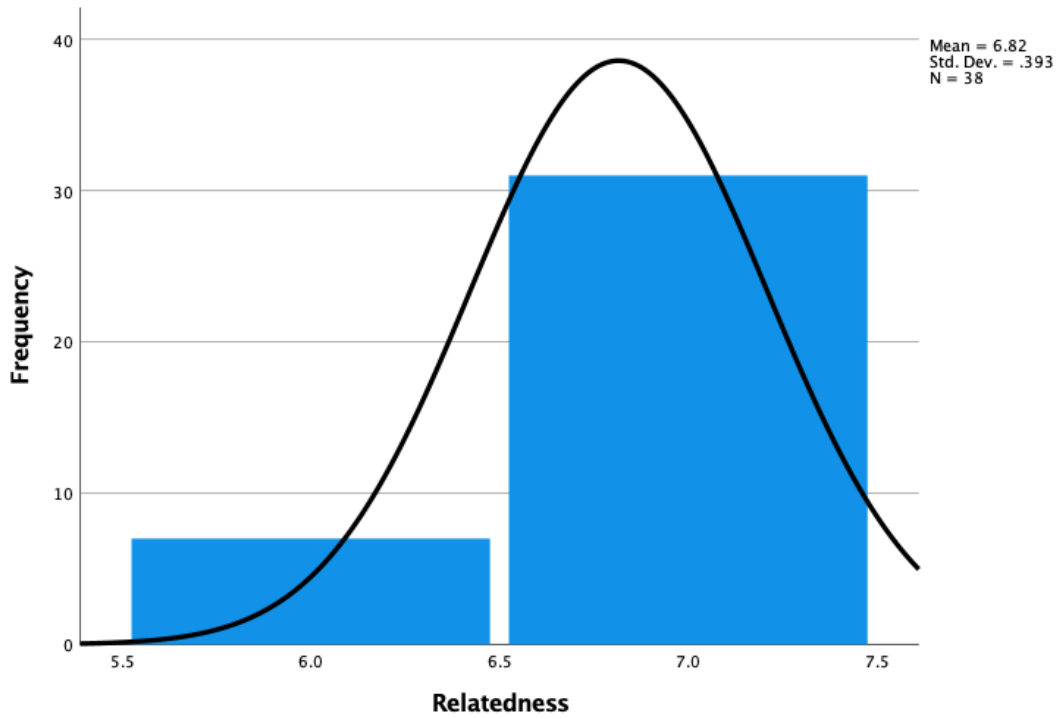


Figure 4.5 - Question #20: Student Respectfulness Towards Reading Faculty

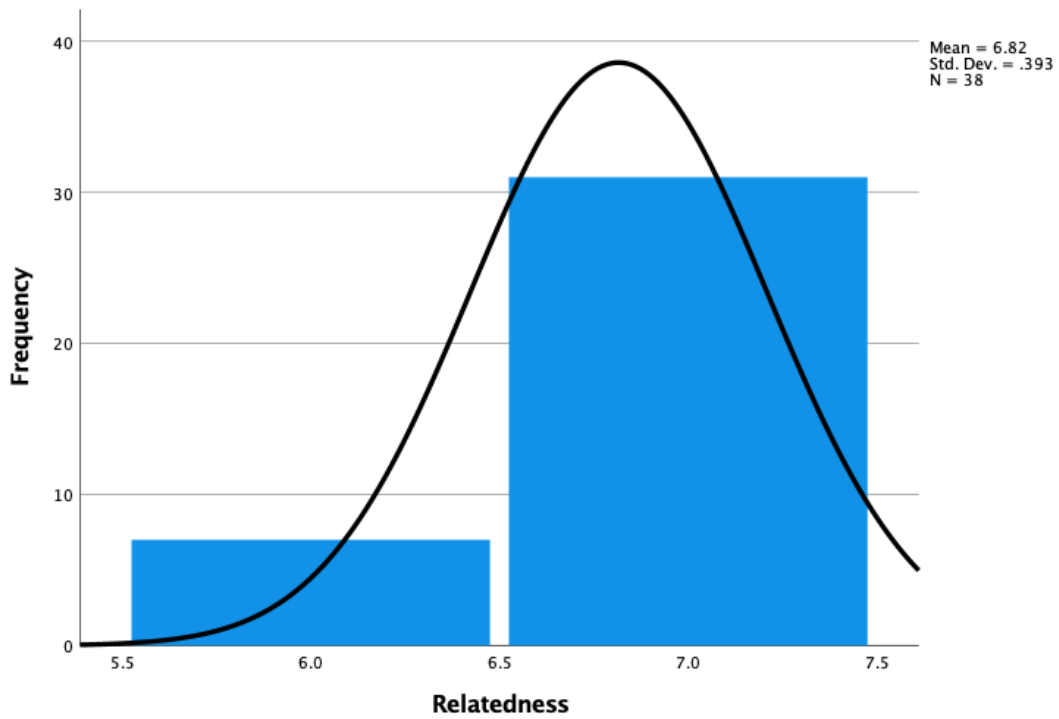


Figure 4.6 - Question #7: Frequency of Choice in Class Assignments

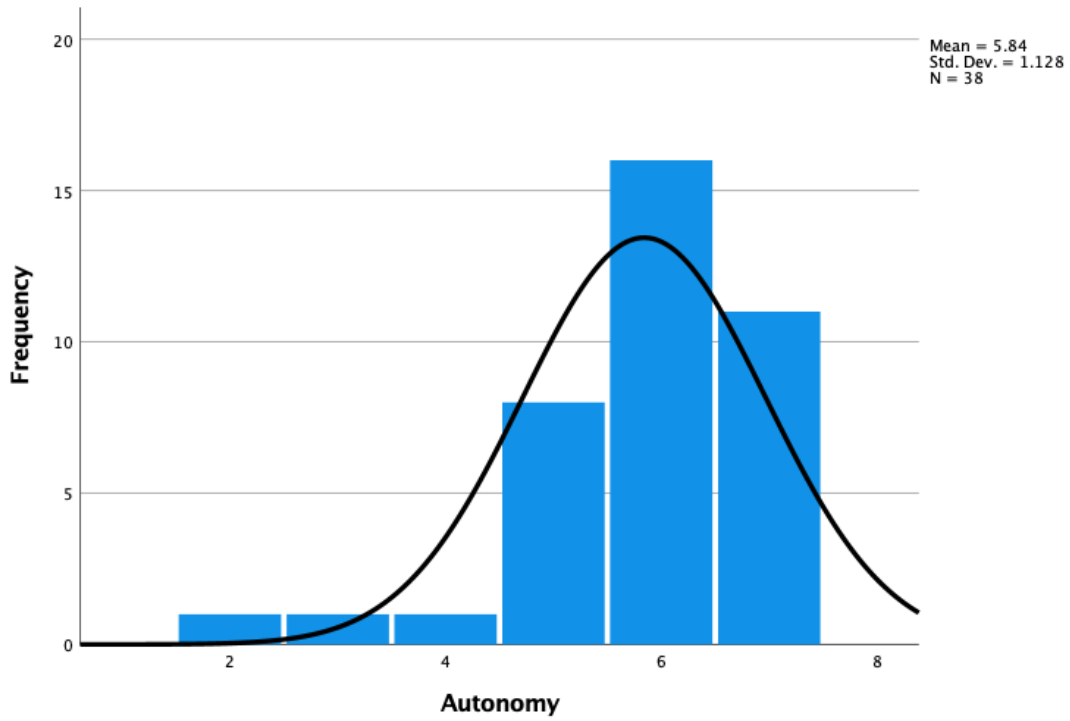


Figure 4.7 - Question #8: Student Confidence in Idea Expression

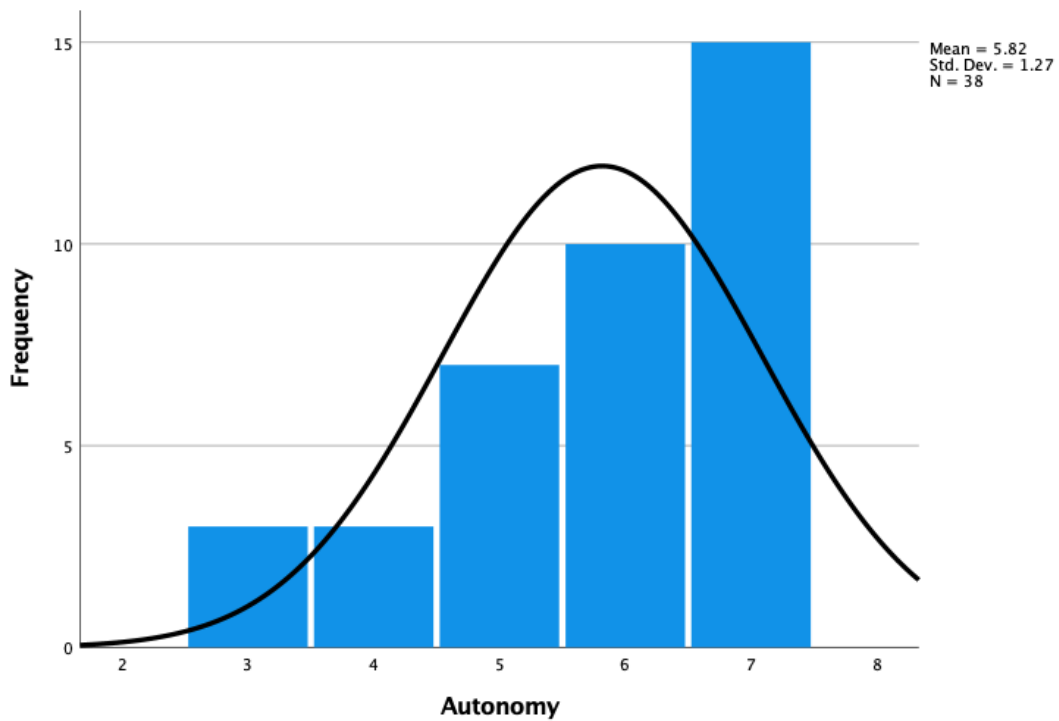
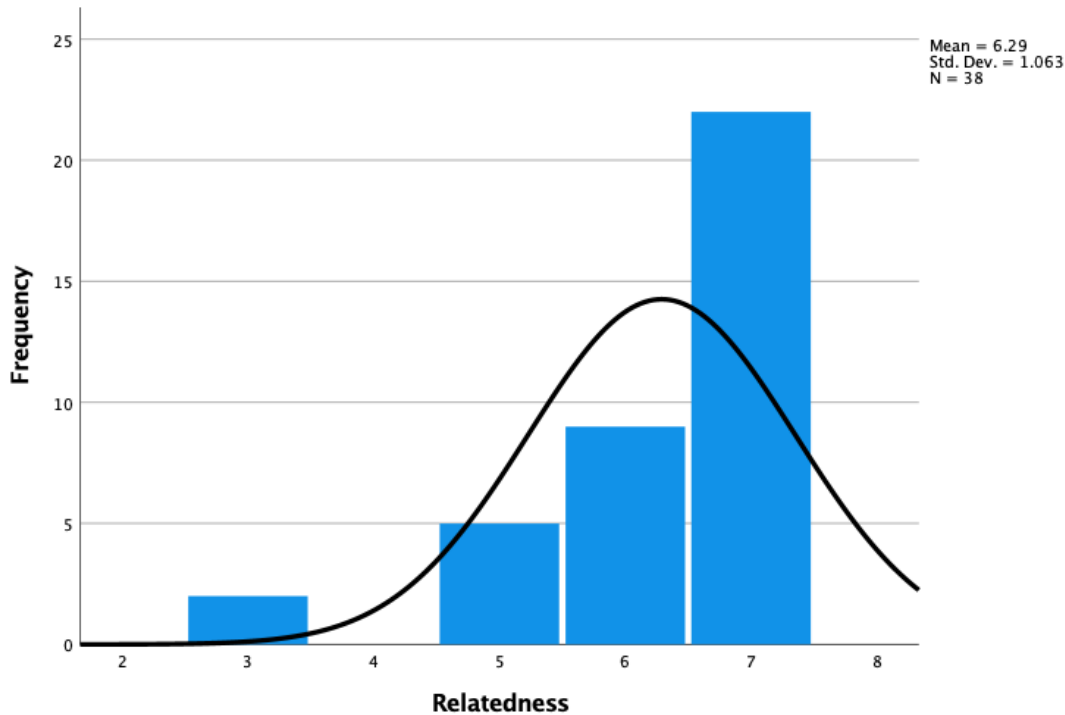


Figure 4.8 - Question #16: Perceived Connection with Reading Faculty



The histograms provide additional clarity on the distribution of responses. For items with lower standard deviations, such as 'instructor approachability' (SD = 0.49) and 'interest in learning' (SD = 0.42), the distributions were generally symmetrical, reflecting a high level of agreement among respondents. In contrast, items with higher standard deviations, such as 'confidence in expressing ideas' (SD = 1.27) and 'allowing choices in assignment completion' (SD = 1.13), exhibited greater variability, with occasional negative skewness indicating differing experiences among students. These patterns reinforce the interpretation that items with lower standard deviations represent areas of strong consensus, while those with higher standard deviations reflect more diverse perceptions.

Summary of Survey Population

The survey population for this study consisted of elementary teacher candidates enrolled in university-level reading methods courses. Demographically, the sample included a diverse group of students in terms of educational background, age, and experience levels. This diversity

contributes to the variation seen in some constructs, especially those related to autonomy and competence, as differing experiences may shape how students perceive their instructors and their own capabilities within the course. The descriptive statistics provided here lay a foundation for understanding these constructs in greater detail and contextualizing the variability observed within the sample, setting the stage for further analysis of the correlations and relationships between teacher behaviors and students' self-determination constructs.

Correlation Analysis

To explore the relationships between teacher behaviors and students' self-perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, Pearson r correlation coefficients were calculated on the mean scores of each scale. Before computing the correlations, scale scores were first derived by calculating the mean of the sum of item scores within each scale, ensuring a standardized representation of each construct. Then, correlations were computed using these mean scale scores to assess relationships among the variables.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is a statistical measure that indicates the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables, ranging from -1 to +1. Values closer to +1 signify a strong positive correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other tends to increase as well. Conversely, values closer to -1 indicate a strong negative correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other tends to decrease.

In educational research, Pearson correlations are commonly used to examine associations between psychological constructs, such as students' perceptions of their learning environment and their self-perceptions (Field, 2018).

This study tested the following hypotheses, rooted in self-determination theory:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of autonomy.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of competence.
- **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and interactions will be positively correlated with their self-perceptions of relatedness.

The correlation results provide insights into how supportive teacher behaviors are associated with these self-determination constructs, affirming or refuting each hypothesis. Additionally, a correlation analysis of each psychological construct within self-determination theory has been conducted to further contextualize the theoretical framework within the scope of this study. Type 1 error was set at 0.05 for all analyses. Table 4.4 outlines all the correlation analyses conducted at this juncture of the study. Individual scatterplots highlighting specific construct relationships can be found in the following subsections.

Table 4.4 - Correlation Matrix for Self-Determination Variables and Teacher Behaviors

<i>Variables</i>	Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness	Teacher Behaviors
Autonomy	—	.855**	.820**	.833**
Competence	—	—	.828**	.835**
Relatedness	—	—	—	.773**
Teacher Behaviors	—	—	—	—

***Note: Correlation Significance:** Correlations marked with ** (e.g., .855**) are significant at the $p < .01$ level (1-tailed).

***Note: Diagonal Values:** The diagonal in the correlation matrix (e.g., Autonomy with Autonomy) is not displayed because these values are always 1 (a variable's perfect correlation with itself).

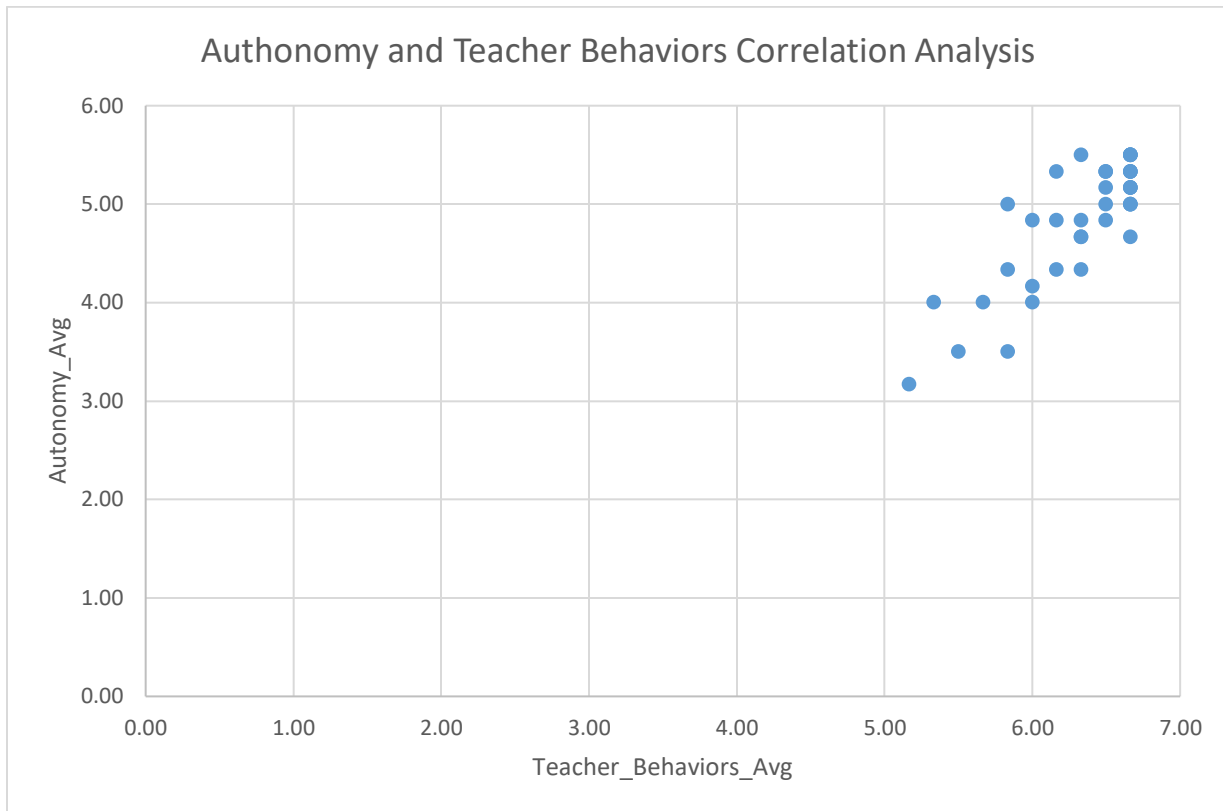
Table 4.5 - Confidence Intervals for Correlations (95%)

Pair of Variables	Correlation	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Autonomy and Competence	.855	.759	1.000
Autonomy and Relatedness	.820	.703	1.000
Autonomy and Teacher Behaviors	.833	.724	1.000
Competence and Relatedness	.828	.718	1.000
Competence and Teacher Behaviors	.835	.729	1.000
Relatedness and Teacher Behaviors	.773	.635	1.000

Relationship Between Teacher Behaviors and Autonomy

A strong positive correlation was found between students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and their self-perceived autonomy ($r = 0.833, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1). This result suggests that as students perceive their teachers as more supportive, their sense of independence in learning also increases. According to Deci and Ryan (1980), autonomy is a fundamental component of self-determination theory, representing the extent to which individuals feel self-directed in their actions. In educational settings, autonomy-supportive teacher behaviors—such as offering choices, fostering independent thought, and encouraging student input—are linked to increased student autonomy (Reeve, 2013). By promoting an environment where students feel free to express their ideas and make choices, teachers help cultivate students' sense of ownership over their learning, a critical factor in motivating and engaging students (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Figure 4.9 illustrates this data in a visual scatterplot.

Figure 4.9 - Hypothesis 1 (H1) Correlation Scatterplot



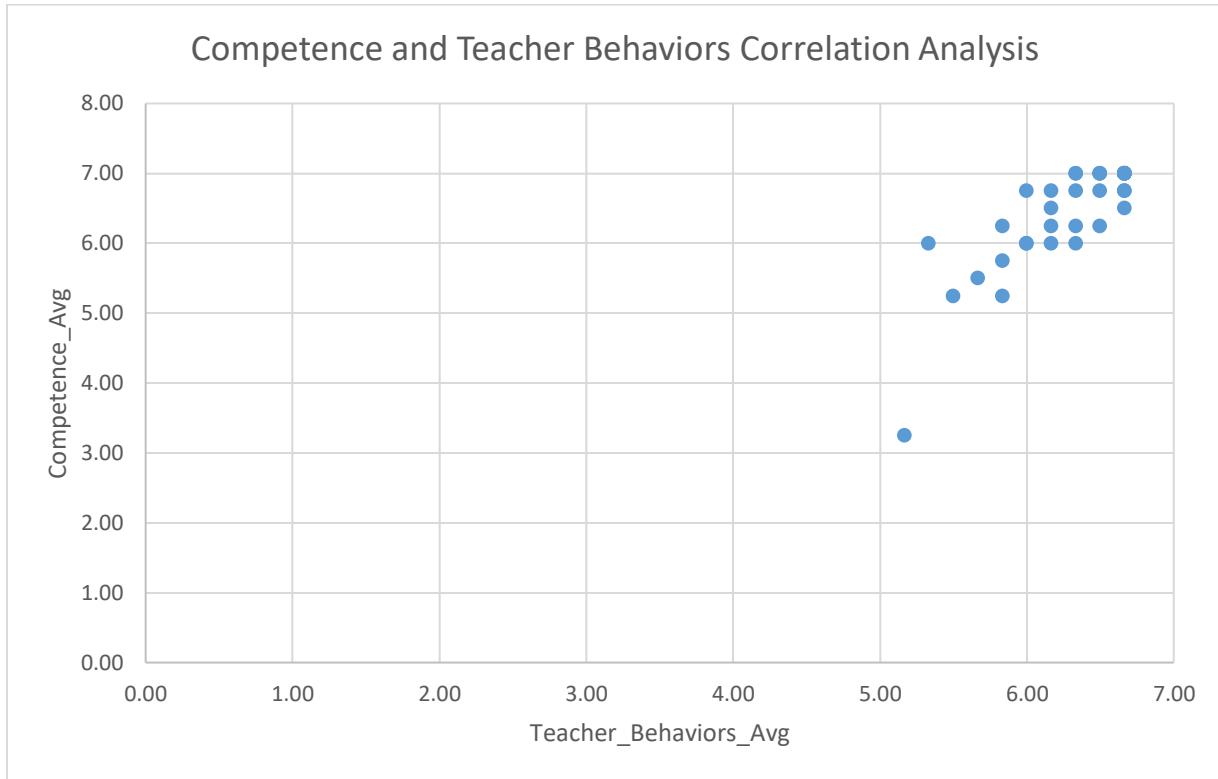
Relationship Between Teacher Behaviors and Competence

The correlation between teacher behaviors and students' self-perceived competence was similarly strong and positive ($r = 0.835, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2). This finding suggests an association between students' perceptions of supportive teacher interactions and their confidence in their academic abilities. Competence, closely related to Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy, refers to the belief in one's capability to successfully perform a task.

While instructors who provide constructive feedback, challenge students appropriately, and express belief in students' abilities may contribute to students' sense of competence (Hattie, 2009), it is also possible that students who already feel highly confident perceive their instructors as more supportive. Empirical research suggests that students who feel competent are more likely to engage in challenging tasks and exhibit resilience in the face of academic challenges (Usher &

Pajares, 2008). The observed correlation highlights a meaningful relationship between teacher behaviors and students' self-perceptions of competence, though the directionality of this relationship cannot be determined. Figure 4.10 illustrates this data in a visual scatterplot.

Figure 4.10 - Hypothesis 2 (H2) Correlation Scatterplot

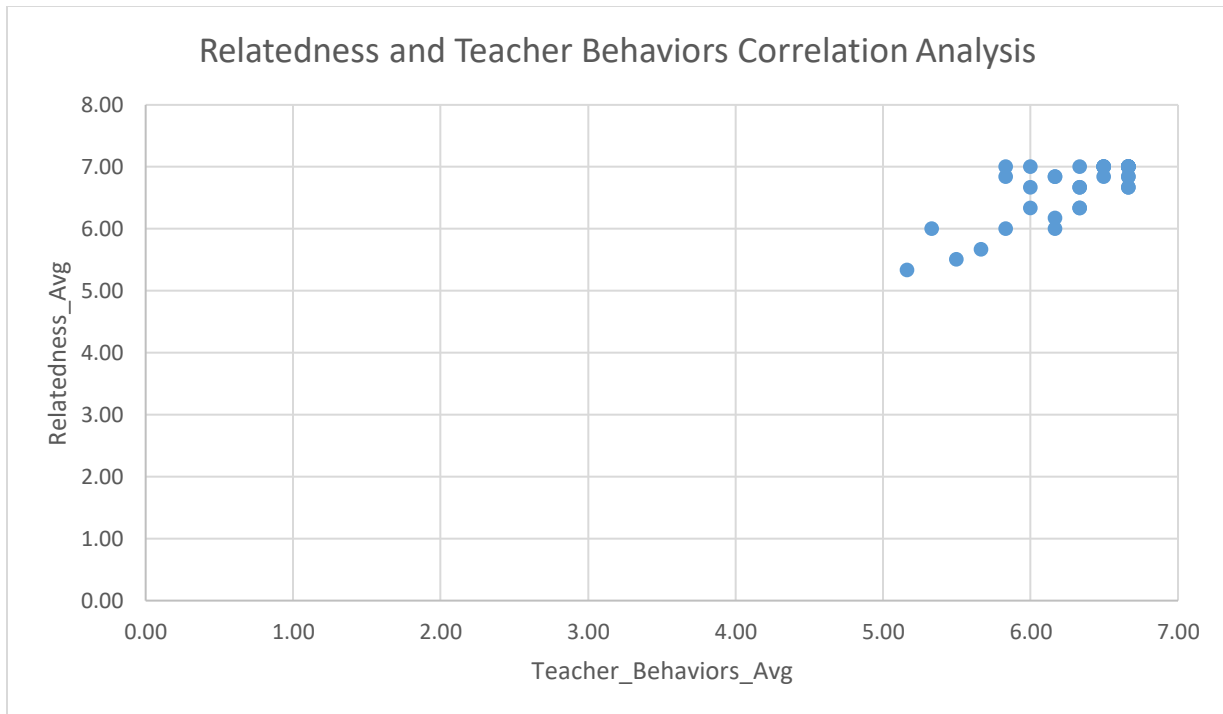


Relationship Between Teacher Behaviors and Relatedness

A significant positive correlation was also observed between teacher behaviors and students' perceived relatedness ($r = 0.773, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). Relatedness, or the sense of connection and belonging within a learning environment, is another core need within self-determination theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Students who perceive their instructors as empathetic, warm, and open tend to report a greater sense of relatedness, contributing to a supportive academic climate. Prior research suggests that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with students feeling valued, accepted, and respected, which can enhance their motivation to learn (Pianta et al., 2012). However, it is also possible that

students who already feel a strong sense of connection with their instructors are more likely to perceive teacher behaviors as supportive. This correlation highlights a meaningful relationship between teacher behaviors and students' sense of relatedness, though the directionality of this association cannot be determined. Figure 4.11 illustrates this data in a visual scatterplot.

Figure 4.11 - Hypothesis 3 (H3) Correlation Scatterplot



Relationship Between Autonomy and Competence

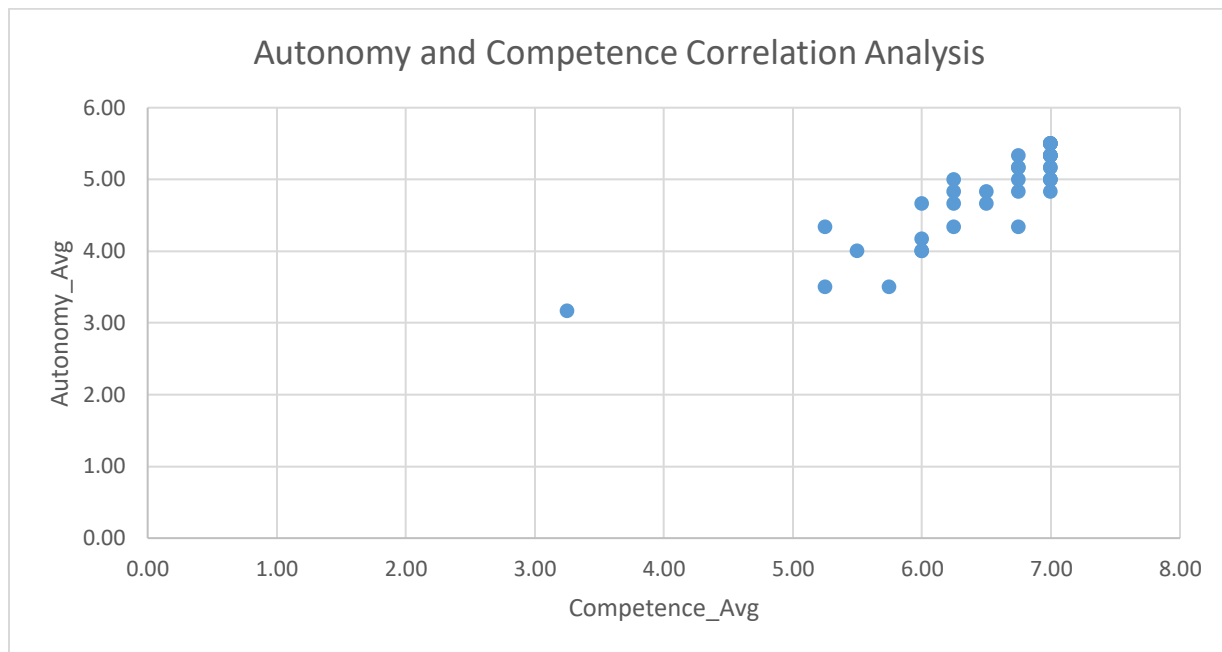
The correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive relationship between students' perceptions of autonomy and competence ($r = .86, p < .001$). This significant correlation indicates that students who perceive themselves as having greater autonomy in their learning are also likely to perceive themselves as more competent in their abilities. This finding aligns with the tenets of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), which posits that autonomy and competence are interrelated psychological needs that jointly contribute to intrinsic motivation and engagement.

The strength of the correlation ($r = .86$) suggests that autonomy and competence are closely connected constructs within the learning environment. A supportive context that fosters autonomy—such as providing meaningful choices, encouraging student input, and promoting independent thinking—may simultaneously enhance students’ sense of competence by affirming their abilities and promoting confidence in their skills (Reeve, 2013).

The 95% confidence interval for this correlation ranged from .76 to 1.00, further supports the reliability and significance of this relationship. This range indicates that the observed association is consistently strong, reflecting a robust connection between the two constructs across the sample.

This relationship highlights the importance of creating classroom environments that support both autonomy and competence. Instructors who encourage independence and self-direction while simultaneously providing constructive feedback and appropriately challenging tasks can holistically address these psychological needs, fostering greater motivation and engagement among students. Figure 4.12 illustrates this data in a visual scatterplot.

Figure 4.12 - Autonomy and Competence Correlation Analysis



Relationship Between Autonomy and Relatedness

The correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive relationship between students' perceptions of autonomy and relatedness ($r = .82, p < .001$). This significant finding indicates that students who feel a greater sense of autonomy in their learning also tend to feel more connected and supported within their learning environment. These results are consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), which posits that autonomy and relatedness are complementary psychological needs that collectively enhance students' motivation and engagement.

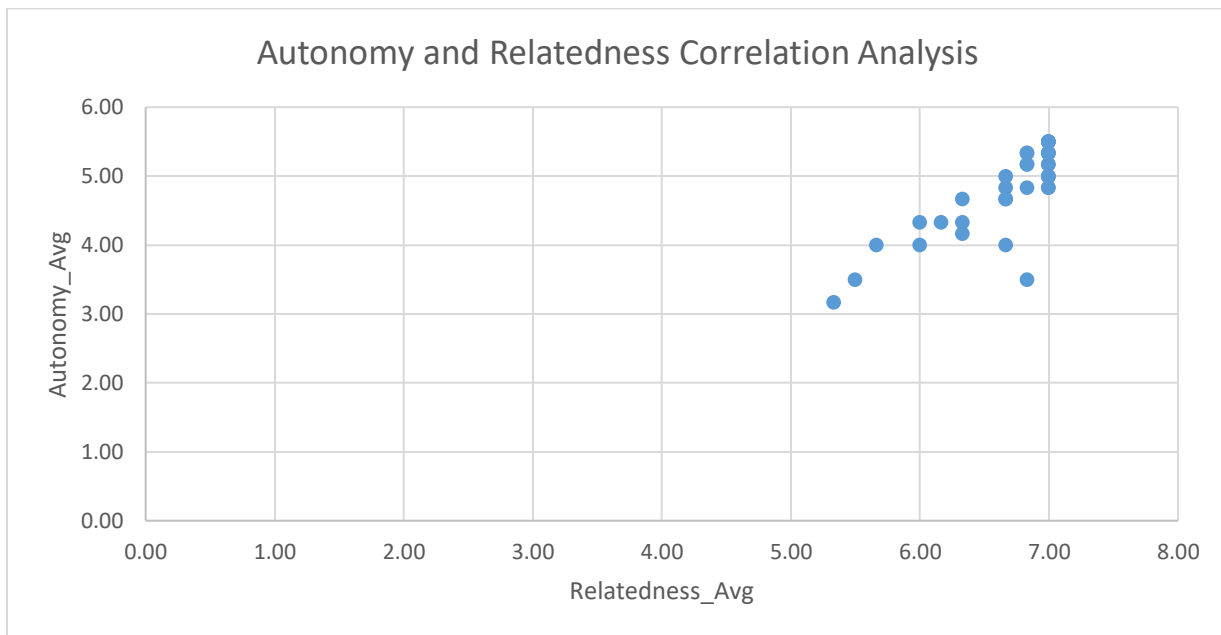
The magnitude of the correlation ($r = .82$) underscores the importance of fostering environments where students experience both independence and relational support. Autonomy-supportive practices, such as offering meaningful choices and encouraging self-expression, may also enhance students' perceptions of relatedness by demonstrating respect for their individuality and fostering trust. These dynamics reflect the interconnectedness of autonomy and relatedness,

as students who feel valued and understood are more likely to engage in self-directed learning (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

The 95% confidence interval for this correlation ranged from .70 to 1.000, confirming the strength and reliability of the observed relationship. This range validates the robustness of the connection between autonomy and relatedness across the sample, highlighting the theoretical alignment with self-determination constructs.

These findings suggest that classrooms that promote autonomy often simultaneously have students' who express a sense of belonging and connection. Instructors who balance independence with relational warmth and empathy create environments that satisfy both needs, ultimately fostering more meaningful and engaging learning experiences. Figure 4.13 illustrates this data in a visual scatterplot.

Figure 4.13 - Autonomy and Relatedness Correlation Analysis



Relationship Between Competence and Relatedness

The correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive relationship between students' perceptions of competence and relatedness ($r = .83, p < .001$). This significant finding indicates

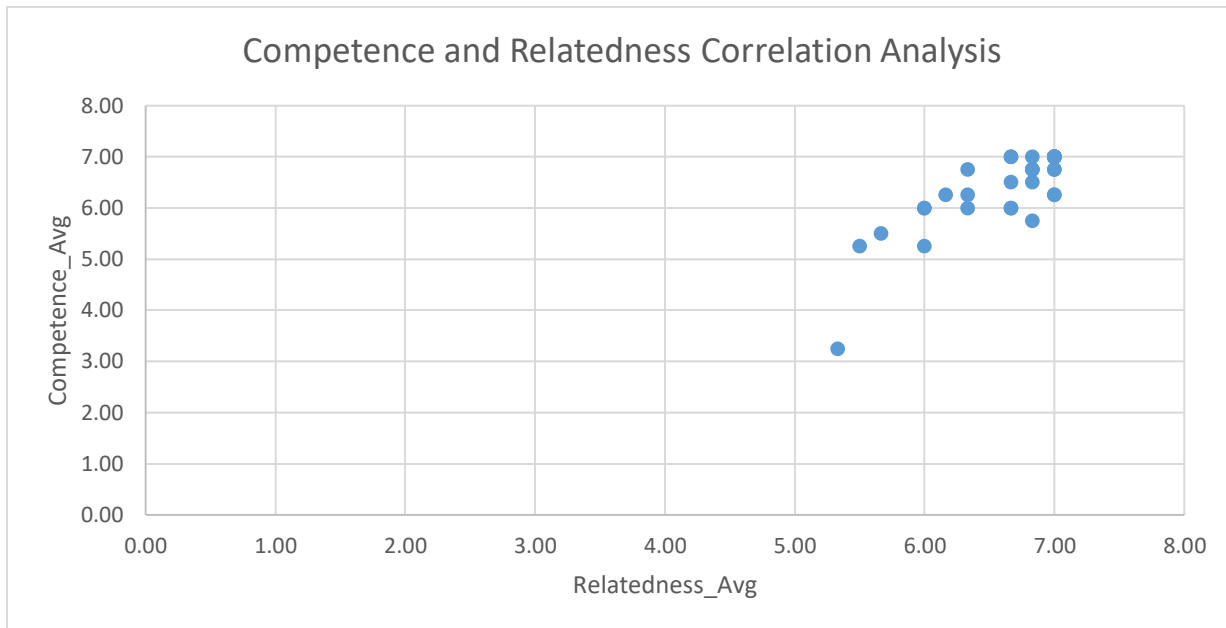
that students who feel confident in their academic abilities are also more likely to feel a sense of connection and belonging within their learning environment. These results align with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), which suggests that competence and relatedness are interconnected psychological needs that collectively support students' motivation and engagement.

The strength of the correlation ($r = .83$) underscores the important interplay between these constructs in shaping students' experiences. When students feel capable and confident in their abilities, they may be more inclined to engage positively with their peers and instructors, thereby fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging. Conversely, environments that nurture relatedness by promoting acceptance and respect may also enhance students' confidence in their skills, reinforcing their sense of competence (Niemi & Ryan, 2009).

The 95% confidence interval for this correlation ranged from .72 to 1.000, confirming the reliability and robustness of the observed relationship across the sample. This range provides additional validation of the strong connection between competence and relatedness.

These findings suggest that classroom environments designed to promote both competence and relatedness can have a mutually reinforcing effect. Teachers who provide constructive feedback and appropriately challenge students while simultaneously fostering positive and supportive relationships contribute to a more holistic satisfaction of these psychological needs, ultimately enhancing students' learning experiences and motivation. Figure 4.14 illustrates this data in a visual scatterplot.

Figure 4.14 - Competence and Relatedness Correlation Analysis



Summary of Correlation Findings

These findings strongly support each hypothesis and align with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), emphasizing the critical relationship between supportive teacher behaviors and autonomy, competence, and relatedness among students. The significant correlations highlight how teacher practices—such as fostering independence, offering constructive feedback, and building positive relationships—simultaneously address students’ psychological needs and enhance their engagement and motivation. These quantitative results establish a robust foundation for the qualitative analysis that follows, where the lived experiences of students will further illuminate the nuanced ways in which teacher behaviors influence self-determination in learning.

Qualitative Findings

This section presents the qualitative findings of the study, focusing on elementary teacher candidates' experiences and perceptions of teacher-student interactions within university-level

reading methods courses. The qualitative component of the study was designed to capture the nuances of students' experiences, particularly regarding how teacher behaviors influence their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness—key constructs within self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980). By engaging with students' narratives, the qualitative findings offer in-depth insights that enrich the understanding of patterns observed in the quantitative data. This section begins with a strategic review of the qualitative research methods used in the study, followed by a series of portraits that have been crafted to provide additional context and nuance to the interview data, and finally it concludes with a presentation of the qualitative findings themselves.

Review of Qualitative Methods

To gather detailed and personal accounts, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of survey respondents. This method allowed all ten participants to discuss their experiences with specific teacher behaviors and reflect on how these interactions impacted their motivation, engagement, and sense of connection within the course. Semi-structured interviews provided a flexible framework, allowing the interviewer to follow up on responses and explore topics in depth. This approach aligns with Patton's (2015) emphasis on capturing participants' perspectives through open-ended questioning, which is particularly valuable for identifying themes within complex social interactions.

The analysis followed a three-stage coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding phase, initial codes were generated from the data to capture distinct ideas and recurring concepts within participants' responses (Saldaña, 2016). This was followed by axial coding, where connections between these initial codes were identified and organized into broader categories, revealing underlying patterns and relationships. Finally,

selective coding was used to refine these categories into central themes that represent core aspects of students' experiences with teacher-student interactions. This structured coding process ensured a systematic and rigorous analysis of the data, supporting the identification of key themes that provide deeper insights into the relational dynamics influencing students' motivational orientations in the classroom.

Participant Portraiture

To provide context for the qualitative findings, the qualitative findings section is preceded by portraits of each participant, highlighting their unique educational backgrounds, personal motivations, and perspectives on teacher-student interactions. These portraits serve as an introduction to the voices and experiences that shape the study's qualitative insights, offering a glimpse into the diversity within the participant sample. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe, portraiture is a qualitative research approach that blends ethnographic and narrative techniques to capture the richness of participants' lived experiences. By presenting these brief narratives, the study foregrounds the individuality of each participant, enabling a richer understanding of how varied educational paths and personal challenges influence their perceptions of faculty support and instructional approaches. This approach not only humanizes the data but also contextualizes the themes that emerged during the coding process, helping readers appreciate the nuanced ways in which teacher behaviors impact each participant's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Jimmy

Jimmy, a transfer student from a community college, is pursuing his education degree with a unique perspective shaped by his experiences as one of the few male students in his children's literature class. With an early affinity for reading fostered by his mother, a teacher,

Jimmy faced challenges in comprehension due to ADHD. His interactions with supportive faculty have significantly influenced his confidence and motivation, particularly in settings where he felt individually recognized and encouraged. Jimmy values constructive feedback, both in real-time and through online platforms, and emphasizes the importance of open communication in building a trusting, motivating learning environment. His experience highlights the impact of positive relationships with instructors, which he credits with enhancing his confidence and application of instructional strategies in reading.

Jill

Jill, who also grew up with a teacher for a mother, developed strong foundational reading skills early on, though she often struggled with comprehension due to her tendency to read quickly. Jill's collegiate reading experiences, primarily in the education program, have been overwhelmingly positive, with a particular appreciation for instructors who provide clear, structured feedback and consistently communicate expectations. She is motivated by a blend of intrinsic interest in teaching and an extrinsic drive to excel academically, balancing her dedication to grades with a broader commitment to becoming an effective educator. Jill notes the benefits of an education program that emphasizes reflection, particularly through assignments designed to encourage ongoing self-assessment and adaptation of teaching strategies.

Molly

Molly's early experiences with reading in school were influenced by a system that prioritized testing and reading levels, which she felt detracted from her enjoyment. While she found pleasure in reading recreationally during summers, her structured school experiences were less positive. As a university student in reading methods courses, Molly values constructive feedback and a supportive atmosphere where teachers "have her back." She appreciates faculty

who provide reassurance, model instructional strategies, and encourage reflective practice. These interactions have helped her build confidence in her ability to teach reading and adapt instructional decisions to meet her students' needs.

Jennifer

Jennifer developed a strong foundation in reading early on and enjoyed the academic challenges posed by systems like the Accelerated Reader (AR) program. Her college reading courses have provided a space where she feels both supported and encouraged to engage deeply with instructional planning. Jennifer appreciates clear communication, both in-person and online, and finds that consistent feedback has helped her refine her instructional decisions and gain confidence. Her experiences reflect a positive, real-world orientation toward teaching, where she feels prepared to manage diverse student needs and adapt her teaching strategies as necessary.

Annie

Annie's journey as a reading student has evolved from an early love of narrative reading in elementary school to a rekindled appreciation for reading in high school, spurred by personal choice in reading material. Her college experience has been shaped by positive faculty interactions, particularly with instructors who provide individualized reading recommendations and supportive, accessible communication. Annie highly values constructive feedback, especially on practical assignments like lesson plans, which she sees as essential for her future teaching. This strong relational foundation with faculty has bolstered her confidence and influenced her teaching style, preparing her to apply these supportive dynamics in her own classroom.

Elle

Elle struggled with reading comprehension from a young age, often feeling pressured by school assignments that focused heavily on volume rather than understanding. In college, she has

found that the personal connections with faculty, particularly those who offer guidance and openness to questions, have helped her navigate these challenges. Elle values clear and direct feedback, especially in areas where she needs to reinforce her own skills, such as comprehension strategies for teaching. She believes that the encouragement to adapt and innovate during her micro-teaching experiences has increased her confidence and preparedness to manage diverse student needs in real-world classroom settings.

Maria

Maria recalls her early reading experiences as structured yet disengaging, especially during her elementary years with programs like Accelerated Reader (AR), which felt more focused on earning points than fostering a love for reading. Though her initial school experiences left her feeling disconnected from reading, her college interactions with supportive faculty have helped her build confidence. She values professors who encourage open communication and offer detailed feedback, especially on practical assignments like lesson planning. This encouragement has strengthened her motivation to take risks and learn through trial and error, fostering a sense of competence and readiness for real-world teaching challenges.

Ruth

With a background that spans a 15-year gap between high school and college, Ruth brings a unique perspective to her education courses. Her early academic experiences in reading were marked by a sense of competition and achievement, while her more recent college experiences have focused on the practical application of reading instruction. Ruth highly values professors who communicate consistently and provide actionable feedback, especially in courses where they model teaching techniques. She appreciates faculty who inspire her to make reading engaging for students, reflecting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in her desire to excel as

a future teacher. Her experiences highlight the value of practical guidance and mentorship in preparing her for classroom application.

Dee

Dee's reading journey began with a strong foundation at home, where she learned to read through regular story time with her parents. However, her school experiences in reading were sometimes overwhelming, as assignments like weekly spelling bingo felt time-intensive and exhausting. In her college reading methods courses, Dee values structured, in-person feedback and has found that professors who scaffold assignments and clarify expectations bolster her confidence in instructional planning. Dee emphasizes the importance of building relationships with professors, believing that strong rapport fosters better communication, openness, and ultimately a sense of readiness for teaching.

Lyla

Lyla faced challenges with reading from a young age, struggling with pacing and comprehension, particularly with dense, uninterrupted text. In college, she has benefited from faculty who accommodate her learning needs, such as through audio resources and flexible feedback. Face-to-face communication and adaptive strategies have been critical for her, as she finds these interactions help her better connect with content and professors. She attributes much of her motivation to professors who demonstrate excitement about reading, which she feels boosts her engagement and inspires her to excel. For Lyla, strong relationships with faculty are instrumental in building her confidence and helping her envision effective ways to keep future students engaged.

These portraits are intended to provide additional insights into each participant's unique educational background, setting a foundation for understanding the thematic findings. By

beginning with these individual stories, the study honors the diversity within the sample, contextualizing each participant's perspective as it informs the analysis of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Qualitative Findings from Interviews

Following the portraiture, which provide context for each participant's experiences, this section presents the qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with elementary teacher candidates, offering insight into their experiences with faculty support in university reading methods courses. These findings directly address the study's primary research question (R1): *How do university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses?* To explore this, the findings are structured around the three core constructs of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980)—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—as guiding themes, with each construct encompassing specific sub-themes derived from student responses.

Additionally, this section examines (R1a) by identifying the specific faculty behaviors and interactions that characterize positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in this context. The sub-themes reflect key aspects of faculty-student interactions that participants identified as influential, including the impact of choice in learning, constructive feedback, and supportive relationships. Furthermore, (R1b) is explored by analyzing how these relationships foster a sense of autonomy, influence candidates' perceptions of competence, and ultimately shape their self-determination in reading methods coursework.

By weaving participant voices throughout, this section aims to balance researcher narrative with authentic insights, ensuring that the findings remain deeply connected to the theoretical framework of SDT. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how

faculty behaviors contribute to students’ perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thus providing direct answers to the research questions and reinforcing the role of TSRs in supporting teacher candidates' motivation and engagement.

To provide a structured overview of the qualitative findings, Table 4.6 presents a summary of the key themes that emerged from participant responses. These themes are organized according to the three core constructs of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980)—autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The table also highlights which participants contributed to each theme and the ways in which these themes align with SDT principles. This summary serves as a guide for the subsequent discussion, where each theme is explored in greater depth with supporting participant narratives.

Table 4.6 - Summary of Qualitative Themes and Participant Alignment

SDT Construct	Theme	Participants Mentioned	Impact on SDT
Autonomy	Choice in Assignments and Learning Activities	Jimmy, Jill, Maria	Enhanced motivation and engagement through self-directed learning
Autonomy	Flexible Learning and Adaptability	Elle, Molly, Dee	Increased confidence and personal connection to learning
Autonomy	Encouragement of Independent Thinking and Reflection	Molly, Jennifer, Ruth	Strengthened self-awareness and critical thinking
Autonomy	Personal Responsibility and Ownership of Learning Outcomes	Dee, Annie, Ruth	Heightened sense of accountability and investment in learning
Competence	Constructive and Personalized Feedback	Annie, Jimmy, Dee	Reinforced competence through targeted support
Competence	Practical Skill Development	Jill, Jennifer, Molly	Developed real-world teaching confidence
Competence	Scaffolded Learning	Lyla, Elle, Jimmy	Gradual mastery of complex concepts
Competence	Recognition of Progress	Maria, Ruth, Annie	Validated student growth and persistence

Relatedness	Supportive and Approachable Faculty	Jimmy, Jill, Elle	Strengthened sense of belonging and support
Relatedness	Empathy and Understanding	Annie, Dee, Ruth	Increased student comfort and validation
Relatedness	Mentorship Beyond Academics	Molly, Jennifer, Maria	Encouraged long-term growth and professional confidence
Relatedness	Creating an Inclusive and Safe Learning Environment	Jill, Lyla, Annie	Fostered a respectful, welcoming learning space

Autonomy Themes

In the context of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), autonomy reflects students’ need for self-direction and a sense of agency within their learning environment. Across interviews, participants consistently highlighted the value of autonomy-supportive practices, specifically pointing to instances where faculty offered them choices, encouraged independent thinking, and fostered personal responsibility. This theme captures how various aspects of autonomy contributed to students’ motivation, engagement, and self-confidence in their academic journeys.

Choice in Assignments and Learning Activities

A key component of autonomy that emerged from student responses was the opportunity to make choices within assignments and learning activities. Participants frequently expressed that having options allowed them to tailor their learning experiences to align with their interests and goals. Jimmy, for example, described how selecting reading materials that resonated with him made him “more invested” in the course. He explained, “When I got to pick books that matched my interests, I felt like I had a say in my education, and that made me care more about what I was doing.” This sense of control over his learning choices empowered Jimmy to take ownership of his academic journey, fueling a deeper engagement with the material.

Jill echoed this sentiment, noting that being able to customize certain assignments made her “feel like [she] had a voice.” She mentioned a specific project where she could choose the

focus of her research, which allowed her to explore a topic she was passionate about. “Having that choice,” Jill shared, “made me feel like I was contributing something meaningful rather than just completing an assignment.” This experience reinforced her sense of agency, as she was able to approach the assignment in a way that felt personally significant. Maria also emphasized the importance of choice, sharing that she felt “more connected to [her] learning” when given the opportunity to select a topic or method of presentation. For Maria, choice was not just about flexibility but also about connecting her work to her own interests and goals as a future educator.

Participants consistently highlighted how instances of choice within assignments led to increased motivation and engagement, as they felt more in control of their learning paths. By offering these opportunities, faculty members reinforced students’ self-direction, allowing them to shape their learning experiences in ways that were both relevant and fulfilling.

The freedom to choose assignments and topics reflects SDT’s emphasis on autonomy, as it allows students to feel a sense of control and agency over their learning. By offering options, faculty reinforce students’ self-direction, which can increase intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement with the content.

Flexible Learning and Adaptability

Flexibility in instructional methods was another aspect of autonomy that participants valued highly. Many students spoke about the importance of adaptability, particularly when instructors adjusted assignments or methods to meet individual learning needs. Elle, who has struggled with traditional formats, expressed her appreciation for “alternative assignments” that allowed her to demonstrate understanding in ways that suited her learning style. She explained, “Having different ways to show understanding helped me feel more confident and engaged. It was like the professor was saying, ‘I see you and how you learn best.’” For Elle, this flexibility

not only reinforced her sense of autonomy but also made her feel validated in her individual learning needs.

Molly also appreciated this flexibility, noting that her instructor's openness to multiple approaches "made learning feel more personal." She shared an experience where her professor allowed students to choose between a written report or a presentation for a final project. Molly chose the presentation format, which allowed her to engage more deeply with the material. "It was less restrictive," she noted, "and I could focus on what mattered to me without feeling boxed in by one format." For Molly, this choice allowed her to approach the content in a way that resonated with her personal learning style, fostering a stronger connection to the subject matter.

Dee, who had similar experiences with adaptable learning approaches, described how being able to choose different methods of assessment made her feel respected and seen as an individual. "When my professor gave options, it felt like she understood that not everyone learns the same way," Dee reflected. This respect for individual learning preferences was integral to her sense of autonomy, as it allowed her to engage in a way that felt authentic and manageable. Flexible learning approaches thus served as a crucial component in fostering students' ownership over their learning, empowering them to choose paths that aligned with their strengths and interests.

Participants' appreciation for flexible learning approaches aligns with SDT's concept of autonomy, as adaptable instruction respects individual learning preferences and allows students to engage in ways that feel personally relevant. This flexibility fosters a sense of ownership, empowering students to approach tasks confidently.

Encouragement of Independent Thinking and Reflection

Faculty encouragement of independent thinking and reflective practice was also central to participants' experiences of autonomy. Molly described how assignments requiring self-reflection and personal analysis helped her "understand [her] own growth" and feel "more prepared to adapt [her] teaching." She noted that reflective assignments encouraged her to think critically about her learning process, fostering a sense of ownership and control over her development. "It wasn't just about getting a grade," she explained, "it was about seeing how far I'd come and where I wanted to go." For Molly, these opportunities for introspection helped her see the value in her learning journey, reinforcing her sense of autonomy.

Jennifer shared a similar experience, explaining that assignments designed to prompt critical thinking helped her feel more empowered in her decision-making. "Being asked to think critically about my instructional decisions made me feel like I was really in charge of my learning," she noted. Jennifer emphasized that the freedom to analyze and adjust her own approach as she saw fit was "incredibly empowering" because it allowed her to view her progress as a series of personal choices. This approach fostered her confidence in making independent instructional decisions, which she found essential for her growth as a future teacher.

Additionally, Ruth reflected on how the encouragement to engage in independent thinking fostered her self-reliance. She shared, "When my professor asked us to analyze our own strengths and areas for improvement, it made me feel responsible for my growth." For Ruth, the emphasis on independent reflection reinforced her sense of control over her learning outcomes, allowing her to set personal goals based on her insights. By promoting reflective practices and encouraging independent thinking, faculty members supported students' development of self-directed learning skills, contributing to a robust sense of autonomy.

Encouraging independent thinking and reflection supports students' need for autonomy by validating their unique perspectives and fostering self-directed growth. This approach is consistent with SDT's emphasis on nurturing autonomy through promoting self-awareness and personal insights.

Personal Responsibility and Ownership of Learning Outcomes

Participants frequently linked autonomy with a sense of personal responsibility for their academic success. Dee noted that when given autonomy, she felt a stronger sense of accountability. "When I had more control over my assignments, I felt like my success was up to me," she explained, adding that this responsibility made her "more invested in doing well." This sense of personal accountability was highly motivating for Dee, as it connected her efforts directly to her achievements, fostering an intrinsic drive to succeed.

Annie expressed a similar sentiment, describing how having autonomy led her to take ownership of her learning outcomes. "When I'm responsible for choosing my own path, I know I'm the one who will benefit or suffer from it," she reflected. This realization drove Annie to approach her coursework with greater intentionality, as she felt that her choices had tangible consequences for her progress. Ruth also mentioned feeling "more committed to doing well" when she had control over her learning experiences, as she could clearly see the link between her actions and her academic growth.

For many participants, autonomy-supportive environments enabled them to connect their actions with their learning outcomes, fostering a powerful sense of personal responsibility. This sense of ownership was not only motivating but also reinforced participants' belief in their capacity to influence their educational journeys. By promoting personal accountability, faculty

members cultivated an environment in which students felt both empowered and responsible for their success.

When students connect their efforts with outcomes, they experience a strong sense of autonomy, as described in SDT. By fostering environments where students feel responsible for their success, faculty encourage intrinsic motivation and resilience, reinforcing students' belief in their ability to direct their academic journeys.

Competence Themes

In SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), competence refers to the need for individuals to feel effective and capable in their activities. Participants consistently described how competence-supportive faculty practices—such as providing personalized feedback, offering practical skill-building opportunities, and recognizing progress—reinforced their confidence and readiness to become effective educators. This theme captures how constructive and targeted instructional support fostered a sense of mastery, empowering students to approach challenges with self-assurance.

Constructive and Personalized Feedback

Participants frequently emphasized the impact of receiving constructive, personalized feedback from faculty. Many students expressed that detailed and timely feedback not only clarified areas for improvement but also reinforced their sense of competence by affirming their strengths. Annie described how feedback that was “specific and actionable” allowed her to understand her progress more clearly. “When my professor pointed out exactly what I did well and where I could improve,” she explained, “it made me feel like I was really capable of refining my skills.” This type of feedback helped Annie build confidence, as she felt supported in identifying both her strengths and areas for growth.

Jimmy echoed this sentiment, noting that feedback on lesson plans was particularly valuable. “I appreciated when my professor didn’t just tell me what was wrong but actually suggested ways to make it better,” he said. For Jimmy, having concrete suggestions empowered him to take corrective action and approach similar tasks with greater confidence in the future. Dee also highlighted the motivational power of personalized feedback, explaining that it “reinforced [her] sense of direction and purpose.” She described feeling “more equipped” to handle future challenges after understanding how her instructors perceived her efforts. This detailed feedback, tailored to individual students, was integral to their experience of competence, as it provided them with clear and achievable steps for improvement.

For many students, constructive feedback went beyond evaluation; it offered guidance that affirmed their capabilities and potential. By focusing on specific aspects of student performance, faculty feedback helped students see their progress tangibly, reinforcing their belief in their ability to succeed in their educational journey.

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) posits that competence is nurtured when individuals receive clear, actionable feedback that builds their confidence and skills. Personalized feedback enhances students’ belief in their abilities, motivating them to improve and fostering a sustained sense of competence.

Practical Skill Development

Practical skill development emerged as a crucial element in fostering competence, as participants described feeling more capable when they had opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in guided, hands-on settings. Jill shared that working through sample lesson plans and receiving feedback on these exercises allowed her to “see [her] strengths and where [she]

needed to build more skills.” She emphasized that the chance to practice in a supportive environment made her “feel more prepared and capable” to teach in real-world scenarios.

Similarly, Jennifer described how guided teaching simulations helped her develop a sense of competence. “Having a chance to practice my lessons in a classroom setting, even if it was with peers, was incredibly valuable,” she explained. “It felt like my professor was preparing me to actually handle real classroom situations.” The hands-on experience allowed Jennifer to transition from theory to application, giving her a sense of accomplishment and confidence in her ability to teach. Molly shared a similar perspective, noting that these practice opportunities “made the abstract concepts feel real and manageable.” She explained that applying theories in a structured setting helped her “grasp the material more fully” and strengthened her belief in her ability to succeed in the classroom.

Through guided practice, students gained a tangible sense of their skills, as they could directly observe their progress in real-time. The practical application of theoretical knowledge enabled them to build competence incrementally, reinforcing their readiness and self-efficacy as future educators.

Hands-on practice allows students to build confidence in their teaching skills, which is central to developing competence in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980). The chance to apply theory in a structured setting reinforces their sense of capability, bridging the gap between knowledge and practical application.

Scaffolded Learning

Participants appreciated tasks that were appropriately challenging and supported by instructor scaffolding, as these activities allowed them to gradually build competence in a way that felt achievable. Lyla, for example, described how her professor would “start with smaller

tasks and then layer on complexity as we became more confident.” This gradual approach to learning helped her “feel more comfortable tackling difficult concepts,” as each step felt manageable and aligned with her current abilities. She noted, “It felt like I was learning at my own pace, with the right amount of support along the way.”

Elle also found this scaffolded approach valuable, explaining that her instructor introduced new techniques in stages, which “made it easier to build [her] skills without feeling overwhelmed.” This incremental approach allowed her to practice foundational skills before moving to more complex tasks, reinforcing her confidence with each level of mastery achieved. Jimmy echoed the benefits of scaffolded learning, sharing that his professor “knew just when to push us and when to step back.” He described how this balance between support and independence helped him tackle challenging assignments with greater assurance, knowing that he could rely on his instructor’s guidance if needed.

Incremental challenges, supported by scaffolding, provided students with structured opportunities to enhance their competence at a manageable pace. This approach allowed participants to experience success progressively, which reinforced their confidence and commitment to mastering the skills necessary for their roles as future educators.

Introducing tasks incrementally, with appropriate support, aligns with SDT’s (Deci & Ryan, 1980) emphasis on competence. Scaffolding helps students approach challenges progressively, allowing them to experience success at each stage and strengthening their confidence in their evolving skills.

Recognition of Progress

Another significant factor contributing to students’ sense of competence was the recognition of their growth over time. Many participants expressed how impactful it was when

faculty acknowledged their improvement, as it validated their hard work and reinforced their belief in their capabilities. Maria shared that hearing her professor acknowledge her progress “made [her] feel seen” and provided encouragement to continue building her skills. “It wasn’t just about where I was at that moment,” she explained, “but about how far I had come.” This recognition gave her a renewed motivation to keep improving, as she felt her efforts were noticed and valued.

Ruth, who returned to college after a long break, found this acknowledgment of growth particularly meaningful. “It’s easy to doubt yourself when you’re coming back to school after so many years,” she noted. “But when my professor highlighted how much I’d improved, it made me feel like I was on the right track.” For Ruth, having her progress recognized helped alleviate self-doubt, allowing her to focus on her strengths and development. Annie also described the importance of growth recognition, sharing that her instructor’s acknowledgment of her progress “reinforced [her] confidence” and reminded her of her potential. This external validation reinforced Annie’s sense of competence, as she felt her hard work was seen and appreciated by those guiding her educational journey.

For many students, recognition of their growth over time was a powerful source of motivation, as it validated their efforts and reinforced their self-confidence. Faculty acknowledgment of progress provided students with a sense of accomplishment and underscored their belief in their capabilities, making them feel capable and prepared for the next stages of their journey.

Acknowledging progress over time validates students’ efforts, reinforcing their sense of competence as highlighted in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980). When faculty recognize growth,

students feel valued and capable, which motivates them to continue improving and persist through challenges.

Relatedness Themes

In Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), relatedness encompasses the need for connection, support, and belonging within a learning environment. Participants frequently emphasized the impact of relational support from faculty, noting that approachable, empathetic, and inclusive instructors made them feel valued and engaged. This theme captures how supportive faculty relationships contributed to students' motivation, engagement, and sense of security, fostering an environment where students felt connected and understood.

Supportive and Approachable

A prominent aspect of relatedness identified by participants was the importance of approachable faculty who demonstrated genuine interest in their success. Many students shared that open, supportive interactions with instructors made them feel comfortable and valued. Jimmy described his professor as “always approachable and willing to help,” adding, “it made a big difference just knowing I could ask questions without feeling judged.” This sense of openness not only facilitated Jimmy's engagement with the course but also helped him feel connected to the learning process, as he felt his professor was invested in his development.

Jill shared a similar experience, noting that her professor's approachability made her feel more confident in seeking guidance. “Knowing my professor was there to support me whenever I needed it really motivated me to push harder,” she explained. Jill felt that her instructor's willingness to offer guidance showed a genuine commitment to her growth, reinforcing her belief in her ability to succeed. For Elle, an approachable instructor played a crucial role in her feeling “seen and heard” as a student. She mentioned how her professor would regularly check in with

students, asking if they needed help or had questions. “Just that small act of asking how we were doing made a huge difference,” she said, underscoring the value of open, supportive communication in fostering relatedness.

Across interviews, students highlighted how approachable faculty helped them feel more connected and engaged, as they felt comfortable seeking support and guidance. This approachability reinforced students’ sense of belonging and motivation, as they felt valued and respected within the academic setting.

These accounts demonstrate how faculty approachability fosters a sense of relatedness, as theorized by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980). When students feel their instructors are open and supportive, they experience an increased sense of belonging and connection, key factors that enhance their motivation and engagement in the academic environment.

Empathy and Understanding

Participants frequently noted the importance of faculty empathy, especially during challenging times. Many students appreciated instructors who acknowledged and responded to their struggles, as this empathy made them feel understood and supported. Annie shared an experience where her professor noticed she was having a difficult time and took the initiative to reach out. “My professor could tell I was stressed, and she checked in to see how I was doing,” she recalled. “It made me feel like she really cared about me as a person, not just as a student.” This empathy strengthened Annie’s sense of connection to her instructor and helped her feel more supported in navigating academic challenges.

Dee echoed the value of empathetic faculty, sharing that instructors who understood the pressures of balancing academics and personal life made her feel validated. “It helps a lot when professors show they understand that life can get overwhelming,” Dee explained. “Knowing they

see us as people, with our own challenges, makes me feel like I belong here.” For Dee, empathy was a critical component of feeling included and respected within the learning environment. Similarly, Ruth shared that when her professor acknowledged her unique challenges as a returning student, it made her feel “respected and understood.” She noted that this empathy allowed her to connect with her professor on a personal level, which encouraged her to remain committed to her studies.

Empathy from faculty members contributed significantly to students’ sense of relatedness, helping them feel seen, understood, and supported during both academic and personal challenges. This empathy reinforced their sense of belonging, as students felt that their experiences and struggles were acknowledged by those guiding their education.

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) emphasizes the need for relatedness, which is strengthened when faculty show empathy and understanding toward students’ challenges. By acknowledging and validating these experiences, faculty make students feel seen and respected, fostering a supportive learning atmosphere.

Mentorship Beyond Academics

Many students described the impact of faculty who provided mentorship beyond the traditional scope of academics, offering guidance on career paths, personal development, or navigating future challenges. For Molly, one professor’s mentorship extended to career advice, helping her explore various teaching options. “She didn’t just teach the course,” Molly said. “She took the time to discuss my future goals and how I could get there.” This mentorship contributed to Molly’s sense of relatedness, as she felt supported in her broader professional journey, not just within the course.

Jennifer shared a similar experience, explaining that her professor often offered encouragement beyond academics. “He would give us advice on how to handle real-life classroom situations, not just theoretical stuff,” she explained. “It made me feel like he cared about our success as future teachers, not just students in his class.” Jennifer felt that this mentorship strengthened her bond with her professor, as she viewed him as an ally invested in her long-term success. Maria also valued mentorship that extended beyond academic concerns, sharing how her instructor provided personal encouragement during difficult times. “My professor took the time to check in with me personally, which made me feel more confident and supported,” she noted, underscoring the importance of relational support that transcended the classroom.

For many students, mentorship provided a profound sense of connection and motivation, as faculty members demonstrated commitment to their long-term success. This guidance helped students feel understood and supported, reinforcing their sense of belonging and inspiring them to approach future challenges with confidence.

When faculty extend mentorship beyond academics, they fulfill students’ need for relatedness by demonstrating genuine care for their overall success. This relational support, highlighted in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), encourages students to engage more fully and persist in their educational and career aspirations.

Creating an Inclusive and Safe Learning Environment

Participants frequently mentioned the importance of feeling safe and accepted within their learning environment, especially in courses that encouraged open discussion and self-expression. Many students appreciated instructors who created inclusive, non-judgmental spaces where they felt comfortable sharing ideas and expressing concerns. Jill described how her

professor “set the tone for inclusivity” by encouraging all students to participate without fear of judgment. “It was a space where everyone’s voice mattered,” she said, adding that this inclusivity made her feel “valued and respected.” For Jill, this safe environment was essential to feeling connected to her classmates and instructor.

Lyla, who had previously struggled with self-expression, shared that her professor’s inclusive approach helped her feel more comfortable participating in discussions. “I never felt judged, even when I was unsure of my answer,” she explained. “Knowing my professor valued all perspectives made me feel like I belonged.” This safe, accepting environment allowed Lyla to build her confidence and engage more fully with course content. Annie also highlighted the impact of inclusivity, noting that her professor’s commitment to fostering a respectful classroom helped her feel more connected to the learning community. “It wasn’t just about respecting the professor; it was about respecting each other,” she shared, emphasizing how this mutual respect reinforced her sense of relatedness.

Creating an inclusive and safe environment was crucial to fostering relatedness, as it allowed students to feel comfortable, respected, and valued within the academic space. This inclusivity encouraged open communication and collaboration, reinforcing students’ sense of belonging and connection to their learning community.

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) underscores the importance of relatedness within inclusive, safe environments, where students feel accepted and valued. By fostering non-judgmental spaces, faculty allow students to express themselves freely, reinforcing their sense of belonging and encouraging active participation.

Mixed-Methods Integration

In this section, findings from the quantitative and qualitative components of the study are integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of teacher-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in university-level reading methods courses. The mixed-methods approach enables a nuanced exploration, capturing both the breadth of quantitative survey data and the depth of qualitative interview insights. By comparing and triangulating these findings, the study aims to reveal not only statistical patterns but also the personal narratives that illuminate those patterns.

The mixed-methods design was employed to examine how Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) constructs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are related to teacher behaviors in ways that quantitative or qualitative data alone might not fully capture. While the quantitative data offer a broad overview of significant relationships, qualitative findings add depth by revealing the specific ways in which students experience these relationships. This integration provides a richer and more complex understanding of how teacher-student interactions shape student motivation and engagement within the academic context.

This section begins with a comparison of quantitative and qualitative findings, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence. By examining where data from each method align or contrast, a clearer picture emerges of how teacher behaviors contribute to students' motivational constructs. This is followed by a triangulation of results, where both data sets are synthesized to create a cohesive understanding of the role of teacher-student relationships in fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This integrated approach not only validates the

findings across data types but also enhances the study's ability to inform best practices in supporting student motivation through relational and instructional strategies.

Autonomy Findings

The construct of autonomy, central to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), reflects students' need for self-direction and agency within their learning environments. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative findings reveal how autonomy-supportive teacher behaviors are positively correlated with students' experiences, although some complexities and challenges emerge from the qualitative data that add depth to this understanding.

Convergence of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative survey data analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between autonomy and supportive teacher behaviors, suggesting that students feel more independent and motivated when they perceive their instructors as fostering choice and self-direction in the classroom. This pattern aligns with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), which posits that autonomy-supportive environments are correlated with intrinsic motivation, as students feel they are engaging in meaningful learning experiences that align with their personal goals and preferences.

The qualitative findings further support these quantitative patterns, offering insight into the specific ways in which autonomy-supportive practices manifest in students' educational experiences. Participants consistently highlighted the positive impact of having choices in assignments and learning activities, which allowed them to align tasks with their interests and goals. For example, students described how the ability to select topics or methods for assignments not only deepened their engagement but also fostered a sense of ownership over their learning journey. Molly expressed how being able to choose between written and presentation formats for a final project enabled her to approach the content in a way that felt

personally meaningful, reinforcing her investment in the course. Similarly, Jimmy shared how selecting books that resonated with his personal interests increased his motivation, making him feel more connected and engaged in his academic experience.

Another theme that emerged from qualitative data is students' appreciation for flexible learning approaches. Several participants noted that when instructors adapted assignments or provided alternative formats, they felt a greater sense of autonomy. Elle, for instance, valued "alternative assignments" that allowed her to demonstrate understanding in ways that matched her learning style. This flexibility was not only empowering but also reinforced her confidence, as she felt her instructor respected and understood her individual learning preferences. These qualitative insights align with the quantitative data, reinforcing the view that autonomy-supportive practices, such as choice and flexibility, contribute significantly to students' sense of agency and motivation.

Divergence in Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

While quantitative findings showed overall high levels of autonomy among students, qualitative insights revealed a more nuanced picture, highlighting certain challenges that arise even within autonomy-supportive environments. Despite the general sense of independence indicated by relatively high mean scores on autonomy, some students in interviews expressed difficulties in fully internalizing this autonomy, particularly when it came to managing personal responsibility.

For example, Jill reflected on her struggle to balance the freedom of choice with the responsibility it entailed. Although she valued the opportunity to customize certain assignments, she noted that this autonomy sometimes created pressure, as she felt personally accountable for her learning outcomes. This sentiment reveals that autonomy, while generally positive, can be

challenging for some students as it requires a high level of self-regulation and responsibility. For Jill, the ability to make choices was empowering, but it also introduced an element of stress, as she felt that her success or failure was solely in her hands.

Similarly, Maria shared that while she appreciated having choices, the lack of clear structure occasionally left her feeling overwhelmed. This contrast suggests that autonomy, while beneficial, may require additional support from instructors to help students navigate the challenges of self-directed learning. These narratives add depth to the quantitative data by highlighting that autonomy-supportive practices are most effective when balanced with guidance and support that can assist students in managing their responsibilities.

Summary of Autonomy Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings illustrates that autonomy-supportive teacher behaviors are significantly and meaningfully related to students' sense of self-direction and agency. While the analysis of survey data revealed the positive relationship between these variables, qualitative insights reveal the layered experiences of students, who both value and sometimes struggle with the responsibility that comes with autonomy. This convergence and divergence underscore the importance of autonomy-supportive environments that not only provide choice and flexibility but also offer guidance to help students internalize this independence constructively.

Competence Findings

Competence, according to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) reflects students' need to feel effective and capable in their learning activities. Both quantitative and qualitative findings in this study indicate that teacher behaviors play a critical role in fostering students' sense of competence, with constructive feedback, skill-building opportunities, and supportive guidance

emerging as key factors. However, some nuanced challenges related to competence also surfaced in the qualitative data, providing additional depth to the quantitative findings.

Convergence of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The analysis of quantitative survey data revealed a strong positive correlation between teacher support and students' sense of competence, indicating that supportive instructional practices are positively related to students' confidence in their academic abilities. This result aligns with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), which posits that competence-supportive environments enable students to feel capable, motivated, and resilient in facing academic challenges.

Qualitative data reinforce these quantitative patterns, as participants consistently emphasized the importance of constructive and personalized feedback in building their confidence. Many students described how detailed, timely feedback helped them recognize their strengths and areas for growth, making them feel more capable in their teaching roles. For instance, Annie shared that feedback on her lesson plans was “specific and actionable,” allowing her to refine her skills with a clear understanding of what she was doing well and what needed improvement. This constructive guidance empowered her, reinforcing her belief in her ability to excel. Similarly, Jimmy appreciated feedback that included practical suggestions for improvement, which helped him approach tasks with greater confidence. These experiences underscore how qualitative insights confirm the quantitative finding that teacher support enhances students' sense of competence.

Practical skill-building opportunities, such as guided practice and hands-on learning, also surfaced as vital components of competence in the qualitative data. Several participants highlighted how exercises like teaching simulations and lesson planning provided them with a sense of preparedness for real-world teaching scenarios. Jill, for instance, mentioned that

working through sample lesson plans helped her “see [her] strengths and where [she] needed to build more skills,” which made her feel increasingly prepared to handle the demands of teaching. This hands-on experience, combined with supportive feedback, helped participants feel more confident in applying theoretical knowledge, further reinforcing the quantitative strength of the competence construct.

Divergence in Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

While quantitative findings generally indicated high levels of competence among students, some qualitative insights reveal a more complex picture, with certain students expressing lower levels of confidence or consistency in their perceived competence. For instance, although most participants described feeling competent when receiving regular, constructive feedback, a few students mentioned challenges stemming from inconsistent feedback or varied teaching styles.

Elle, for example, shared that when feedback was delayed or lacked specificity, she felt uncertain about her progress and less confident in her skills. This sentiment suggests that while constructive feedback generally supports competence, inconsistencies in its delivery may hinder some students’ ability to feel fully capable. Such variations in feedback may not be captured in the quantitative data, which assesses competence on a broader scale, but qualitative insights reveal that the regularity and clarity of feedback play a crucial role in maintaining students’ confidence.

Moreover, differences in teaching styles emerged as another factor influencing competence perceptions. Ruth noted that while some instructors provided clear guidance and step-by-step support, others took a more hands-off approach, which sometimes left her feeling less prepared. This variation in instructional methods highlights a potential area of divergence

between quantitative and qualitative findings, as the quantitative data may not capture these subtleties in teaching approaches that influence students' sense of competence.

Summary of Competence Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that competence-supportive teacher behaviors, such as personalized feedback and practical skill-building opportunities, substantially are positively related to students' confidence in their academic abilities. While the analysis of survey data indicated generally high levels of competence, qualitative narratives revealed that the consistency and style of support can significantly impact students' confidence. These findings highlight the importance of regular, specific feedback and structured skill-building exercises in fostering competence, while also pointing to the need for greater consistency in instructional practices to support all students effectively.

Relatedness Findings

Within SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), relatedness refers to the need for a sense of connection and belonging, particularly in a supportive academic environment. Both quantitative and qualitative findings in this study underscore the significance of teacher approachability, empathy, and inclusivity in fostering students' sense of relatedness. While the analysis of quantitative data revealed strong correlations between teacher support and students' feelings of connection, qualitative insights provided a more nuanced understanding of how relatedness manifests and highlight certain complexities that may not be fully captured in survey responses.

Convergence of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative survey analyses showed a strong positive correlation between teacher approachability and students' sense of relatedness, suggesting that supportive, open instructor behaviors may help students feel valued and included in their academic setting. This finding

aligns with SDT's (Deci & Ryan, 1980) assertion that relational support enhances motivation by fulfilling students' need for connection within their learning environment.

Qualitative data reinforce these quantitative patterns, as participants frequently described feeling a sense of connection and belonging when instructors displayed approachability and empathy. Jimmy, for instance, spoke highly of his professor's openness and willingness to offer help, which made him feel comfortable and valued. "Just knowing I could ask questions without feeling judged made a big difference," he explained, highlighting how approachability fostered his sense of belonging in the course. Jill echoed this sentiment, sharing that her professor's willingness to support her when she faced challenges reinforced her motivation and confidence, as she felt her success mattered to her instructor. These experiences confirm the quantitative finding that approachable, empathetic faculty support students' relatedness.

The qualitative findings further illustrate how inclusivity contributes to relatedness. Participants shared that instructors who fostered a safe, inclusive classroom environment allowed them to engage more fully, feeling respected and supported by both peers and faculty. Lyla, who often struggled with self-expression, appreciated the inclusive approach her professor took, ensuring that all students felt comfortable sharing their perspectives. This inclusive dynamic strengthened her sense of connection to her instructor and classmates, reinforcing her engagement. Such examples in the qualitative data align with quantitative results by showing that inclusive, approachable teachers fulfill students' need for relatedness, enhancing their connection to the learning environment.

Divergence in Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

While quantitative findings generally indicated high levels of relatedness, certain qualitative insights revealed variation in students' experiences, reflecting the nuanced ways that

relatedness is interpreted and achieved. Some participants expressed that while they generally felt connected to their instructors, differences in teacher engagement or empathy levels influenced the strength of this connection. These accounts offer additional context to the quantitative data, shedding light on potential factors contributing to varying levels of relatedness.

For instance, Maria described feeling less connected in courses where her instructor's engagement was limited to academic content without extending to personal support. She shared that, although she respected the instructor's expertise, the lack of personal connection sometimes left her feeling less engaged. This distinction suggests that while quantitative data capture a general sense of relatedness, qualitative insights reveal that the depth of connection varies based on the extent of instructors' personal involvement.

Additionally, some participants expressed a need for mentorship that went beyond classroom support, adding another layer to how relatedness can be experienced. For example, Molly appreciated instructors who not only provided academic support but also offered career advice and personal encouragement. "She didn't just teach us," Molly explained. "She cared about our future and what we wanted to achieve." This mentoring aspect of relatedness, which extends beyond the classroom, highlights a unique interpretation of relatedness that might not be fully captured by survey metrics focused solely on classroom dynamics. Such insights illustrate that relatedness encompasses more than approachability; for some students, it also includes mentorship and guidance that address their broader educational and career goals.

Summary of Relatedness Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings shows that teacher approachability, empathy, and inclusivity play essential roles in fostering students' sense of relatedness. Analysis of survey data bolstered the connection between supportive teacher

behaviors and students' sense of connection, while qualitative insights reveal the varied dimensions of relatedness, such as mentorship and inclusive classroom practices. This convergence and divergence emphasize the importance of understanding relatedness as a multi-dimensional construct, shaped by both academic and personal support, and highlight how tailored, empathetic interactions deepen students' sense of belonging and motivation in the academic environment.

Triangulation of Results

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings offers a cohesive, multi-dimensional view of teacher-student relationships and their impact on students' motivation within SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) constructs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—in university-level reading methods courses. Through triangulation, the study combines the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative narratives, creating a comprehensive understanding of how teacher behaviors shape students' educational experiences and motivational orientations.

Enhanced Validity and Depth

By synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative data, this study reinforces the validity of its findings, offering a robust basis for interpreting the dynamics of teacher-student relationships. Quantitative data reveal significant correlations between teacher behaviors and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) constructs, showing general trends that underscore the importance of autonomy-supportive, competence-building, and relationally supportive behaviors. This broad perspective establishes clear associations, highlighting how specific teacher behaviors contribute to students' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Qualitative data add depth to these findings, illustrating the underlying mechanisms by which these trends manifest in students' personal experiences. For example, while quantitative

data may indicate a strong correlation between teacher support and students' perceived competence, qualitative narratives explain why certain feedback styles or instructional methods resonate with students, reinforcing their confidence and skill development. By providing context and specific examples, qualitative data reveal the nuances of teacher-student interactions that influence students' motivational experiences, thereby adding layers of meaning that complement the quantitative trends. The triangulation of these data types enhances the study's validity, demonstrating how breadth and depth together create a comprehensive understanding of teacher-student dynamics.

Complementary Insights into Teacher-Student Relationships

Through mixed-methods integration, this study captures not only the presence of relationships between teacher behaviors and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) constructs but also provides insight into the quality and nature of these relationships from students' perspectives. Quantitative data outline the strength of correlations, indicating which teacher behaviors are most strongly correlated with student motivation. For instance, high correlations between teacher approachability and relatedness underscore the importance of accessible, empathetic faculty in creating supportive learning environments.

Qualitative insights complement these findings by illustrating how these relationships unfold in practice. Students' personal narratives detail the specific behaviors that contribute to their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness—such as constructive feedback, mentorship, and flexible learning approaches—allowing for a more nuanced view of motivational experiences. By combining these data sources, the study provides a richer understanding of teacher-student relationships, showing that effective teaching practices are not only statistically significant but are also deeply meaningful and impactful to students on an

individual level. This layered perspective illuminates both the strength and quality of teacher-student relationships, underscoring the importance of relational dynamics in fostering motivation within educational settings.

Summary

This chapter presented an in-depth exploration of the quantitative and qualitative findings, offering a comprehensive view of the impact of teacher-student relationships on students' Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980) constructs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—in university reading methods courses. By integrating the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative narratives, the study reveals how specific teacher behaviors may shape students' perceptions and experiences in ways that foster motivation and engagement.

Through a mixed-methods approach, this study identified essential teacher behaviors that contribute to students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Quantitative findings demonstrated strong correlations between supportive faculty practices and enhanced perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, establishing a foundation for understanding these dynamics. Qualitative data provided rich narratives that brought these patterns to life, with participants detailing how choice in assignments, constructive feedback, flexible learning approaches, and supportive relationships directly influenced their motivation. Together, these findings emphasize that when students perceive that their teacher creates an autonomy-supportive, competence-building, and inclusive environment, they experience a greater sense of agency, confidence, and connection.

The triangulated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data validates and enriches the study's results, offering a well-rounded understanding of how teacher-student interactions

contribute to motivation within the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) framework. Quantitative analyses established general trends and significant associations, while qualitative insights provided specific examples and explanations for these trends, revealing the nuanced ways teacher behaviors impact students' learning experiences. This integration underscores the importance of both perspectives: quantitative analyses highlighted the strength of relationships, and qualitative analyses unpacked the quality and nature of those relationships.

These findings underscore the value of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) as a framework for examining motivational dynamics in educational settings, with practical implications for teaching practices in higher education. The results suggest that autonomy-supportive practices, constructive feedback, and inclusive faculty-student relationships are vital in creating a motivating learning environment, particularly within reading methods courses. These insights establish a foundation for the implications discussed in Chapter 5, where the focus shifts toward practical recommendations for educators, considerations for policy, and theoretical contributions to the understanding of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) in higher education contexts.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the connection between university teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1980), this research explored how positive TSRs may foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness—key psychological needs essential for intrinsic motivation and professional development. Through a mixed-methods approach, this study integrated survey data with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these relationships shape teacher candidates' self-perceptions and instructional preparedness.

The findings of this study reinforce the central tenets of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980), demonstrating that when college students perceive that instructors create environments that support autonomy, build competence, and foster relatedness, teacher candidates exhibit higher levels of motivation and self-efficacy in their professional preparation. Participants described meaningful relationships with faculty members as critical in shaping their confidence, resilience, and engagement in their coursework. This aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1980) assertion that fulfilling these basic psychological needs enhances self-determined motivation, leading to greater persistence and professional growth.

Additionally, the study's findings corroborate Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977), emphasizing the role of mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional states in developing teacher candidates' confidence. Participants highlighted how students' perceived teacher-constructive feedback, mentorship, and the modeling of instructional practices were significantly related to their beliefs about their ability to teach literacy effectively.

This suggests that positive TSRs do not merely support motivation but are instrumental in shaping future educators' perceptions of their competence and instructional efficacy.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study advances the understanding of how university faculty can intentionally cultivate relationships that support teacher candidates' development, particularly within reading methods coursework. The next sections will discuss the key findings in depth, explore their implications for educational practice and policy, and present the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) as a conceptual framework for fostering self-determined learning in teacher education programs.

Summary of Findings

This study explored the impact of university teacher-student relationships (TSRs) on the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. The findings, drawn from quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews, indicate that student perceptions of TSRs are significantly related to candidates' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Teacher behaviors—such as constructive feedback, adaptability, mentorship, and encouragement—emerged as critical factors related to candidates' motivation and instructional confidence. This section synthesizes these findings in alignment with the study's research questions, integrating participant voices to illustrate key themes.

Autonomy Findings

Autonomy was strongly associated with student choice in assignments, flexible learning opportunities, and an instructional climate that encouraged independence. Survey results showed that students generally rated their instructors favorably on autonomy-supportive practices, with mean scores above 5.8 on a 7-point scale. Specifically, responses to the question, "*How frequently does your instructor allow you to make choices about assignments?*" had a mean

score of 5.84 (SD = 1.13), suggesting that most students experienced some level of autonomy in their coursework.

However, there was notable variability in responses. While many students felt empowered to make choices, others found course assignments to be somewhat rigid. In fact, responses to survey questions related to assignment flexibility exhibited one of the highest standard deviations (1.13), indicating differing perceptions among students. One participant shared:

"When my professor let us modify assignments to fit our future classrooms, I felt more invested. It wasn't just about getting a grade—it was about building something I could actually use when I start teaching."

Conversely, some students expressed frustration over a lack of flexibility in course structure. Survey responses suggest that a subset of students felt assignments were too prescriptive, with varying degrees of agreement on this point. As one participant explained:

"When everything is locked into a specific format with no room for adjustment, it's hard to stay excited about the work."

These findings suggest that while most students experienced autonomy in some form, variability in instructional approaches was related to perceptions of autonomy support. Ensuring structured yet adaptable learning experiences may enhance students' sense of ownership and motivation.

Competence Findings

The development of competence was significantly related to the quality and specificity of instructor feedback, scaffolded learning experiences, and opportunities for guided practice. Survey data showed that students generally felt confident in their ability to teach reading, with

competence-related survey items yielding high mean scores (ranging from 6.37 to 6.55) and an excellent reliability rating (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93).

One of the strongest factors related to competence was timely and detailed instructor feedback. Students who received frequent, constructive feedback scored significantly higher in competence-related survey items. A participant shared:

"I used to doubt whether I could actually teach reading effectively. But when my professor gave me very specific feedback on how I structured my lesson, I started to see how I could improve. That really changed my confidence."

Additionally, scaffolded learning experiences were positively associated with competence development. Survey results showed that students highly valued observing their instructors model effective literacy instruction strategies, with several competence-related items having mean scores above 6.4. One participant described:

"Watching my professor model phonics instruction and then trying it myself gave me a roadmap. It felt like I had the tools I needed to be successful."

However, qualitative data revealed some challenges. While most students found feedback and modeling beneficial, others expressed concerns about inconsistent feedback or differences in instructional styles among faculty. For instance, one participant noted:

"When feedback was delayed or lacked specificity, I felt uncertain about my progress and less confident in my skills."

These findings indicate that structured feedback, scaffolded learning, and consistent guidance are key components in helping teacher candidates develop instructional competence.

Relatedness Findings

The study's findings underscore the central role of faculty support and mentorship in fostering relatedness. Survey data showed that students felt highly connected to instructors, as reflected in high relatedness scores (mean scores ranging from 6.29 to 6.82) and a strong reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85). Students who rated their instructors as highly approachable and supportive also reported a greater sense of belonging in the program. One participant described:

"I always felt like my professor actually cared—not just about my work, but about me as a future teacher. That made a huge difference in how comfortable I felt asking for help."

Additionally, students were more likely to reach out for academic or professional support when they felt their instructors genuinely cared about their success. Survey items measuring students' perceptions of faculty approachability and respect had some of the highest mean scores (above 6.7). However, students who reported limited faculty interaction were significantly less engaged. One participant explained:

"In classes where I didn't feel like my professor really knew me, I just did what I had to do to pass. It wasn't the same level of investment."

These findings affirm that teacher relational support is positively correlated with student perceptions of motivation, professional confidence, and engagement. When students perceive warm, inclusive, and responsive teacher relationships, they also feel valued and motivated to succeed.

Addressing Research Questions

The findings provide clear answers to the study's research questions:

- (R1) How do university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses?
 - Survey results and qualitative interviews indicate that perceived TSRs are significantly related to teacher candidates' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, shaping motivation and engagement.
 - Candidates who reported stronger faculty connections exhibited higher self-determination scores, reinforcing the importance of relational teaching practices in fostering professional growth.
- (R1a) What specific behaviors and interactions characterize positive TSRs in this context?
 - Survey data and qualitative responses highlight constructive feedback, mentorship, responsiveness, and adaptability as key faculty behaviors related to students' motivation and instructional confidence.
- (R1b) How do university teacher-student relationships foster a sense of autonomy, influence candidates' perceptions of competence, and affect their overall self-determination?
 - Autonomy was supported through choice in assignments, flexible learning structures, and opportunities for self-directed engagement.
 - Competence was strengthened by scaffolded instruction, constructive feedback, and structured opportunities for practice.
 - Relatedness was developed through faculty mentorship, approachability, and a strong sense of academic community.

The findings of this study reaffirm the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in shaping teacher candidates' motivation, confidence, and professional preparedness. By fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness, faculty members play a crucial role in developing self-determined and confident future educators. The next section will explore the broader implications of these findings for teacher education programs, policies, and future research.

Integration of Findings with Models

The findings of this study demonstrate the central role of university teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in shaping elementary teacher candidates' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To further interpret these findings, this section introduces the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming), which synthesizes key faculty behaviors that contribute to self-determination in teacher education. This model is then compared to established frameworks to highlight its unique contributions, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of integrating these models.

Presentation of the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming)

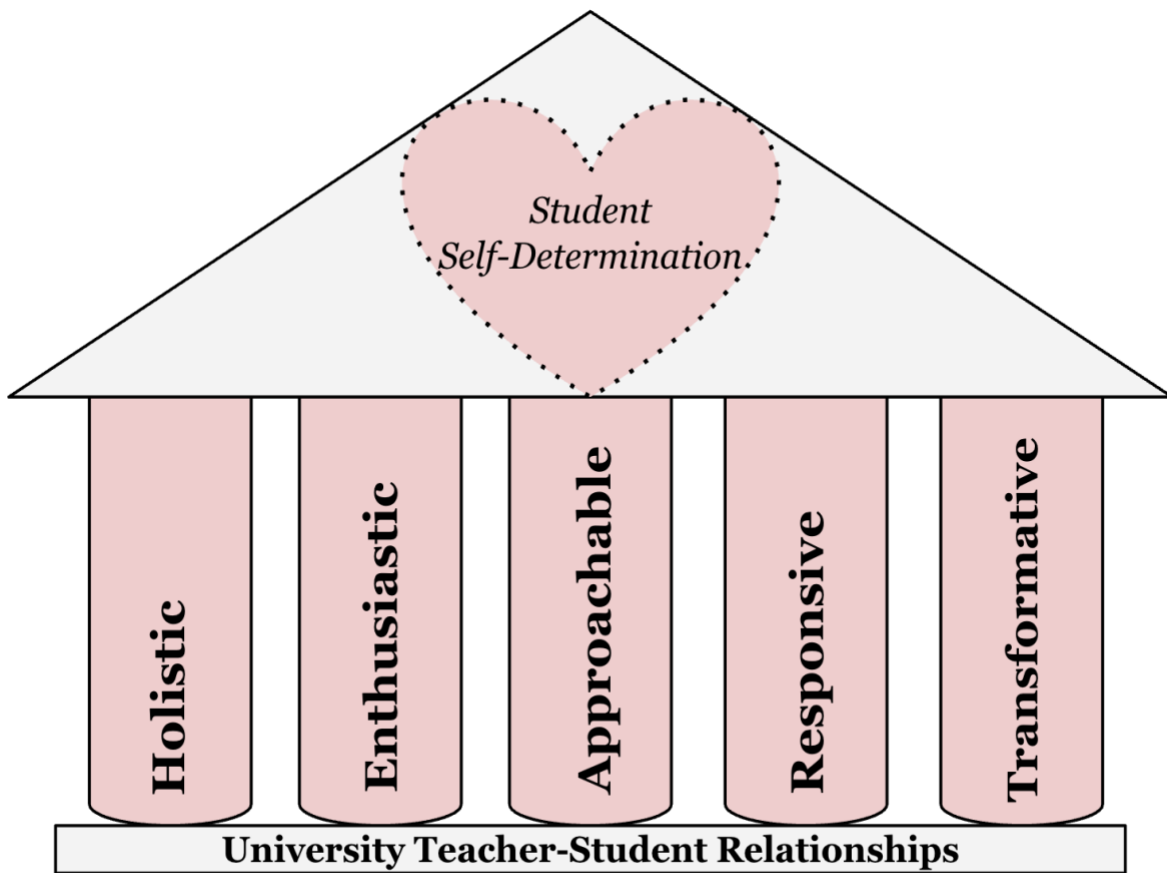
The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) provides a structured framework for understanding how faculty behaviors influence self-determination in teacher preparation programs. The model consists of five core constructs, each representing a specific but interconnected aspect of effective teacher-student relationships (TSRs):

1. **Holistic Support** – Faculty's role in fostering mentorship and emotional connection to promote relatedness.
2. **Enthusiastic Engagement** – Faculty's passion, energy, and enthusiasm in motivating and inspiring teacher candidates.

3. **Approachability** – Faculty’s availability, responsiveness, and open communication, which foster trust and engagement.
4. **Responsive Feedback** – Faculty’s constructive, targeted, and timely feedback in shaping instructional confidence and professional growth.
5. **Transformative Teaching** – Faculty’s modeling of instructional practices and design of meaningful, real-world learning experiences that build competence.

These five constructs form an interconnected system that creates an optimal learning environment where teacher candidates experience higher levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness—key components of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

Figure 5.1 – HEART Model: A University TSR Model to Support Student Self-Determination



The figure illustrates how each of these five elements functions independently while also contributing to an interconnected framework that supports teacher candidates' growth. Each component reinforces self-determination in different ways, ensuring a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to university TSRs.

Mapping the HEART Model to Emerging Themes from Data

Each construct within the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) is grounded in themes identified through quantitative and qualitative analysis. The following sections provide a detailed breakdown of how survey findings, statistical correlations, and interview themes align with each construct.

Holistic Support: Fostering Relatedness

Holistic support, the first of the five constructs conceptualized in the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming), encompasses the faculty behaviors that go beyond academic instruction, focusing on building strong, meaningful relationships with students. Faculty members who demonstrate care, mentorship, and investment in students' success play a critical role in fostering a sense of belonging and motivation among teacher candidates. Through ongoing mentorship that extends beyond the boundaries of coursework, instructors offer personalized guidance and emotional support, acknowledging the personal and professional challenges that students may face throughout their academic journey.

These relationships create an inclusive, welcoming environment where students feel valued and understood, contributing to a strengthened sense of community and trust within the academic program. Teacher candidates who experience such support are more likely to engage actively in their coursework and persist through challenges, knowing that they have a mentor

who believes in their potential and is invested in their success. This aligns with the self-determination principle of relatedness, where feeling connected to others enhances motivation and commitment.

Findings from this study reinforce the importance of holistic support in fostering relatedness. As presented in Chapter 4, analyses of survey data indicated that students who rated their instructors as approachable and supportive also reported a stronger sense of connection to the program. Correlational analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between perceived faculty support and students' relatedness scores. Participants consistently expressed that relational teaching practices—where faculty take time to know their students personally and professionally—had a profound impact on their motivation.

One participant captured this sentiment, stating,

“I always felt like my professor actually cared—not just about my work, but about me as a future teacher. That made a huge difference in how comfortable I felt asking for help.”

This student’s reflection highlights the powerful influence of holistic support on student engagement and self-determination. When faculty invest in mentorship relationships that go beyond surface-level interactions, students not only feel more supported academically but also experience a greater sense of belonging and professional growth. Holistic support fosters an environment where teacher candidates are empowered to reach their potential, knowing that their professors are deeply invested in their success, both in and out of the classroom.

Enthusiastic Engagement

One of the most impactful ways faculty can influence teacher candidates may be through their enthusiasm and passion for both teaching and the subject matter. When instructors display genuine excitement about literacy instruction, it energizes students, encouraging them to engage

more deeply with the content and to develop their own passion for the field. Enthusiastic engagement is not just about delivering content with energy—it involves creating a dynamic, positive learning environment where students are inspired to explore, ask questions, and commit to their growth as future educators.

Faculty who consistently demonstrate enthusiasm for literacy instruction and student learning motivate their students to participate actively in their coursework. This enthusiasm is often contagious, sparking a desire in teacher candidates to emulate the same level of passion in their own teaching. Instructors who are excited about the material make it easier for students to stay engaged, even when faced with challenging or complex concepts. They do this by incorporating engaging instructional methods, such as interactive discussions, hands-on activities, and real-world applications, which keep students interested and invested in the learning process.

This passion for the subject not only enhances immediate engagement but also plays a key role in inspiring long-term commitment to the teaching profession. When students see their instructors modeling enthusiasm for literacy instruction, they are more likely to carry that excitement forward into their own classrooms, fostering a love for learning among their future students. As one participant remarked,

“My professor’s passion for literacy instruction was contagious. It made me want to bring that same energy into my future classroom.”

This sentiment reflects the transformative effect of faculty enthusiasm on teacher candidates. By witnessing the joy and excitement that their professors bring to teaching, students may be inspired to embrace that same energy and cultivate a passion for their profession.

Analyses of survey data presented in Chapter 4 underscored the importance of faculty enthusiasm in fostering student engagement. Participants who reported higher perceptions of faculty enthusiasm also demonstrated greater motivation and participation in coursework. Statistical analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between faculty enthusiasm and student engagement scores, confirming that instructors' passion for teaching directly is related to student investment in learning.

These findings support the qualitative themes, emphasizing that enthusiasm is not only a teaching strategy but also a relational and motivational tool that may strengthen students' long-term commitment to literacy instruction and education as a whole.

Moreover, faculty who are enthusiastic about teaching encourage curiosity and passion in their students. When instructors present literacy instruction as exciting and meaningful, they may inspire teacher candidates to view their future careers not just as a profession but as a purposeful and fulfilling calling. As a result, teacher candidates may be more likely to develop and sustain a long-term passion for teaching, which ultimately benefits both the educators themselves and the students they will teach.

Approachability

Approachability is a key element of effective teacher-student relationships in higher education, as it reflects faculty behaviors that promote open communication, accessibility, and trust. When students perceive their instructors as approachable, they feel more comfortable seeking guidance, asking questions, and engaging in deeper discussions. Faculty who prioritize approachability ensure that teacher candidates have the support they need to navigate challenges, build confidence, and succeed in their academic journey.

Instructors can demonstrate approachability by maintaining consistent office hours and availability, making it easy for students to reach out when they have concerns or need clarification on course content. This availability fosters a sense of reliability and openness, signaling to students that their instructors are invested in their success and are willing to make time to address their needs. Beyond office hours, approachability also extends to classroom dynamics, where faculty encourage open dialogue and respectful discussions. By creating an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns, instructors build trust and rapport that enhances student engagement.

One of the most important aspects of approachability is how faculty respond to student inquiries. Providing timely and individualized feedback not only answers students' immediate questions but also shows that their contributions are valued. When students receive personalized responses, they feel that their professor cares about their individual progress, which strengthens their confidence and willingness to engage further. This sense of personal attention and care is crucial in motivating students to stay involved and seek academic support when needed.

The impact of approachability on teacher candidates is significant. Students who perceive their instructors as approachable are far more likely to seek guidance and academic support, knowing that their questions and concerns will be met with respect and attentiveness. This accessibility fosters a culture of trust and mutual respect, which is essential for student success. As one participant expressed,

“Knowing that my professor believed in me made me believe in myself. It wasn’t just about learning content—it was about growing into a teacher.”

This reflection captures the power of approachability. When faculty create a welcoming environment and show confidence in their students, it helps teacher candidates develop belief in their own abilities and motivates them to actively participate in their learning journey.

Findings from Chapter 4 reinforce the significance of approachability in fostering student engagement. Quantitative analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between faculty approachability and students' likelihood of seeking academic or professional support. Students who perceived their instructors as more accessible and responsive reported higher engagement levels, suggesting that approachability is directly linked to students' willingness to participate, ask questions, and reach out for guidance.

By promoting open communication and trust-building, approachable faculty encourage students to engage in meaningful dialogue, ask questions, and seek the help they need to succeed. This not only enhances students' immediate academic experience but may also contribute to their long-term confidence and professional growth.

Responsive Feedback

Responsive feedback plays a vital role in teacher education, serving as a critical mechanism for guiding students' instructional development. Faculty who provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback help teacher candidates build their instructional competence, offering them the guidance they need to improve and refine their teaching practices. Responsive feedback is more than just commentary on student performance—it is a tool that empowers students to reflect on their work, make necessary adjustments, and grow as educators.

Faculty who excel in delivering responsive feedback are intentional in offering clear, actionable insights on assignments such as lesson plans and teaching demonstrations. By focusing on specific areas of improvement and suggesting concrete steps for revision, they

enable students to see exactly where they need to improve and how to make those changes. This feedback is most effective when it is timely, allowing students to apply the guidance while the content is still fresh in their minds, which in turn accelerates their learning and growth.

In addition to providing specific guidance, faculty also utilize formative assessment strategies to shape the learning process. Rather than waiting until the end of an assignment to offer feedback, formative assessments allow instructors to provide input throughout the learning experience, ensuring that students can adjust and improve as they work. This ongoing feedback loop encourages teacher candidates to view learning as a dynamic and iterative process, where mistakes are part of growth and reflection and revision are integral to their development as educators.

The impact of responsive feedback on teacher candidates is significant. Students who receive constructive and supportive feedback report increased confidence in their ability to make instructional decisions. The feedback possibly boosts their self-efficacy and may also give them the tools to implement literacy instruction strategies with greater precision and success. As one participant shared,

“Even when I made mistakes, my professor would say, ‘This is part of the learning process. You’re on the right track.’ That kept me from shutting down.”

This reflection highlights the empowering nature of responsive feedback. Rather than feeling discouraged by mistakes, teacher candidates may be motivated to persist and improve when they believe their instructor sees these missteps as learning opportunities rather than failures. This approach fosters an environment where students are not afraid to take risks in their teaching because they know they have the support and guidance they need to grow.

Findings from Chapter 4 indicate that faculty feedback may play a pivotal role in shaping teacher candidates' instructional confidence. Quantitative analyses revealed a statistically significant correlation between the specificity and timeliness of faculty feedback and candidates' self-reported competence in teaching literacy instruction. Participants who received detailed, constructive feedback reported greater confidence in lesson planning, student engagement strategies, and instructional decision-making. These findings support the broader literature (Bandura, 1977; Hattie & Timperly, 2007; Deci & Ryan, 1980; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) on effective teacher education, emphasizing that explicit, actionable, and well-timed feedback may enhance both competence and motivation.

By encouraging reflection and revision, responsive feedback ensures that teacher candidates not only understand their current strengths and areas for improvement but also feel equipped to make meaningful changes in their instructional practices. This ongoing feedback cycle fosters a mindset of continuous learning, helping future educators to continually refine and enhance their skills.

Transformative Teaching

Transformative teaching goes beyond the mere transmission of content—it involves faculty engaging students in deep, meaningful learning experiences that are directly applicable to their future professional practice. In the context of teacher preparation, this means that faculty are not only responsible for teaching the principles of literacy instruction but also for modeling best practices in ways that students can replicate in their own classrooms. By demonstrating effective literacy instruction strategies, faculty members provide teacher candidates with a clear example of what successful teaching looks like, allowing them to internalize these practices and apply them in their own instructional contexts.

Faculty who engage in transformative teaching also design engaging, real-world applications of course material. Rather than relying on passive forms of instruction, these educators encourage students to actively participate in learning and reflect critically on their experiences. By creating opportunities for hands-on learning and real-world problem-solving, faculty enable students to see the direct connection between their coursework and their future roles as educators. This approach fosters higher levels of engagement and motivates students to invest deeply in their learning.

The impact of transformative teaching on teacher candidates is profound. Exposure to effective modeling of instructional strategies significantly boosts instructional confidence, as students feel more prepared to implement these strategies in their future classrooms. Teacher candidates who observe their instructors modeling literacy instruction are better able to visualize how they can adapt these methods to suit their own teaching styles and classroom environments. As one participant noted,

“Watching my professor model phonics instruction and then trying it myself gave me a roadmap. It felt like I had the tools I needed to be successful.”

This quote encapsulates the essence of transformative teaching—by observing skilled faculty members, students gain a clear and practical understanding of how to teach effectively. The impact is not only theoretical but practical, as students leave the classroom with tangible strategies they can use to enhance their own teaching.

Findings from Chapter 4 reinforce the role of transformative teaching in developing instructional competence. Survey responses indicated a strong positive association between instructor modeling and candidates’ perceived preparedness to teach literacy effectively. Participants who observed explicit faculty modeling of instructional strategies reported greater

confidence in planning and delivering lessons. These findings underscore that faculty who model instructional strategies effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice, equipping teacher candidates with both conceptual understanding and practical skills.

By fostering active participation and reflection, transformative teaching ensures that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but engaged learners who critically reflect on their own instructional approaches. This deep engagement may lead to increased motivation and a stronger connection between theory and practice, helping teacher candidates feel more prepared and confident as they transition into their future teaching roles.

Putting It All Together

The proposed HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) offers a comprehensive and multi-dimensional framework for understanding how faculty-student relationships can foster self-determination among teacher candidates. By focusing on five essential elements—Holistic Support, Enthusiastic Engagement, Approachability, Responsive Feedback, and Transformative Teaching—this model highlights the specific faculty behaviors that directly contribute to student motivation, instructional confidence, and professional preparedness. Each of these components plays a distinct role in shaping the teacher candidate experience, but they do not function in isolation. Instead, they work interdependently to create a supportive and dynamic learning environment where students feel valued, capable, and inspired to grow as educators.

Holistic support ensures that students feel connected and supported on both personal and professional levels, fostering a sense of belonging and trust. Enthusiastic engagement inspires students by demonstrating a genuine passion for teaching, which in turn motivates them to develop their own commitment to the profession. Approachability builds an atmosphere of open communication and accessibility, encouraging students to seek guidance and feel comfortable

asking for help. Responsive feedback offers constructive guidance that empowers students to reflect, revise, and improve their teaching skills, ensuring they are well-prepared to enter the classroom with confidence. Finally, transformative teaching provides candidates with clear models of effective practice, enhancing their instructional confidence and engagement.

The strength of the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) lies in its ability to synthesize these diverse elements into a cohesive framework that can be practically applied in teacher education programs. It provides actionable insights for faculty looking to enhance their teaching practices, emphasizing the importance of building relational, responsive, and dynamic teaching environments that support the holistic development of teacher candidates. Moreover, this model contributes new insights into the ways in which faculty behaviors can influence key psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—ultimately fostering self-determination and long-term professional success.

In the following section, this model will be compared to existing models, illustrating how it both aligns with and contributes new dimensions to teacher education research. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) offers a unique contribution to the field, ensuring that teacher candidates are equipped not only with the skills they need but also with the confidence, motivation, and passion required to succeed as educators.

Situating the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) within Existing Educational Frameworks

While Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1980) provided the primary theoretical foundation for this study, the findings suggest meaningful intersections with other established frameworks that explore teacher-student interactions, motivation, and instructional

effectiveness. Although these theories were not deeply examined in the initial literature review, they offer valuable lenses for interpreting the ways in which TSRs shape teacher candidate development. Thus, this section presents a comparative analysis of the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) to Support Student Self-Determination with Progressive Education (Dewey, 1916), Constructivist Pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978), Humanistic Education (Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 1984; Rogers, 1961), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1980) itself, highlighting their connections and the unique contributions of this study's model.

- *Progressive Education* (Dewey, 1916). Rooted in experiential learning, Progressive Education advocates for student-centered instruction and democratic classrooms that empower learners to take ownership of their educational experiences.
- *Constructivist Education* (Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivist learning theory posits that students build knowledge through social interaction and scaffolded instruction, emphasizing the role of teachers as facilitators rather than mere transmitters of information.
- *Humanistic Education* (Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 1984; Rogers, 1961). Humanistic approaches emphasize meeting students' psychological and emotional needs, arguing that a caring, supportive educational environment is essential for learning and personal growth.
- *Social Learning Theory* (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's framework highlights the importance of observational learning, modeling, and self-efficacy, suggesting that individuals learn behaviors and beliefs by watching and interacting with others.

- *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1980). As explored throughout this dissertation, SDT emphasizes the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, arguing that fulfilling these needs leads to intrinsic motivation and engagement.

Table 5.1 - Comparison of HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) with Existing Models

Framework	Core Ideas	Connection to the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming)	New Insights from the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming)
Progressive Education (Dewey, 1916)	Experiential learning, student-centered education, and democratic classrooms.	Aligns with the TSRs Model’s emphasis on student autonomy and engagement through transformative teaching and holistic support.	The TSRs Model specifically operationalizes faculty behaviors that foster autonomy in teacher candidates, providing a structured approach to student support beyond general experiential learning.
Constructivist Education (Vygotsky, 1978)	Knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction, with teachers as facilitators.	The responsive feedback and transformative teaching components of the TSRs Model align with scaffolded learning and active engagement, promoting competence.	While constructivism focuses on learner autonomy, the TSRs Model uniquely emphasizes faculty approachability and mentorship as integral components in shaping student motivation and instructional confidence.
Humanistic Education (Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 1984; Rogers, 1961)	Emphasizes meeting students’ psychological needs, fostering a caring and supportive educational environment.	The TSRs Model’s holistic support and approachability align with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Noddings’ ethic of care, which highlight the importance of belonging for motivation.	The TSRs Model extends humanistic theories by identifying specific faculty behaviors (e.g., mentorship, feedback, enthusiasm) that actively enhance teacher candidate self-efficacy.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)	Learning occurs through observation, modeling, and feedback; self-efficacy plays a crucial role in motivation.	The transformative teaching and responsive feedback components of the TSRs Model mirror Bandura’s emphasis on modeling instructional practices and verbal reinforcement.	The TSRs Model expands on SLT by situating self-efficacy in teacher preparation, demonstrating how faculty modeling in reading methods coursework directly influences instructional confidence and motivation.
Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980)	Autonomy, competence, and relatedness as drivers of motivation.	The TSRs Model operationalizes SDT principles by structuring faculty behaviors that directly support autonomy, competence, and relatedness.	Bridges SDT with teacher education by identifying tangible ways faculty interactions shape motivation and long-term professional growth.

Rather than existing in isolation, the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) builds upon these foundational educational theories, offering a structured framework that synthesizes the key elements of positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs). While Progressive Education (Dewey,1916), Constructivist Pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978), Humanistic Education (Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 1984; Rogers, 1961), and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) have each explored aspects of teacher-student interaction and motivation, the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) provides:

- A clear framework for identifying specific faculty behaviors that directly impact self-determination in teacher candidates.
- A structured approach for translating theoretical insights into practical teaching strategies that enhance teacher candidate confidence, competence, and autonomy.
- A new lens for applying SDT to teacher education, demonstrating how TSRs function as mechanisms of self-determined learning and professional growth.

The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) extends the conversation beyond broad pedagogical principles, providing an actionable model that guides faculty practice in teacher education programs.

Implications for Practice

The comparative analysis of the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) against established educational theories highlights the critical role of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in shaping teacher candidate motivation, instructional confidence, and professional growth. While prior frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Constructivist Pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978) provide valuable insights into student engagement and learning, this study contributes a practical, faculty-centered model that clarifies how instructors can cultivate autonomy-supportive, competence-enhancing, and relationally rich learning environments in teacher education.

These findings carry important implications for teacher education programs, particularly in how faculty mentorship, responsive feedback, and instructional modeling influence pre-service teacher motivation and preparedness. Understanding how these relational and instructional dynamics operate offers an opportunity to enhance faculty training, course design, and institutional policies that directly support teacher candidate development.

This section outlines specific recommendations for implementing the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) in practice. This includes:

- Training university instructors to effectively foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness in teacher candidates.
- Developing institutional guidelines and faculty practices that reinforce relational, feedback-driven, and transformational teaching approaches in teacher education.

By embracing these strategies, institutions can create more supportive and motivating learning environments, increasing the likelihood that teacher candidates not only develop strong instructional skills but also feel empowered and confident as future educators.

Training University Instructors

To fully leverage the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming), faculty could be trained to intentionally cultivate autonomy, competence, and relatedness in teacher candidates. This requires professional development initiatives that help university instructors:

- Recognize their role in supporting teacher candidate motivation through relational, feedback-driven, and engaging instructional practices.
- Adopt autonomy-supportive teaching methods that give candidates control over aspects of their learning, reinforcing ownership and engagement.
- Implement targeted strategies to build competence, including structured feedback loops, scaffolded learning opportunities, and mastery-based assessments.
- Prioritize relationship-building through mentorship, approachability, and a classroom climate that fosters belonging and trust.

Key Training Strategies

- *Workshops on Autonomy-Supportive Teaching*: Faculty training could include strategies for incorporating choice, voice, and flexibility in assignments to enhance student motivation. For instance, instructors might explore student-driven assignments where candidates select literacy strategies based on their classroom goals.
- *Training in Effective Feedback Practices*: Providing specific, actionable, and growth-oriented feedback can be an area of focus for faculty development. Research suggests that

clear, constructive feedback supports competence-building, and training opportunities could help instructors refine their approach to formative assessment.

- *Faculty Mentorship Programs*: Institutions may consider structured mentorship initiatives that foster relatedness and professional growth. Faculty development efforts could include mentorship training to enhance both emotional and instructional support for teacher candidates.
- *Reflective Practice*: Encouraging faculty to engage in self-reflection may help them analyze how their interactions with students influence motivation and self-efficacy. This might involve peer observations, video recordings of instruction, or faculty learning communities to facilitate collaborative professional growth.

Institutional Guidelines and Faculty Development Initiatives

Institutional guidelines and faculty development initiatives could explicitly recognize the importance of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in teacher preparation. Implementing guidelines that emphasize faculty mentorship, relational engagement, and effective feedback practices may help support teacher candidates' motivation, instructional confidence, and professional growth.

Key Policy Considerations

- *Institutional Commitment to TSRs-Based Teaching*: Teacher preparation programs may consider adopting policies that emphasize the role of faculty mentorship, relational engagement, and transformational instruction. Institutions could explore ways to incorporate TSRs-based teaching expectations into faculty evaluations and promotion criteria to reinforce the value of relational pedagogy.

- *Standardized Feedback and Assessment Guidelines:* Policies might encourage faculty to provide timely, constructive, and student-centered feedback that enhances competence. Institutions could support the use of rubrics and structured feedback tools that highlight strengths, areas for growth, and concrete next steps to promote consistent and effective assessment practices.
- *Faculty Development Programs That Prioritize TSRs-Based Instruction:* Onboarding for new faculty could include training on motivational teaching strategies and relational engagement to ensure they are equipped to foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness in teacher candidates. Institutions may benefit from offering annual teaching workshops focused on effective feedback practices, mentorship approaches, and autonomy-supportive teaching methods.
- *Student Perception Data for Continuous Improvement:* Institutions might consider regularly collecting teacher candidate feedback on faculty approachability, instructional support, and mentorship effectiveness to inform faculty development efforts. Data from student surveys could be used to refine faculty training and institutional policies, ensuring that faculty practices align with best practices in teacher candidate development.

By aligning faculty practices, curriculum development, and institutional guidelines with the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming), teacher education programs may enhance their ability to cultivate motivated, self-determined, and instructionally confident future educators.

Implication for Policy

The findings of this study suggest that teacher-student relationships (TSRs) play a critical role in shaping teacher candidates' motivation, instructional confidence, and self-determination.

While much attention has been given to content knowledge and pedagogical skills in teacher

preparation, there is a need for institutional and accreditation policies to explicitly recognize the significance of TSRs in fostering effective teaching and learning environments at the university level.

This section discusses potential policy considerations at both institutional and accreditation levels, with particular emphasis on the alignment of TSR-based practices with Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards and Science of Reading (SoR) mandates. Recognizing the role of faculty engagement, mentorship, and relational pedagogy in teacher preparation may strengthen teacher education programs and better equip future educators to meet the demands of modern classrooms.

Institutional and Accreditation Policy: Recognizing the Role of TSRs in Teacher Education

Despite the well-documented importance of student-teacher interactions in K-12 education, higher education policies do not always explicitly emphasize TSRs as a key component of teacher preparation (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012; Wentzel, 1997). While teacher education programs focus on evidence-based instructional strategies, many do not incorporate faculty training or curriculum structures that systematically foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness in teacher candidates (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ambrose et al., 2010; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010).

Institutional Policy Considerations

At the institutional level, teacher education programs could adopt policies that:

1. Incorporate TSRs into Faculty Evaluation and Teaching Expectations
 - Teacher education programs could explore ways to include TSRs-focused teaching criteria in faculty evaluations, promotion, and tenure reviews.

- Recognizing mentorship, relational engagement, and effective feedback as integral to teaching excellence may incentivize faculty to adopt TSRs-supportive practices in their instruction.
2. Use Student Perception Data to Inform Faculty Development
- Institutions might consider implementing student feedback surveys assessing faculty approachability, responsiveness, and mentorship effectiveness in coursework and field experiences.
 - Analyzing student perception data may provide actionable insights for faculty professional development and curricular improvements.

By incorporating these institutional policies, universities can create learning environments that systematically prioritize positive faculty-student relationships, which may ultimately strengthen teacher candidate motivation, instructional preparedness, and professional confidence.

Alignment with CAEP Accreditation

Accreditation policies play a central role in shaping the priorities of teacher preparation programs. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) establishes rigorous standards designed to ensure that teacher education graduates are well-prepared to enter the classroom as effective educators (CAEP, 2023). While CAEP accreditation guidelines emphasize instructional competence and pedagogical content knowledge, they do not explicitly address the importance of faculty-student relationships (TSRs) in shaping teacher candidate development.

As I addressed in chapter two, teacher education accreditation has been closely aligned with national education policies, adapting its standards to reflect shifting literacy instruction trends (AACTE, 2024). Since its inception, accreditation in teacher education has evolved,

beginning with the American Association for Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in 1948, followed by the creation of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in 1954 and later the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) in 1997 (CAEP, 2023). These bodies ultimately merged in 2014 to form CAEP, which remains the primary accreditation entity for teacher education programs today (CAEP, 2023).

As accreditation bodies have long aligned their standards with national educational trends, it is logical to consider how CAEP's current accreditation policies could evolve to reflect the growing research base on the impact of faculty-student relationships on teacher candidate success (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Bandura, 1977).

Several CAEP standards naturally align with the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) and could provide a framework for integrating TSRs-based practices into accreditation expectations.

Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge

CAEP requires that candidates demonstrate knowledge of content and effective teaching strategies (CAEP, 2019). The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) supports this by ensuring that faculty model high-impact instructional practices, serving as a foundation for teacher candidates' instructional competence.

- *Policy Implication:* Institutions could incorporate faculty modeling of effective teaching into CAEP-aligned coursework, ensuring that candidates observe and internalize relationally supportive teaching approaches (Reutzel, 1998; Stahl, 1999).

Standard 3: Candidate Quality, Recruitment, and Selectivity

Research suggests that relational engagement with faculty plays a role in teacher candidate persistence and success (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016).

- *Policy Implication:* Institutions could consider adopting TSRs-informed retention strategies, such as faculty mentorship programs or advising models that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 1984).

By integrating TSRs-based teaching strategies into CAEP accreditation compliance efforts, institutions may strengthen the relational, feedback-driven, and mentorship aspects of teacher preparation, leading to more engaged and instructionally confident teacher candidates.

Alignment with Science of Reading Mandates

Recent legislative efforts to improve early literacy instruction have resulted in Science of Reading (SoR) mandates requiring evidence-based literacy coursework in teacher preparation programs. These mandates emphasize structured, systematic reading instruction based on decades of research in cognitive science and literacy development (Moats, 2020; Seidenberg, 2017). While these policies are designed to ensure that teacher candidates enter the classroom with strong literacy instructional skills, they often do not explicitly acknowledge the importance of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in effective implementation.

Successfully preparing teacher candidates to internalize and apply SoR-aligned instructional strategies requires more than content knowledge—it demands a supportive learning environment where candidates feel encouraged, capable, and confident in their ability to teach reading effectively. The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) highlights the critical role of faculty mentorship, scaffolded learning, and relational engagement in ensuring that candidates remain motivated, persistent, and resilient as they navigate the complexities of literacy instruction.

Below are some considerations as to why TSRs should be included in SoR conversations, policies, and mandates:

1. Supporting Teacher Candidates Through Challenging Learning Experiences

The shift toward evidence-based literacy instruction can be intellectually and emotionally challenging for teacher candidates, particularly if they have prior experiences or beliefs about reading instruction that conflict with SoR principles. Research suggests that when students encounter difficult or unfamiliar content, relational support from faculty plays a key role in their ability to persist and engage deeply with the material (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Noddings, 1984).

Without faculty mentorship and encouragement, candidates may feel overwhelmed or resistant to instructional shifts, particularly when implementing new strategies in field placements. By fostering supportive, relational learning environments, faculty can help teacher candidates embrace the complexities of SoR-aligned instruction rather than resist or disengage from it.

2. Bridging Pedagogical Knowledge with Application Through Faculty Mentorship

The transition from learning about reading instruction to implementing it in real classrooms is a critical moment in teacher preparation. Without structured faculty support, candidates may struggle to connect theory to practice or lack confidence when applying evidence-based literacy strategies in student teaching placements (Snow et al., 2005).

By integrating TSRs into SoR implementation, teacher preparation programs can ensure that candidates feel supported throughout this transition, increasing their likelihood of successfully implementing evidence-based reading instruction in their future classrooms.

3. Encouraging Long-Term Professional Growth and Adaptability

Literacy education is constantly evolving, and SoR mandates represent just one stage in the ongoing development of reading instruction policies and practices. Preparing teachers to

engage critically with new research and adapt their practices over time requires more than just content knowledge.

By embedding relationally supportive teaching practices into teacher preparation programs, institutions can equip candidates not just with the skills needed to implement SoR-aligned instruction, but also with the confidence and adaptability necessary to evolve with future literacy research and policy changes.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in fostering self-determination among teacher candidates. While the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) provides a conceptual framework for understanding how faculty behaviors contribute to teacher candidate motivation, competence, and relatedness, further research is needed to refine and expand upon this work. Specifically, future studies should explore each construct of the HEART Model independently, pinpoint the specific faculty behaviors that contribute to relationally supportive teaching, and develop a faculty reflection tool to facilitate research-based assessment and improvement of TSRs in higher education settings. This section outlines key directions for future research, highlighting opportunities to further validate and operationalize the TSRs Model in teacher preparation programs.

Investigating Pillars of HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) as Independent Constructs

The findings of this study underscore the positive relationship between college students' perceptions of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and their reported self-determination. While the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) to Support Student Self-Determination provides a conceptual framework for understanding how faculty behaviors contribute to teacher

candidate motivation, competence, and relatedness, further research is needed to refine and expand upon this work.

To enhance the practical application and conceptual clarity of the TSRs at the university level, this study proposes a framework—HEART—which encapsulates the five core pillars of effective teacher-student relationships in university settings:

- Holistic Support
- Enthusiastic Engagement
- Approachability
- Responsive Feedback
- Transformative Teaching

Future research should explore each of these HEART components independently, pinpoint the specific faculty behaviors that contribute to relationally supportive teaching, and develop a faculty reflection tool to facilitate research-based assessment and improvement of TSRs in higher education settings.

While this study presents the HEART Framework as an integrated model, each of its five components represents a distinct yet interconnected aspect of faculty-student relationships. Future research could examine each HEART pillar as an independent construct, allowing for a more precise understanding of its specific impact on teacher candidate self-determination.

Potential research questions for future studies may include:

- Holistic Support: What specific aspects of faculty mentorship and relational engagement most significantly contribute to teacher candidates' sense of belonging in teacher education programs?

- **Enthusiastic Engagement:** How does faculty enthusiasm influence teacher candidates' intrinsic motivation in reading methods coursework?
- **Approachability:** What faculty behaviors contribute to perceived approachability, and how do these behaviors influence teacher candidates' willingness to seek guidance and support?
- **Responsive Feedback:** What characteristics of faculty feedback are perceived by teacher candidates as most effective in building instructional competence and autonomy?
- **Transformative Teaching:** How does faculty instructional modeling shape teacher candidates' confidence in implementing literacy instruction strategies?

A deeper examination of these individual components would strengthen the empirical foundation of the HEART framework and provide actionable insights for faculty development and instructional improvement.

Developing an Instructor Reflection Tool for HEART Practices

Building on the findings of this study, future research could also focus on developing a structured faculty reflection tool which enables university instructors to assess their own HEART practices. This tool could serve as both a self-assessment measure and a professional development resource, allowing faculty members to:

1. Reflect on their own teaching and mentorship practices within the five components of the HEART framework.
2. Identify strengths and areas for growth in relationally supportive teaching.
3. Engage in research-based self-reflection practices to evaluate how their instructional approaches influence student autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

4. Determine which HEART components might benefit from targeted improvement efforts, allowing for intentional professional growth.

Protentional research questions for the development of this tool might include:

- What indicators should be included in a faculty reflection tool to assess HEART-related teaching practices?
- How do faculty perceptions of their relational engagement compare to student perceptions of faculty support?
- What faculty development strategies are most effective in increasing instructor self-awareness and implementation of HEART-based practices?

The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) for University TSRs provides a foundation for understanding the relational dimensions of teacher preparation, yet further research is necessary to refine its components and applications. Through continued inquiry and empirical validation, future research can contribute to the ongoing refinement of the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming), ensuring that faculty engagement, mentorship, and relational pedagogy remain central to teacher candidate success. By prioritizing HEART principles in higher education research and practice, teacher preparation programs can cultivate motivated, instructionally confident, and self-determined future educators.

Study Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in teacher preparation, it is important to recognize methodological constraints that may influence the scope and interpretation of the findings. These limitations do not undermine the significance of the study but rather highlight areas where further research can refine and expand upon its conclusions.

Scope and Transferability of Findings

This study employed mixed methods to explore the nuanced experiences of teacher candidates within a specific teacher preparation program. While this in-depth approach allowed for rich, contextualized insights, the findings may not fully capture the diverse range of experiences across different institutions and program structures.

Because the study prioritized depth over breadth, the themes that emerged are highly reflective of the participants in this specific program. While the findings align with existing theoretical frameworks, their transferability to other institutions, disciplines, or teacher preparation models remains an open question. To strengthen the transferability of the HEART Framework, future research could employ larger, multi-institutional studies incorporating teacher candidates from various geographic regions, institutional types, and program models.

Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

As the researcher, my professional background in elementary teaching and higher education provided insider knowledge that enriched the interpretation of data. However, this also necessitated a heightened awareness of researcher positionality to ensure that preexisting assumptions did not influence data collection and analysis.

While measures such as researcher journaling and reflexive analysis were used to mitigate bias, the interpretation of qualitative data is inherently shaped by the researcher's own perspectives. Certain themes may have been emphasized based on my understanding of teacher preparation, while other perspectives may have been overlooked.

To address potential researcher bias, future studies could incorporate:

- Multiple coders for qualitative analysis to ensure intercoder reliability.

- Collaborative research teams with varied backgrounds to provide diverse perspectives on TSRs in teacher education.

Reliance on Self-Reported Data

A key methodological consideration in this study was the use of self-reported data from teacher candidates through surveys and interviews. While these methods provided firsthand insights into participants' experiences, self-reported data can be subject to response bias, particularly when discussing faculty relationships and instructional support.

Participants may have unintentionally shaped their responses based on social desirability bias, influencing the extent to which faculty support and mentorship were portrayed in a positive light. Additionally, self-reporting does not directly measure faculty behaviors, but rather perceptions of those behaviors, which may not always align with actual instructional practices.

Future research could triangulate data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of TSRs by incorporating:

- Direct classroom observations to assess faculty-student interactions.
- Longitudinal studies tracking teacher candidates beyond their coursework into their early teaching careers.
- Faculty self-assessments to compare instructor perspectives with student experiences.

By integrating observational, longitudinal, and self-reflective methodologies, future studies could validate and expand upon the findings of this research. By acknowledging these methodological considerations, this study ensures transparency in its findings while also identifying key areas for further investigation. While limitations such as sample specificity, researcher positionality, and self-reported data shape the interpretation of results, they also provide a foundation for continued research. Future studies that incorporate larger participant

pools, multiple data sources, and cross-institutional comparisons will further enhance the understanding of how faculty-student relationships influence teacher candidate motivation and professional growth.

The recognition of these limitations does not diminish the value of this study's contributions but rather emphasizes the need for ongoing inquiry into the relational dimensions of teacher preparation. By addressing these considerations, future research can build upon the HEART Framework to ensure that university faculty continue to foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness in teacher candidates.

Conclusion

This study has explored the critical role of university teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in fostering the self-determination of elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980), this research examined how autonomy, competence, and relatedness—key psychological needs—are related to the quality of faculty-student interactions. The findings from this mixed-methods study reveal that relationally supportive faculty may play a central role in shaping the motivation, confidence, and instructional self-efficacy of future educators.

Building upon these findings, this study presents the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) as a conceptual model that synthesizes the essential dimensions of effective teacher-student relationships in higher education. The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) provides a structured approach to understanding faculty behaviors that contribute to teacher candidate development. The five key elements of the model include holistic support, enthusiastic engagement, approachability, responsive feedback, and transformative teaching.

Together, these components capture the relational and pedagogical practices that support motivation, instructional competence, and long-term professional growth in teacher education.

Contributions and Implications

The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) represents a refinement of this study's contributions, offering a more actionable framework that builds upon existing theories of teacher preparation. While theories such as constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), humanistic education (Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 1984), and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) have emphasized the role of relationships and learning, the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) uniquely operationalizes these principles by outlining faculty behaviors that directly support teacher candidate development.

The study's findings suggest that the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) aligns with the increasing emphasis on evidence-based teacher preparation and accreditation requirements. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of faculty mentorship and relational engagement in fostering teacher candidate persistence and instructional confidence (Darling-Hammond, 2017). As institutions work to align their programs with accreditation standards such as those set by CAEP, the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) provides a framework for integrating faculty-student relationships into teacher preparation in a meaningful and measurable way.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

The HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) offers a structured approach for enhancing teacher-student relationships at the university level, with direct implications for faculty practice, institutional policies, and future research.

1. **Implications for Practice**

Faculty development programs could incorporate training on HEART-based relational teaching strategies, emphasizing autonomy-supportive instruction, constructive feedback, and mentorship. Mentorship programs designed around HEART principles could further enhance faculty approachability and responsiveness, ensuring that teacher candidates feel valued and supported throughout their preparation.

2. **Implications for Policy**

Institutions could consider integrating HEART-aligned teaching practices into faculty evaluations, accreditation reviews, and instructional expectations. CAEP accreditation standards could explicitly include faculty mentorship and relational engagement as critical components of teacher preparation. Institutional policies should also encourage the systematic collection of teacher candidate feedback on faculty support and relational engagement.

3. **Implications for Future Research**

Further studies could examine each pillar of the HEART Model (Maydew, 2025, forthcoming) independently to identify specific faculty behaviors that contribute to each domain. The development of a HEART Instructor Reflection Tool could provide faculty with a structured means of assessing their own strengths and areas for growth in relational pedagogy. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of HEART-based faculty practices on teacher candidates' instructional confidence and classroom effectiveness.

A Path Forward

As Rita Pierson famously stated, “*Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.*” It turns out that even grown kids—our teacher candidates—may learn better from people they feel connected to. The findings of this study reaffirm that university teacher-student relationships are not incidental to teacher preparation; they are foundational to it. When students perceive their teacher as more engaging, approachable, and responsive, they also report greater confidence, motivation, and instructional competence.

As teacher education programs continue to evolve in response to policy and accreditation demands, intentional faculty engagement must remain a priority. Teacher candidates should know that faculty are there to support them, even as they engage with new and sometimes challenging instructional practices. By fostering meaningful and well-structured relationships, institutions can ensure that future educators enter the classroom equipped not only with knowledge, but with the confidence and resilience to succeed.

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Appendix A - Survey Items

Appendix Figure 1 – Survey Items

Specific Behaviors and Interactions (R1a)
<p># 1</p> <p>Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt: <u>How approachable or unapproachable is your reading methods instructor?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very approachable <input type="radio"/> Approachable <input type="radio"/> Slightly approachable <input type="radio"/> Neither approachable nor unapproachable <input type="radio"/> Slightly unapproachable <input type="radio"/> Unapproachable <input type="radio"/> Very unapproachable
<p># 2</p> <p>Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt: <u>How helpful or unhelpful is your reading methods instructor in their feedback on your work?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very helpful <input type="radio"/> Helpful <input type="radio"/> Slightly helpful <input type="radio"/> Neither helpful nor unhelpful <input type="radio"/> Slightly unhelpful <input type="radio"/> Unhelpful <input type="radio"/> Very unhelpful
<p>#3</p> <p>Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt: <u>How interested or uninterested is your reading methods instructor in your learning and development?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very interested <input type="radio"/> Interested <input type="radio"/> Slightly interested <input type="radio"/> Neither interested nor uninterested <input type="radio"/> Slightly uninterested <input type="radio"/> Uninterested <input type="radio"/> Very uninterested
<p>#4</p> <p>Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt: <u>How available or unavailable do you feel your reading methods instructor is for support and guidance?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very available <input type="radio"/> Available <input type="radio"/> Slightly available <input type="radio"/> Neither available nor unavailable <input type="radio"/> Slightly unavailable <input type="radio"/> Unavailable <input type="radio"/> Very unavailable
<p>#5</p> <p>Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt: <u>How successful is your instructor at encouraging open communication?</u></p>

- Completely successful
- Very successful
- Somewhat successful
- Slightly successful
- Not at all successful

#6
Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:
How much does your reading methods instructor value your opinion?

- Completely values it
- Very much values it
- Somewhat values it
- Slightly values it
- Not at all

Autonomy (R1b)

#7
Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:
How frequently or infrequently does your reading methods instructor allow you to make choices about how to complete assignments?

- Very frequently
- Frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Neither frequently nor infrequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Infrequently
- Very infrequently

8
Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:
How confident or insecure do you feel about expressing your ideas and opinions in this reading methods course?

- Very confident
- Confident
- Slightly confident
- Neither confident nor insecure
- Slightly insecure
- Insecure
- Very insecure

#9
Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:
How supportive or unsupportive of your independent thinking is your reading methods instructor?

- Very supportive
- Supportive
- Slightly supportive
- Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- Slightly unsupportive
- Unsupportive
- Very unsupportive

#10
Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:
How much control do you have over your learning in this reading methods course?

- Complete control
- Very much control
- Some control
- Slight control
- No control at all

#11

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How respectful or disrespectful of your autonomy in the learning process has your reading methods instructor been?

- Very respectful
- Respectful
- Slightly respectful
- Neither respectful nor disrespectful
- Slightly disrespectful
- Disrespectful
- Very disrespectful

Competence (R1b)

#12

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How helpful or unhelpful is your reading methods instructor at increasing your confidence to succeed in this course?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Slightly helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Slightly unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

#13

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How helpful or unhelpful is the feedback you receive from your reading methods instructor in enhancing your understanding and skills?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Slightly helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Slightly unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

#15

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How capable or incapable do you feel about achieving your academic goals in this reading methods course with your instructor's guidance?

- Very capable
- Capable
- Slightly capable
- Neither capable nor incapable
- Slightly incapable
- Incapable
- Very incapable

Relatedness (R1b)

#16

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How connected or disconnected do you feel with the instructor of this reading methods course?

- Very connected
- Connected
- Slightly connected
- Neither connected nor disconnected
- Slightly disconnected
- Disconnected
- Very Disconnected

#17

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How caring or uncaring is your reading methods instructor about your academic well-being and success?

- Very caring
- Somewhat caring
- Slightly caring
- Neither caring nor uncaring
- Slightly uncaring
- Somewhat uncaring

#18

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How supported or unsupported do you feel by your reading methods instructor in your efforts to learn?

- Very supported
- Somewhat supported
- Slightly supported
- Neither supported nor unsupported
- Slightly unsupported
- Somewhat unsupported
- Very unsupported

#19

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How respectful or disrespectful do you feel that your reading methods instructor is towards you?

- Very respectful
- Somewhat respectful
- Slightly respectful
- Neither respectful nor disrespectful
- Slightly disrespectful
- Somewhat disrespectful
- Very disrespectful

#20

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How respectful or disrespectful do you feel that you are towards your reading methods instructor?

- Very respectful
- Somewhat respectful
- Slightly respectful
- Neither respectful nor disrespectful
- Slightly disrespectful

- Somewhat disrespectful
- Very disrespectful

#21

Please select the option that best describes your feeling(s) toward the following prompt:

How inclusive or exclusive is the learning environment fostered by the reading methods instructor?

- Very inclusive
- Somewhat inclusive
- Slightly inclusive
- Neither inclusive nor exclusive
- Slightly exclusive
- Somewhat exclusive
- Very exclusive

Appendix B - Interview Question Guide

Appendix Figure 2 – Interview Question Guide

1. Please describe a situation where you felt particularly supported or mentored by a faculty member in your reading courses?
 - a. Conversely, please describe a situation where you felt unsupported or lacked mentorship?
2. How do you perceive the communication between you and your reading instructors?
 - a. Please provide specific examples of both effective and ineffective communication?
3. Please share an example of feedback on your reading methods that you found particularly helpful?
 - a. Additionally, please share an instance where the feedback was unhelpful or unclear?
4. In what ways do you believe your relationship with your teachers has influenced your learning and application of reading methods? Please include both positive and negative influences.
5. How have your interactions with faculty influenced your motivation to learn in reading methods and teach reading?
 - a. Can you discuss how these interactions have affected both your intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, whether positively or negatively?
6. Please provide an example of how a teacher has helped you feel more capable of making decisions regarding teaching reading?
 - a. What support did you receive?

- b. Have there been times when you felt discouraged or unsupported in trying new approaches?
7. Describe a challenge you faced in learning reading methods.
 - a. How did your teacher's support (or lack of support) affect your ability to overcome it?
8. How have your teachers' attitudes towards reading instruction impacted your own beliefs and approaches to teaching reading?
 - a. Please provide examples of both positive and negative impacts?
9. Please discuss a time when you were encouraged to adapt or innovate in your approach to teaching reading?
 - a. What support did you receive?
 - b. Have there been times when you felt discouraged or unsupported in trying new approaches?
10. How do your teachers encourage you to reflect on your learning and teaching practices in reading methods?
 - a. Please provide examples of specific reflective practices or assignments?
 - b. Have there been instances where you felt reflection was not adequately encouraged?
11. How has the quality of your relationships with university reading teachers impacted your confidence in your abilities as a future educator in reading?
 - a. Please discuss both how supportive relationships have built your confidence and how any problematic relationships may have undermined it?
12. In what ways have your teacher-student relationships prepared you for the real-world classroom setting, specifically regarding teaching reading?
 - a. Please include examples where you felt well-prepared as well as instances where you felt unprepared?
13. Based on your experiences, what suggestions do you have for improving teacher-student relationships within the education program to better support students' development in reading methods?
14. Is there anything else you would like for me to know?

Appendix C - Informed Consent Form (Survey)

Appendix Figure 3 – Informed Consent Form (Survey)

Title of the Study:

Teaching Reading with Heart: A Qualitative Examination of University Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Impact on Elementary Teacher Candidates' Self-Determination in Reading Methods

Researcher(s):

Mrs. Sage Maydew (Principal Investigator)



[REDACTED]

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Sage Maydew from [REDACTED]. This study seeks to explore the dynamics of relationships between faculty and undergraduate elementary teacher candidates' in reading methods courses. Through your participation, I aim to gain insights that may enhance teacher education programs and support the professional growth of future educators.

Purpose of the Study: This study seeks to understand the impact of faculty-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. I will examine how these relationships foster a sense of autonomy, relatedness, influence perceptions of competence, and affect overall self-determination.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Complete a survey consisting of 21 questions. It is anticipated that the survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Participation in this study has no effect on your grade in the course.

Risks and Benefits: There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. You are free to skip any questions or discontinue the survey at any time. The potential benefits include contributing to the understanding of effective teaching practices and improving teacher education programs.

Confidentiality: All information collected in this study will remain confidential. Your responses and identity will be kept anonymous in any publications or presentations resulting from this research. Data will be kept digitally and temporarily for the sole purpose of completing the study and will then be destroyed after three years.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your participation, please contact Mrs. Sage Maydew at [REDACTED]. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED] Research & Grants Center using this email: [REDACTED]

Consent: By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have had the opportunity to ask questions, and that you agree to participate in this study.

Appendix D - Informed Consent Form (Interview)

Appendix Figure 4 – Informed Consent Form (Interview)

Title of the Study:

Teaching Reading with Heart: A Qualitative Examination of University Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Impact on Elementary Teacher Candidates' Self-Determination in Reading Methods

Researcher(s):

Mrs. Sage Maydew (Principal Investigator)

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Sage Maydew from [REDACTED]. This study seeks to explore the dynamics of relationships between faculty and undergraduate elementary teacher candidates in reading methods courses. Through your participation, I aim to gain insights that may enhance teacher education programs and support the professional growth of future educators.

Purpose of the Study: This study seeks to understand the impact of faculty-student relationships on elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods courses. I will examine how these relationships foster a sense of autonomy, relatedness, influence perceptions of competence, and affect overall self-determination.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 minutes.
2. Allow the interview to be audio-recorded for accuracy in data collection.
3. Review the transcript of your interview for accuracy if requested.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Participation in this study has no effect on your grade in the course.

Risks and Benefits: There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. You are free to skip any questions or discontinue the interview at any time. The potential benefits include contributing to the understanding of effective teaching practices and improving teacher education programs.

Confidentiality: All information collected in this study will remain confidential. Your responses and identity will be kept anonymous in any publications or presentations resulting from this research. Data will be kept digitally and temporarily for the sole purpose of completing the study and will then be destroyed after three years.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your participation, please contact Mrs. Sage Maydew at [REDACTED]. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED] Research & Grants Center using this email: [REDACTED]

Consent: By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have had the opportunity to ask questions, and that you agree to participate in this study.

Appendix E - Research Recruitment Announcement

Appendix Figure 5 – Research Recruitment Announcement



Greetings ██████████ Students!

My name is Sage Maydew, and I am an instructor here at ██████████. I teach reading and literacy methods courses, supervise student teaching interns, teach a couple of graduate reading courses, and serve as a graduate advisor. I love teaching, I love ██████████, and I love my students.

Currently, I am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies at ██████████ ██████████. My passion for my role at ██████████ has inspired my doctoral research. As part of my research, I have designed a study that honors our students' voices and experiences in their reading methods coursework, and I would love to hear YOUR voice! It would be an honor to have you participate in this study. I look forward to partnering with you to better understand how university teacher-student relationships impact elementary teacher candidates' self-determination in reading methods coursework.

If you choose to participate, simply click the link below to begin phase one of data collection, which involves completing a brief survey. Please note that your participation is entirely voluntary and will not affect your course grade in any way. Your survey responses will remain completely anonymous. At the end of the survey, there will be an opportunity to express interest in participating in a follow-up interview with me (Mrs. Maydew), which is the second phase of my research. Participants in the interview phase will automatically be entered into a drawing to win one of three \$50 Visa gift cards, distributed upon completion of the study.

Your input is incredibly valuable, and I would greatly appreciate your participation. If you're interested, please complete the survey by Monday, October 14th, 2024 at 5:00 pm.

[Link to Qualtrics Survey](#)

Thank you for considering being part of this research. I am excited to hear your thoughts and experiences!

Warmest wishes,

Sage Maydew

