

Student Teachers' Perceptions of Motivation, Independence, and Supervision Preferences: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The student teaching experience is one of the most impactful capstone experiences for the preparation of preservice teachers. The supervisor, either a cooperating teacher or university supervisor, plays a critically important role in the student teaching experience. The purpose of this study was to explore preservice teachers' perceived motivation and independence throughout their student teaching experience. It is recommended that early in the student teaching experience, a directive supervision style should be utilized. Then, as motivation starts to decline in the middle of the student teaching experience, the focus of supervision should shift to providing moral support and encouraging commitment to the profession of teaching. Recommendations for future research include replication of this study with future cohorts of student teachers across multiple institutions so data trends can be analyzed longitudinally. Additionally, it is recommended that future iterations of this study should administer a post-then version of the quantitative plotting instrument to control response shift bias.

Keywords

Mixed methods, internship, support, supervision, university supervisor

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Introduction and Problem Statement

The student teaching experience is one of the most impactful capstone experiences for the preparation of preservice teachers (Coleman et al., 2021; Miller & Wilson, 2010). The supervisor (i.e. the cooperating teacher or university faculty supervisor) plays a critically important role in the student teaching experience (Roberts, 2006). The relationship between the supervisor and student teacher has been ranked as one of the most critical components of the student teaching experience (Clark et al., 2015; Harlin et al., 2002; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; Young & Edwards, 2006). The vicarious experiences and modeling provided are essential elements for student teachers to build stronger self-efficacy to perform instructional tasks (Clark et al., 2015). However, supervising a student teacher can be a challenging role. The supervisor must step into a passive mentorship role in which they analyze teaching behaviors, evaluate student learning, prompt reflection, foster problem-solving skills, and provide formative, constructive feedback to the student teacher (Henry & Weber, 2010; Roberts, 2006).

Furthermore, supervision of student teachers is not a one size fits all approach. Determining the best approach for supervision depends on the individual development of the student teacher and their desires for a style of supervision (Henry & Weber, 2010; Glickman, 1995). Such development is posited to occur in phases throughout the student teaching experience (Henry & Weber, 2010; Sorensen et al., 2018). Further, for supervision to be effective, teachers are to be included in the developmental process (Danielson, 1996). Understanding the student teaching experience, and preservice teachers' perceived phases of development, could help to improve the preparation of cooperating teachers and lead to more impactful student teaching experiences.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Henry's (1995) paradigm for supervision of student teachers was the conceptual frame utilized for this study. Henry (1995) proposed that the supervision style utilized during the student teaching internship should be unique depending on the supervised person. The style to be utilized can be determined based on analyzing a student teacher's level of commitment and abstraction (Henry, 1995; Henry & Weber, 2010). Henry (1995) expounds on Glickman's (1990) description of supervision styles by offering a four-quadrant model specifically for supervision of student teachers based on different combinations of abstraction and commitment (see Table 1).

Table 1*Henry's (1995) Modified Four Quadrants Model for Supervising Student Teachers*

	Motivation & Independence	Characteristics	Supervision Style Recommended
Quadrant 1	Low motivation, low independence	Difficulty identifying & responding to problems; unimaginative teaching; low amounts of preparation	Directive control with specific instructions and expectations
Quadrant 2	High motivation, low independence	Eager to teach, but lacks a sense of direction; will devote time and energy but without a sense of purpose; may have ideas but lack ability to bring ideas to fruition	Directive information with choices presented by supervisor
Quadrant 3	Low motivation, high independence	Highly intelligent, but is not dedicated to teaching as a profession; low or absent levels of progress towards effective teaching	A collaborative style where supervisor and teacher negotiate ideas and solutions with both parties agreeing on course of action
Quadrant 4	High motivation, high independence	High intellectual capacity; aware of teaching strategies and methods; will try things that involve risk; likely to take advantage of every opportunity during the student teaching experience	Indirect approach with focus on creativity and reflection; Mostly need support and encouragement

Supervisors should make efforts to classify student teachers through several avenues such as student portfolios, previous academic performance, written statements by the preservice teacher, one-to-one conversations, as well as observations (Henry & Weber, 2010). It is expected that the quadrant the student teacher is classified within will change over the course of the student teaching internship. However, the ultimate goal for supervision is for all preservice teachers to be in quadrant four, high abstraction and high commitment, the end of the student teaching experience (Henry, 1995). While Henry (1995) proposed examining developmental levels of commitment and abstraction, these words were operationalized for the purpose of this study. Commitment was operationalized as motivation based on the descriptions of effort put forth towards their internship experience by preservice teachers and their desire to continue with teaching as a profession (Henry & Weber, 2010). Abstraction, or a preservice teacher's conceptual ability to problem solve or plan creative lessons (Henry & Weber, 2010), was operationalized as independence.

The four quadrants presented by Glickman (1990), Henry (1995), and Henry and Weber (2010) were to be utilized by the supervisor, based only on the supervisor's perceptions of the student

teacher's level of development. However, the student teacher's perceptions of their development and their desires for a specific style of supervision are imperative to a positive supervision relationship (Henry & Weber, 2010; Glickman, 1995). Structured time for student teachers to self-reflect in a non-evaluative environment has been shown to benefit their growth during the student teaching experience (Snead & Freidberg, 2019). Understanding preservice teachers' perceptions of their development and any impact on supervision could lead to a more positive student teaching experience as it is almost impossible for any supervisor to know precisely what has happened while student teachers are in the school (Wilkins et al., 2015).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore preservice teachers' perceived motivation and independence over the course of their student teaching experience. The following questions guided the research:

1. What are preservice teachers' perceived developmental classifications?
2. What are preservice teachers' perceived levels of motivation and independence?
3. What were the experiences and support preservice teachers received during their student teaching experience?
4. To what extent do preservice teachers' perceived levels of motivation and independence align with their described desires for supervision style by cooperating teachers and university supervisors?

Methods

A convergent mixed-methods design was used for this study (QUAN + QUAL). This design was chosen because we collected both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously during the research process. Even though data were collected simultaneously, we analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data separately, then compared the results to determine congruency and discrepancy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers' biases potentially influence the interpretation of data (Patton, 2002). When the data were collected, two of the researchers were graduate students and teaching assistants for the course in which the data were collected. One researcher was the instructor of record for the course where the data were collected and the teacher education coordinator. All three researchers were university supervisors for the cohort of preservice teachers during the time in which the data were collected. The researchers attempted to limit their biases by using bracketing (Creswell, 2013; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Specifically, the researchers met bi-weekly to discuss and reflect upon data collection and analysis procedures (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

This study's population consisted of all preservice teachers ($N = 7$) enrolled in the student teaching experience during the spring semester of 2021. Eighty-six percent of the participating preservice teachers were white, mostly female (86%; $n = 6$), and had a mean age of 21 years. Data were collected using a questionnaire via Qualtrics in four intervals during the student teaching experience. Data collection intervals were spaced every four weeks for the entirety of

the 16-week student teaching experience and are noted as observations one through four. A total of 28 questionnaires were collected for a census completion rate of 100%.

The questionnaire used in this study was a researcher developed instrument based off of Henry's (1995) paradigm for supervision. Face and content validity were established through a panel of three faculty and one doctoral graduate student in agricultural education at a land grant university. The panel was considered experts based on their experiences in secondary and post-secondary teaching and learning and research design. Several comments were recommended by the reviewers and implemented. Comments included adjustments to instructions for clarity, grammatical errors, writing style, and word choice to ensure content validity.

The instrument consisted of two sections. In the first section, students were presented with a four-quadrant graph. They were asked to plot their perceived level of development across their student teaching semester at four different periods. The Qualtrics "heat map" function was utilized to collect this data. The X-axis of the displayed graph represented motivation, with the Y-axis being independence.

The first section of the instrument also included four additional open-ended questions. Two questions asked the student teachers to reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and specific experiences that led them to plot their point such as providing specific examples or experiences that led them to select the plot point they did and what support they needed from their supervisor. Qualitative questions one and two related to preservice teachers' motivation, while questions three and four associated with independence. The second section of the instrument consisted of eight items to collect personal and professional data.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages). Additionally, data from the points were plotted using the Microsoft Excel graphing function. Qualitative data were analyzed deductively by the three researchers for congruent and discrepant statements according to their plotted perceived motivation and independence levels. Considerations by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to establish trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis. Specific practices included multiple researcher and mixed methods triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 2012), bracketing to reduce bias (Tufford & Newman, 2010), reflexive discussions by the research team, and achieving inter-coder agreement among the researchers (Ary et al., 2009). Following the analysis of the qualitative data, both sources of data were re-analyzed in comparison (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Limitations

This study's population consisted of students from a single cohort of an agriscience teacher preparation program. Therefore, the findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the population. Further, the authors recognize the exploratory nature of the study due to this being the first time the instrument was utilized.

Findings

Figure 1 illustrates preservice teachers’ developmental classifications across the four observation dates. During observation 1, the majority of the preservice teachers’ plot points classified them as a Quadrant 2 student teacher. Preservice teacher three was classified as a Quadrant 4 student teacher, while preservice teacher two was classified as a Quadrant 3 student teacher. The majority of the preservice teachers’ plot points classified them as a Quadrant 4 student teacher during observation 2, while preservice teacher seven was classified as a Quadrant 2 student teacher. During observation 3, the majority of the preservice teachers’ plot points classified them as a Quadrant 4 student teacher. Preservice teacher six was classified as a Quadrant 3 student teacher. Finally, during observation 4, all preservice teachers’ plot points classified them as a Quadrant 4 student teacher.

Figure 1

Preservice Teachers’ Developmental Classifications

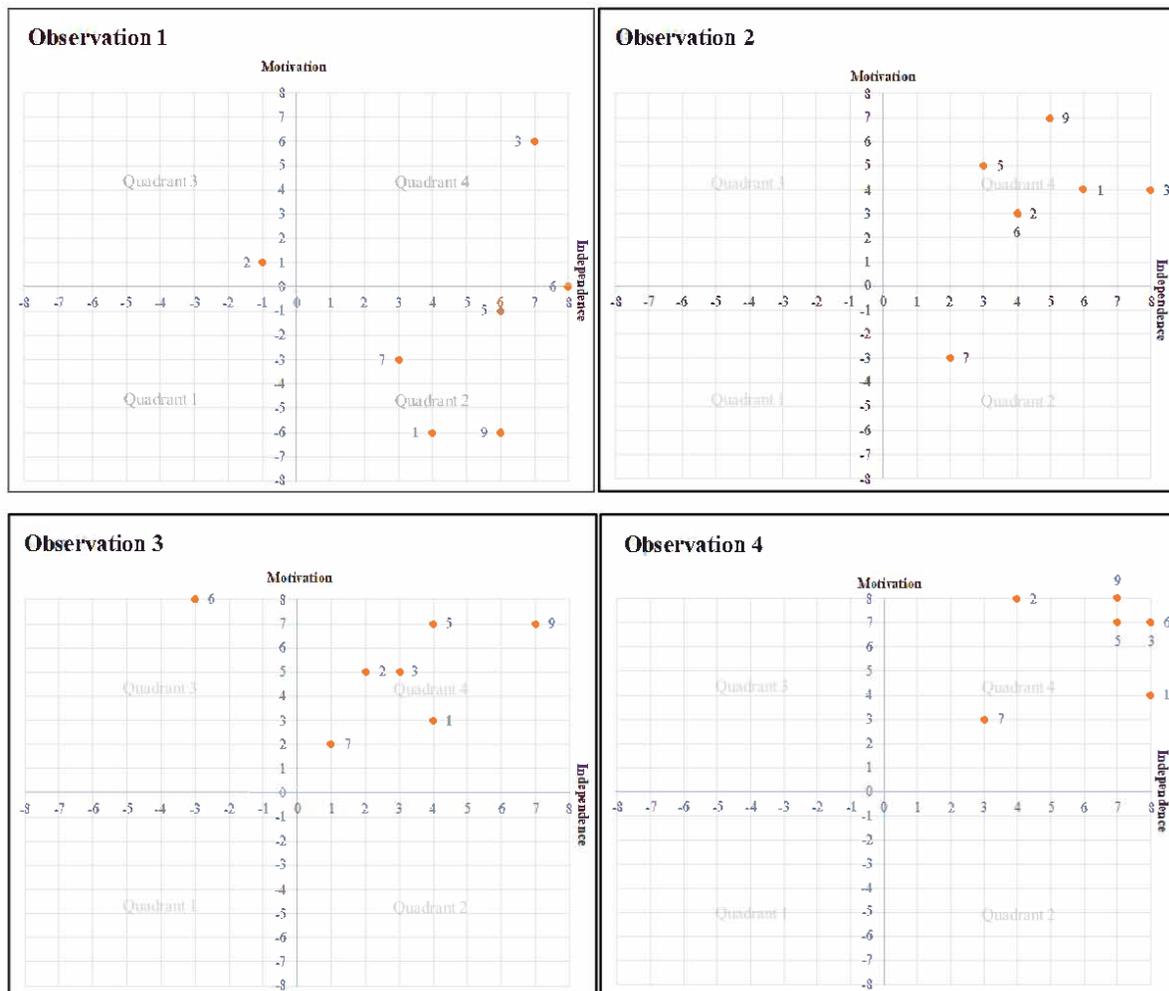


Figure 2 displays preservice teachers' perceived mean levels of motivation and independence across the observation periods. We observed that the mean perceived motivation level at observation one (Jan 12th) was 4.71 ($SD = 3.04$) and slightly declined by observation two (Feb 17th; $M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.99$). At the third observation on March 24th, the preservice teachers' motivation level had a noticeable decline ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 3.10$), and then sharply increased by observation four (Apr 26th; $M = 6.43$, $SD = 2.07$). Related to preservice teachers' independence, the mean level at observation one was -1.29 ($SD = 4.23$), and sharply increased across the next three observations with the largest increase being from observation one to observation two ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 3.09$), a difference of 4.58 points.

Figure 2

Preservice Teachers Perceived Mean Levels of Motivation Across Observations

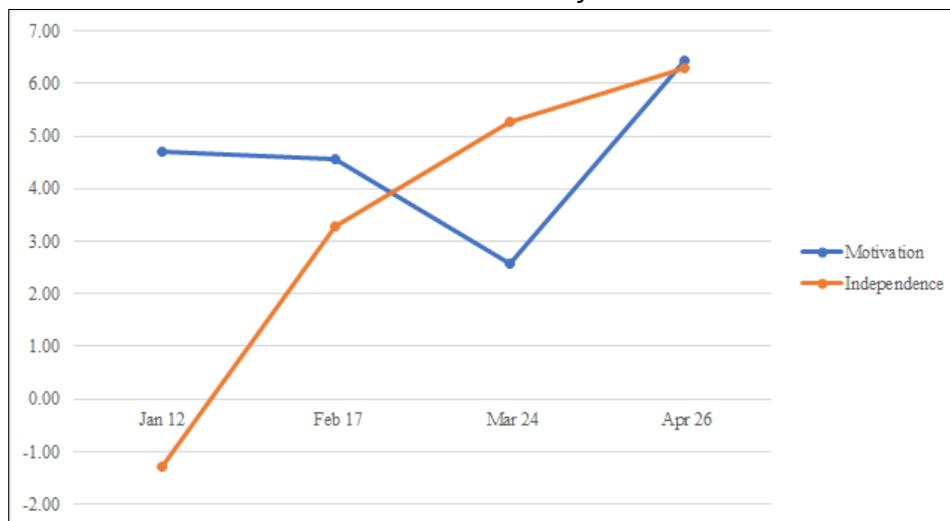


Table 2 displays quotes describing the student teacher's perceived motivation. Congruent statements aligned with Henry's (1995) characteristics for the student teachers' self-determined plot point. Incongruent statements did not align with the characteristics provided for the corresponding quadrant. Table 2 also displays quotes describing the student teacher's perceived independence. Congruent statements aligned with Henry's (1995) characteristics for the student teachers' self-determined plot point. Incongruent statements did not align with the characteristics provided for the corresponding quadrant.

Table 2

Comparing Preservice Teachers' Descriptions of Motivation and Independence with Their Self-Designated Quadrant

Quadrant	Motivation		Independence	
	Congruent	Discrepant	Congruent	Discrepant
<i>Observation One</i>				
Q2 (n = 5)	I feel prepared for this internship but I know that things are going to be different than my other experiences within a program and classroom. My biggest reservation is the fact that I have not had experience with the vet assisting curriculum but yet I have to teach it. (Participant 5)	I don't want to let someone down. I also can be shy and easily intimidated and I don't want my students to get the best of me. (Participant 9)	I think I would need lesson ideas for topics I'm not comfortable with and assistance answering student questions in these topics. (Participant 7)	Feedback! I love learning from my mistakes. (Participant 6)
	I am excited for this opportunity but not really sure what I am doing, so I think I will need a lot of help. (Participant 1)	I have visited with my teacher twice, and she is giving me A LOT of freedom on what to teach. I have also always been a very confident public speaker. (Participant 6)	I mostly need resources and ideas for how to teach the content, and then feedback on how lessons went. (Participant 1)	
			I need a lot of help with structure in the beginning.. (Participant 9)	I will need support through guidance because I know that I can be hard on myself, but I also want to improve so I will need the corrections just in a way that gives me specific ways to be better next time. (Participant 5)
Q3 (n = 1)	I am having trouble thinking of iterative ways to teach this anatomy and the functions of the different muscle groups. (Participant 2)	I am negative one on the motivation scale because I am feeling anxious to start student teaching which is causing more stress in my life. I chose a one for independence because I feel that I do not have adequate teaching resources to be successful. (Participant 2)	More resources - I am sure {cooperating teacher} would be more than happy to help! (Participant 2)	A chance to run plans by my supervisor and additional teaching resources. (Participant 2)

Quadrant	Motivation		Independence	
Placement	Congruent	Discrepant	Congruent	Discrepant
Q4 (n = 1)	I am super motivated to start my internship! I get along with my cooperating teacher very well and she has helped continue to motivate me...I just hope that my university supervisor is there for me to bounce ideas off of and ask advice too. (Participant 3)	I am not prepared to take over Horticulture I am very much the animal science aspect of agriculture education. However, {Cooperating teaching} has assured me that if I get stuck or need help she will be more than willing to guide and jump in to help. (Participant 3)		The biggest thing is resources for supplemental materials... I hope that {cooperating teacher} is willing to share the years of materials she has from her experience. ... I put a 6 for independence just based on her classes that I will be taking over and I am still learning myself. (Participant 3)

Observation Two

Q4 (n = 6)	I am really motivated to get better at teaching and engaging with students (Participant 1)	The students attitudes towards learning mainly. It can be discouraging if you do not properly engage them. (Participant 6)	Advice on presenting information, directions, and lectures. (Participant 2)	I don't really think I need more resources or anything, I really just need to find ways to motivate myself even when the students make it hard. (Participant 5)
	I was really challenged when my cooperating teacher requested that I teach the estrous cycle in livestock because I know very little about that topic, so I felt very dependent on others to help me figure out how to teach that. But that further motivated me because I want to be able to figure that stuff out on my own. (Participant 1)	Student disrespect and disruptions. Finding fun and engaging lessons and activities. Working with students SAE programs and getting involved with the FFA. (Participant 2)	I think the advice and personal experiences of what worked for her is very helpful...new ideas of how to improve and make my life easier. (Participant 9)	I think I need some more ideas for lessons .. instead of {my cooperating teacher] saying "we need to teach animal nutrition," {I want them to} say what exactly the kids need to know. (Participant 9)
	I feel extremely independent and I really like teaching... I am motivated to keep doing better and getting better!! (Participant 9)	..it seems that no matter how much I put in lately, a lot or not, I don't really see much in return (in the form of student involvement/interest) so it is really disheartening...it is still discouraging when nothing I do really gets them excited.. (Participant 5)	She has been so helpful, but she has found this year to be really hard too. We are learning together on the best ways to approach different situations. (Participant 5)	Resources and more ideas about how he wants specific lessons taught would be a great help... more structured guidance in looking ahead at how the current topic will connect to the next topic. (Participant 1)

Quadrant Placement	Motivation		Independence	
	Congruent	Discrepant	Congruent	Discrepant
Q2 (n = 1)	I feel motivated to teach but sometimes it can be hard when I know the students aren't dedicated and I hear crickets when I teach. On the other hand, I like to collaborate with {cooperating teacher} on lesson ideas which helps me when creating ideas (Participant 7)	Students are great they just don't want to work bell to bell which is understandable considering the way the world is right now. So the most challenging aspect would be the participation on classwork and in discussions. (Participant 7)	My co-op is very supportive when I am teaching. She will jump in when kids ask a question, I don't know which helps me not look lost. She also helps me create lesson ideas and gives me realistic feedback. (Participant 7)	{University supervisor} is great. He has helped me realize that I am overthinking things and to not stress myself out on the little things. (Participant 7)
<i>Observation Three</i>				
Q4 (n = 6)	I feel like this point is where I am at because at this point in my internship, I am almost completely independent...I would say I am about a 4 in motivation because I enjoy it and I am motivated to be the best I can be (Participant 5)	I am feeling little motivation, I find myself extremely exhausted and a little beat down from the critiques I receive from my cooperating teacher. (Participant 2)	My [cooperating teacher] is very helpful...she gives me a lot of freedom to do whatever in the classroom as a learning tool of trial and error. (Participant 7)	I would like more lesson planning ideas from my university supervisor for when I am stuck. (Participant 9)
	I am very independent with my teaching and lesson planning, but I second guess my lessons and just need that reassurance from time to time. (Participant 7)	Although I am feeling a lot more comfortable with my students, I am starting to count down the days until its over because I am tired. (Participant 7)	I feel prepared and supported. I think I am just excited to see how the last few weeks will go. (Participant 5)	I think more support from my co-op teacher could be guidance in aspects that are not specifically teaching. (Participant 9)
	I believe that I am even more motivated than I was before I started my student teaching. I am motivated to be finished and have MY OWN classroom. I feel completely independent on the teaching aspect of things... (Participant 9)	I get to the point that I am going all of the time and constantly doing something, that when it's time to wind down, I end up just stressing over everything that I still need to get done so I feel like I never have a break to recuperate. (Participant 5)	The biggest support from my university supervisor was advice and guidance. (Participant 3)	I would like more support in terms of feedback after lessons and ideas for teaching certain topics of information. (Participant 1)

Quadrant Placement	Motivation		Independence	
	Congruent	Discrepant	Congruent	Discrepant
Q3 (n = 1)	Well the kids look forward to seeing me now and I have fixed up the shade house and the greenhouse. (Participant 6)		Information on steps after internship (Participant 6) More information on how to give the class back (Participant 6)	
	Pretty good but also pretty sad that I will be losing everything I have worked at pretty soon. (Participant 6)			
Observation Four				
Q4 (n = 7)	I am so ready to start my own program and do my own thing! I am going in early this summer to set up my classroom!!! (Participant 9)	I have been very independent during my teaching internship. I have been lacking motivation especially towards the end. (Participant 2)	Advice and mentoring (Participant 6) Just a colleague and someone I could go to for advice or inspiration. (Participant 9) {My cooperating teacher} gave me freedom and flexibility in the classroom. She also had the same mindset as I did. She hated lectures and focused more on student discovery, so I never was afraid of what she would say about my lessons. (Participant 7)	Resources, classroom management, and ideas for professional development (Participant 2) Information for larger teaching techniques (Participant 6)
	As I ended the internship, I am more motivated to have my own classroom and begin my own journey with ag education. (Participant 7)	I am highly motivated due to finishing my internship successfully and moving towards graduation, but I feel like I would still need a lot of help in my own classroom. (Participant 1)		Resources on classroom management (Participant 2)
	I feel like I grew a lot in my internship in leadership, teaching methods, and confidence as a teacher. (Participant 5)		Someone who I can go to for advice or inspiration. (Participant 9)	

Note. Q = Quadrant

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

According to Glickman (1995), university supervisors can classify student teachers into four quadrants based on specific characteristics. Based on the teachers' developmental classification, detailed recommendations on supervising student teachers are then provided (Glickman, 1995). However, levels of independence and motivation can vary widely within the quadrants, as seen in the mean levels displayed in Figure 6. Most of the student teachers

plotted themselves in Quadrant 2 on the first observation (see Figure 2). According to Henry (1995), teachers in quadrant two have high motivation and low independence. These teachers are eager to teach but lack a sense of direction. Quadrant 2 teachers prefer a direct supervision style, with choices provided by their supervisor. Two student teachers were not in quadrant two quantitatively; however, their qualitative responses aligned with Quadrant 2 characteristics of high motivation and low independence. When student teachers were asked to describe their perceptions about their internship at this observation point, they were excited but desired resources and specific lesson ideas. Incongruently, student teachers reported an abundance of autonomy over their classroom and lesson topics. They also discussed the feeling of intimidation as they began their internship (see Table 2).

At the second and third observations, the majority of student teachers plotted themselves in Quadrant 4 (see Figure 2). All student teachers aligned themselves in Quadrant 4 for the last observation. According to Henry (1995), Quadrant 4 teachers have high levels of motivation and independence. These teachers know teaching strategies and methods and are willing to try new teaching approaches. Quadrant 4 teachers should be supervised indirectly, including encouraging them to be creative, prompting self-reflection, and providing moral support (Henry, 1995). While a majority of student teachers were quantitatively in Quadrant 4 on observation two, their qualitative responses do not align with the characteristics of Quadrant 4. This could be due to a lack of motivation, as indicated by their qualitative responses. For example, many student teachers continued to request resources, lesson ideas, and materials instead of seeking these resources independently (see Table 2).

On the other hand, during observation 3, both the quantitative scores and the qualitative responses align with Quadrant 4. Student teachers shared a need for moral support, advice, and feelings of being stressed and tired (see Table 2). Therefore, it is recommended that early in the student teaching experience, a directive supervision style should be utilized by providing choices, resources, and lesson ideas, in addition to focusing on support and encouragement congruent with Quadrant 4. Then, as motivation starts to decline in the middle of the student teaching experience, the focus of supervision should shift to providing moral support and encouraging commitment to the profession of teaching. As the student teaching experience approaches the third quarter, those who are responsible for supervising student teachers (i.e., cooperating teachers, university supervisors, etc.) might consider providing more moral support than targeted performance feedback originally recommended by Henry and Weber (2010) and Roberts (2006).

Recommendations for future research include replication of this study with future cohorts of student teachers across multiple institutions so data trends can be analyzed longitudinally. Additionally, it is recommended that future iterations of this study should administer a post-then-pre version of the quantitative plotting instrument to control response shift bias. However, qualitative data could still be collected throughout the student teaching experience to provide a real-time description of students' perceptions about their experiences. Lastly, the authors recommend following up with the cohort from this study during their first year of

teaching to compare their results from student teaching to their in-service experiences and perspectives.

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