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# How Race Can Impact Our Writing Self-Efficacy in College Composition

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**Abstract:** *This study focused on how race impacts a student's perception and success in a community college composition course. The purpose was to uncover the factors that led to successful writers with a focus in self-efficacy and writing. The study used a quantitative research method to analyze the research question.*

**Key Words:** Community College, Composition, Higher Education, Self-Efficacy, and Writing

## 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, other than for those who test out with an Advanced Placement English exam score of 3+ or higher, at Gardenia College<sup>1</sup>, a community college located in northern California.

This research looked into how race can impact a student's self-efficacy in introductory freshman composition course at Gardenia College, 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.

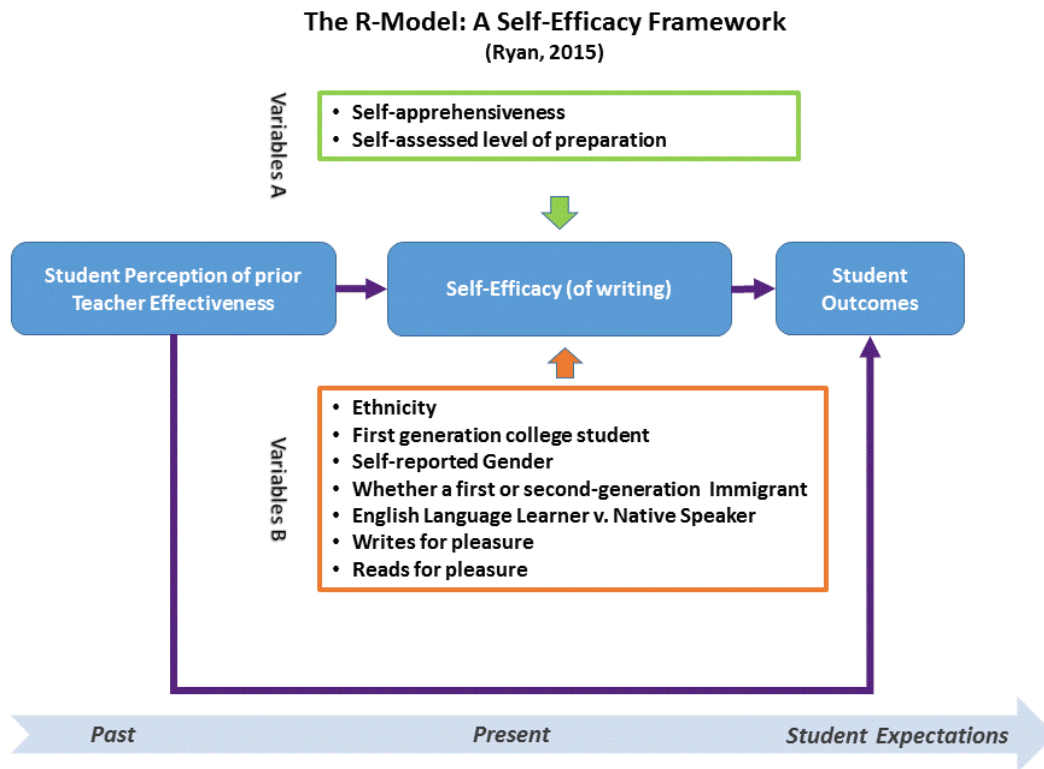
The researcher designed a theoretical framework based on the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy called the R-Model (Figure 1) due to the theory building in this study. These five, well-known theories, when blended together, created both Ryan's Motivation Theory as well as

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the college has been changed for the sake of anonymity for the students surveyed.

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.

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



### 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, such as a student’s ethnic background, 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. The organization of this literature review first showcased the broadest research in self-efficacy, followed by self-apprehensiveness and writing. Finally, it focused on the research of self-efficacy at the collegiate level.

#### 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 demographics and their self-reported feelings about college composition with closed-ended questions that evoked their perceptions and feelings about their introductory composition course.

By focusing on a quantitative-only research method, a more expansive student population was surveyed, which allowed the research to focus on a broader student perspective.

### **THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question was:

1. To what extent does race affect a student's writing self-efficacy?

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 students at a four-year university to measure their self-efficacy in writing course attainment. The original survey looked into a student's writing self-efficacy at a four-year university, similar to how this research focused on community college students and their self-efficacy and writing ability.

## **RESULTS/ CONCLUSIONS**

The Research Question utilized descriptive statistics and cross-tabular data analyses (crosstabs) (Table 1). The variable focused on was the student's race and how that affected other

aspects of their self-efficacy and success in introductory composition such as the student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English (SALPCE) (Table 2), their own self-apprehensiveness when it came to writing (SA) (Table 3), and their perception of their prior teacher's effectiveness (SPTE) (Table 4). The data was compiled from ten introductory composition classrooms and two hundred and fifty-three students at Gardenia College.

Out of the 252 students who listed their ethnicity, 49.6%, or 125 of the students, surveyed at Gardenia College identified as Caucasian. The next largest ethnic group, Hispanic, was nearly half as much as their Caucasian peers at 21.4% and 54 students. They were followed by other, at 12.3% or 31 students, Asian, at 10.3% or 26 students, African American, at 4.0% or 10 students, Pacific Islander, at 2.0% or 5 students, and finally, Native American, at .4% or 1 student.

As per the Crosstab analysis, students from all races in this survey had a similar rating for their self-efficacy with their self-assessed level of preparation for college level English. However, as stated above, there were a far greater number of Caucasian students in this survey population, which could have skewed the results for the less represented ethnicities. For example, only ten students in this survey self-identified as African American, five students identified as Pacific Islander, and there was only one Native American student, which made for a numerically insignificant result in this research study. The APA write up for the Crosstab analysis of race and SALPCE is  $X^2(36, N = 252) = 34.292, p = .550, \phi = .369$ .

Students of all races that were surveyed in this study had a similar level of self-apprehensiveness when it came to their writing self-efficacy. However, as noted above, nearly half the survey population was Caucasian. A more diverse demographic could tell the researcher if there truly is no real difference between race and writing self-apprehensiveness. The APA write up for the Crosstab analysis of race and SA is  $X^2(36, N = 252) = 21.868, p = .969, \phi = .295$ .

The majority of students from almost all races had the perception that their prior composition professor was very effective. The only exception was the single, Native American student who did not feel their prior writing teacher was as effective. However, since only one student responded and labeled him or herself as being Native American, this data is numerically insignificant for the research. The APA write up for the Crosstab analysis of race and SPTE is  $X^2(36, N = 239) = 51.343, p = .047, \phi = .463$ .

### **EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE**

The need for increased understanding of self-efficacy in first-year composition is essential. 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. This research was designed to help educators better understand whether or not writing was a problem of self-perception for students enrolled in an introductory composition class at Gardenia College, as well as how and if a student's race impacted their belief system. While the research found in this study did not show a correlation between a student's ethnicity and their self-efficacy, it is also important to recognize that race could play a factor when it comes to one's writing self-efficacy. The research in this study focused on one school, thus not allowing for a very diverse population. However, as educators, understanding this research will help improve our pedagogical practices as we serve all our students at our diverse and inclusive campuses and classrooms.

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