

The Impact of a Student's Self-Efficacy and Self-Apprehensiveness in an Introductory College Composition Course

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Abstract: *This study focused on how self-efficacy and self-apprehensiveness affected student perception and success in a first-year composition course at a community college. The purpose of this study was to uncover the factors that led to successful writers with a focus on self-efficacy and collegiate writing, namely introductory college composition.*

Key Words: Composition, Higher Education, and Self-Efficacy

INTRODUCTION

An introductory college composition class is typically the very first writing intensive course for a college student. It is a general education requirement, making it a mandatory class for all students, at Gardenia College¹, a community college located in northern California.

This research looked into student self-efficacy and self-apprehensiveness in introductory freshman composition course, where students were surveyed with a set of predetermined, quantitative questions. This research examined how students felt about their ability to succeed in introductory college composition at the beginning of the course. The survey gathered anonymous, self-reported, subjective data from the student's perspective.

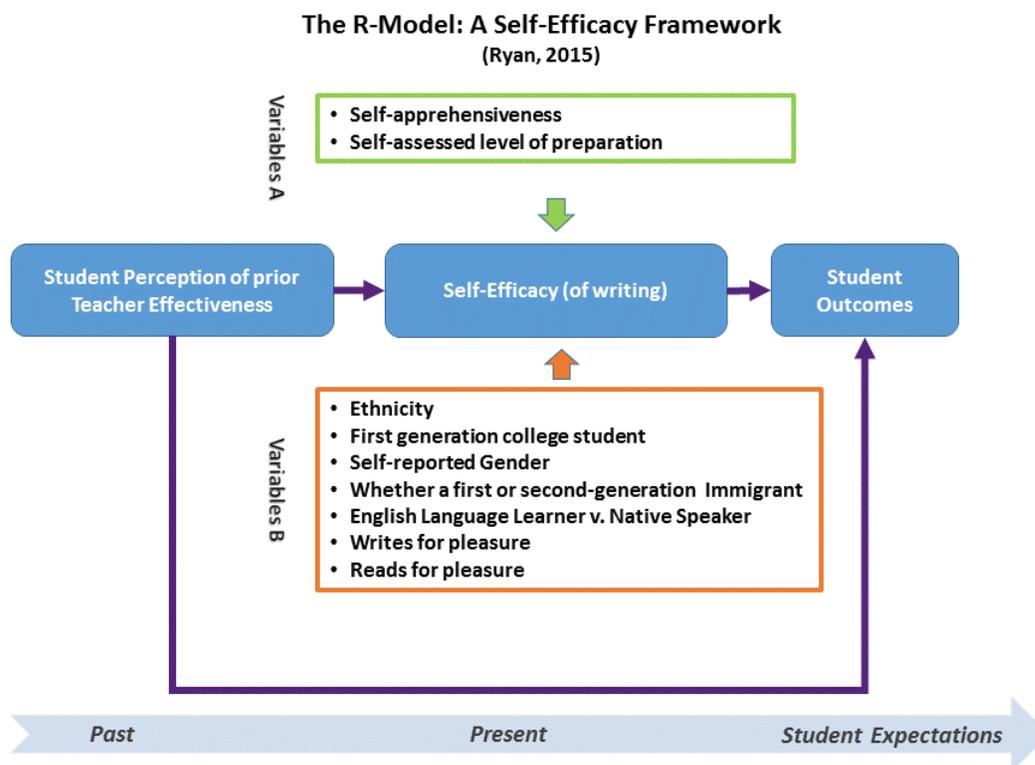
The study drew from a total of five educational theories – two main theories and three sub-theories. The two major theories utilized in this research were Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) and Ogbu and Simmons' cultural ecological theory (1998). The three sub-theories helped enhance a richer research perspective with Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy (1992), social-emotional learning, and social justice.

The researcher designed a theoretical framework based on the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy called the R-Model (Figure 1) due to the theory building in this study. The student outcome was based on the student's self-reported belief on what his or her success in the first-year composition class would be, while the student's self-efficacy showcased the self-apprehensiveness

¹ The name of the college has been changed for the sake of anonymity for the students surveyed.

from Variables A of the R-Model. The other two variables in Variables A, as well as all of Variables B, and the student demographics are not discussed in this research.

Figure 1- The R-Model: A Self-Efficacy Framework (Ryan, 2015).



This research study theory built upon five well-known theories in academia, which, when blended together, created both Ryan's Motivation Theory as well as the R-Model. Ryan's Motivation Theory theorized that low-risk assignments, defined in this paper as short reading and writing assignments such as free writes and journals, when combined with positive instructor assessment, student centered pedagogy, and a focus on the student's background, home life, and culture, would positively impact the student's success in school by further increasing his or her self-efficacy.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

By studying the self-efficacy of the students at Gardenia College as it related to first-year collegiate writing, this research examined the underlying factors leading to a student's capacity to succeed in freshman composition and to continuously excel in his or her ability to communicate in written language.

TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY

In the Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM) article, *The Impact of Teachers' Reflective Journal Writing on their Self-Efficacy*, Rahgozaran and Gholami (2014)

discussed how teacher self-efficacy, which originated from Bandura's social cognitive theory, could influence effective teaching and thus shape a student's educational experience. The article further discussed how the instructor's own self-efficacy was just as important a variable for the research on teaching as anything else (Rahgozaran & Gholami, 2014).

STUDENT SELF-APPREHENSIVENESS AND WRITING

Wachholz and Etheridge (1996) wrote, *Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs of High- and Low-Apprehensive Writers*, for the Journal of Developmental Education. In the article, Wachholz and Etheridge examined how self-efficacy and anxiety when it came to writing were tied to the student's writing performance, how a student's apprehensiveness could result in a poorer writer and potentially influence a student's future career choice, as well as other major life decisions (Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996).

SELF-EFFICACY AND COLLEGE WRITING

McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer (1985) elaborated in their article, *Self-Efficacy and Writing: A Different View of Self-Evaluation*, for the College Composition and Communication journal about what the definition of self-efficacy was, as well as two separate studies on self-efficacy and anxiety when it came to writing. While many author researchers have focused on self-evaluation being based on judging a piece of work against a professor's course syllabus, McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer argued that there was a second type of self-evaluation that also played a vital role: the individual's assessment of their ability to write effectively. They concluded that students who had a stronger self-efficacy and less anxiety were better writers, leading to the question of whether or not writers who had a strong self-efficacy had a different behavior than their peers with a weaker sense of self-efficacy (McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer, 1985).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using a quantitative research method, students at Gardenia College were surveyed on their self-reported self-apprehensiveness with close-ended questions that evoked their perceptions and feelings about their introductory composition course.

The Research Question was a Pearson Correlation Coefficient, a powerful statistic, which showed a correlation, that one variable corresponded with a variation of a second variable (Urdan, 2010).

THE RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. To what extent does self-apprehensiveness (SA), which makes up one aspect of self-efficacy, affect other variables of self-efficacy such as the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness (SPTE) and his or her self-assessed level of preparation for college level English (SALPCE)?

The researcher selected a quantitative survey to measure the relationship between a student's self-efficacy with collegiate writing by using a survey Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) used on student's at a four-year university to measure their self-efficacy in writing course attainment.

RESULTS/ CONCLUSIONS

A Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Table 1) was conducted to discover statistically significant relationships between the single Likert-scale variable for the Research Question. The variable focused on was the student’s self-apprehensiveness with college composition, and how that affected other aspects of their self-efficacy and success in introductory composition. The data was compiled from ten introductory composition classrooms and two hundred and fifty-three students at Gardenia College.

Table 1
Pearson Correlation Coefficient

		Sig	Effect Size
Student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-apprehensiveness	.396	p<.01	Low to Medium
Self-apprehensiveness and student’s self-assessed level of preparation for college level English	.730	p<.01	High

The correlation for the variables was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (Table 2). According to Urdan, a Pearson correlation is a statistic, which indicates the direction and strength of two variables (Urdan, 2010). The symbol *r* represents the Pearson correlation coefficient ranging from -1 to +1, while the effect size (Cohen’s Scale) describes the strength of the correlation: .3 = low; .5 = medium; and .7 = high. According to Cohen’s Scale (Figure 2), the correlation was low to medium for the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-apprehensiveness and with degrees of freedom at two hundred and thirty-eight and it was high for self-apprehensiveness and the student’s self-assessed level of preparation for college level English with degrees of freedom at two hundred and fifty-one. The APA write-up for each of the variables is as follows: $r(N-2) = .396, p < .01$ and $r(N-2) = .730, p < .01$.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SA	4.40	1.186	253

Table 2 Continued

		<i>Correlations</i>		
		SPTE	SA	SALPCE
SA	Pearson Correlation	.396**	1	.730**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	240	253	253

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 2 – Cohen’s Scale.

.3 - Low
.5 - Medium
.7 - High

The Research Question inquired as to what extent the student’s self-apprehensiveness correlated with the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-assessed level of preparation for college level English. Cohen’s scale showed that there was a low to medium strength correlation between the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-apprehensiveness and a very high correlation between self-apprehensiveness and the student’s self-assessed level of preparation for college level English. The correlation was significant at the 0.01 levels.

The Pearson correlation showed that the relationship between self-apprehensiveness and self-assessed preparation for college level English was a very strong correlation, while self-apprehensiveness and the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness was far weaker.

EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

If higher self-efficacy and lower self-apprehensiveness helps students become more successful in their educational path with writing, then this research could help students discover that they can, and will, succeed in their first-year composition class. In fact, Caron (2008) concluded that the issue students have with writing was a thinking problem over a writing problem. The conclusion of this research is that self-efficacy and a student’s self-perception of their abilities do affect the student’s ability to succeed in collegiate writing courses such as introductory composition.

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