

Is Writing a Thinking Problem? Self-Efficacy's Influence in Student Success for First-Year College Composition

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Abstract: *This research studied the variables that affected a student's self-perception and success in first-year composition at a community college. The study utilized a quantitative research method to analyze the Research Question. Quantitative data was collected from a northern California community college using a seven-point Likert-scale. The Research Question was answered with a statistically significant Pearson Correlation Coefficient at the 0.01 level, which showed that a student's self-perception in his or her ability to succeed in introductory composition was a factor in the student's self-efficacy in introductory college composition.*

Keywords: *Self-Efficacy, Higher Education, College Composition, Community College*

This study examined how a student's self-perception affected his or her success in a first-year composition class at Gardenia College, a community college in northern California. The study utilized a purely quantitative research method to answer the Research Question and the researcher theory built upon five theories in total.

The Research Question was: To what extent do the following variables, which make up aspects of self-efficacy, affect one another?

Variables (student perspective): student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness, self-apprehensiveness, and self-assessed level of preparation for college level English.

The two main theories utilized in this research were Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) and Ogbu and Simmons' cultural ecological theory (1998). Furthermore, three sub-theories, which helped enhance the researcher's lens were culturally relevant pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and social justice. Due to the theory building in this research, the researcher designed the theoretical framework named the R-Model and theorized Ryan's Motivation Theory. In this conference proceeding, Variables B, or the student's demographics, will not be discussed. However, the R-Model utilizes Variables A from the Research Question to see how the variables impact the student's self-efficacy of their writing, and thus the student's outcome in their introductory college composition class.

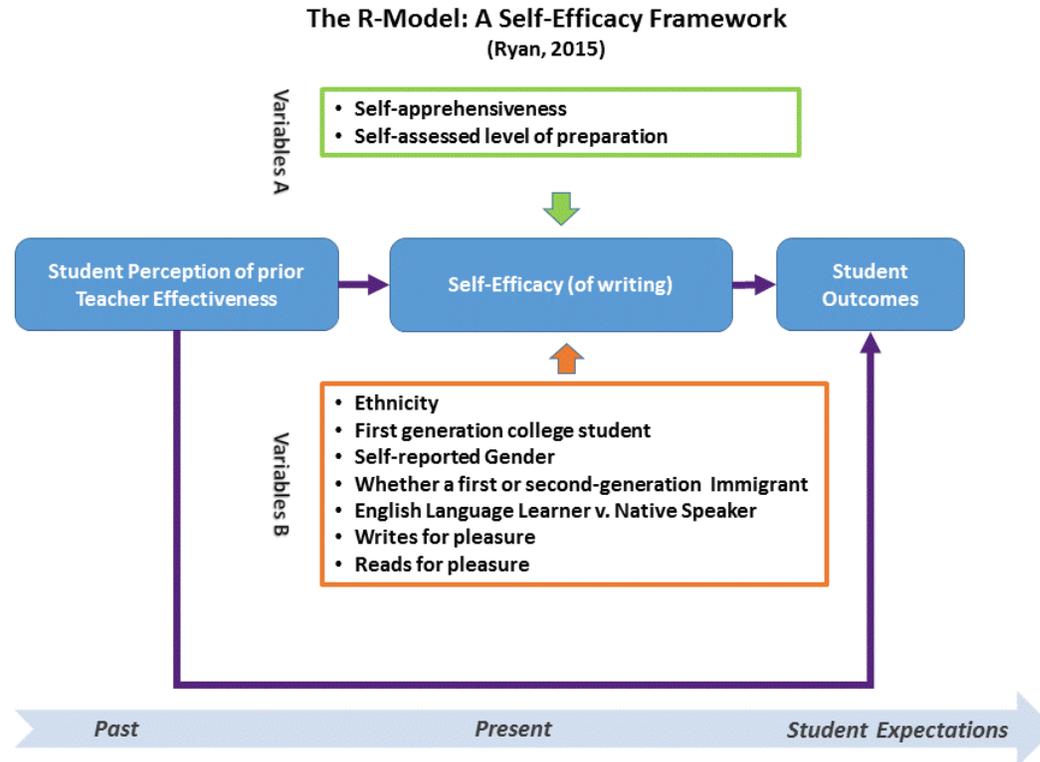


Figure 1. The R-Model: A Self-Efficacy Framework (Ryan, 2015)

Blending together the five theories and the R-Model, the researcher then created Ryan's Motivation Theory. This theorized that low risk assignments, such as journals and free writing, culturally relevant pedagogy, and positive teacher feedback, would together create a higher level of student self-efficacy, and thus, positively impact the student's academic success. The Research Question was a Pearson Correlation Coefficient - a powerful statistic that showed a correlation that one variable corresponded with a variation of a second variable (Urdu, 2010). The researcher chose a quantitative research method to survey a wider population of students, which allows for a broader student perspective, than qualitative research. A quantitative research method also makes it more possible for policy changes and implementations to occur.

The researcher chose a quantitative survey by Zimmerman and Bandura (1994), which was originally used on four-year university students to measure their self-efficacy in writing course attainment. The researcher also added additional questions on student demographics and utilized a seven-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly disagreeing on the student's ability of performing the designated activity (a score of 1) to strongly agreeing that the student believes that he or she can succeed in the activity (score of 7).

The research results showed that there was a significant correlation between all three variables at the 0.01 level. The effect size, or Cohen's Scale, described the strength of the correlation: 0.3 = low, 0.5 = medium, and 0.7 = high. According to Cohen's Scale, the correlation for the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness and the student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English was low, $r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$, and the degrees of freedom was two hundred and thirty-eight. The student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-

apprehensiveness was low to medium, $r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$ and with the degrees of freedom at two hundred and thirty-eight. And for self-apprehensiveness and the student’s self-assessed level of preparation for college level English was high, $r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$ and with degrees of freedom at two hundred and fifty-one.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

| | Mean | SD | N |
|--------|------|------|-----|
| SPTE | 5.05 | 1.65 | 240 |
| SA | 4.40 | 1.19 | 253 |
| SALPCE | 4.45 | 1.11 | 253 |

Table 3. Correlations

| | SPTE | SA | SALPCE |
|--------|------|------|--------|
| SPTE | 1.00 | 3.96 | 3.00 |
| SA | --- | 1.00 | 0.73 |
| SALPCE | --- | --- | 1.00 |

Note**. $p < 0.001$

The Pearson correlation showed a very strong correlation between self-apprehensiveness and self-assessed preparation for college level English, while it was far weaker for the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness with the two other self-efficacious variables. This could be due to the number of survey questions for each variable. There were twenty-one questions for the self-assessed level of college level English, seven questions for self-apprehensiveness, and only two for the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness. Alternatively, it could be because the student’s perception of prior teacher effectiveness was simply not as correlated a variable as the other two.

This research examined the variables related to promoting successful writing for students in their first-year composition class. The study concluded that self-efficacy and a student’s self-perception of his or her ability to write well impacted his or her success in collegiate writing courses such as introductory composition.

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