

# Self-Efficacy's Influence on a Student's Self-Assessed Level of Preparation for College Level English

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**Abstract:** *This study focused on how self-efficacy and a student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English impacted their 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. The research focused on how a student's self-assessed level of preparation for their first-year college composition course impacted other aspects of self-efficacy and student success such as a student's self-apprehensiveness and the student's perception of their prior teacher's effectiveness. The study utilized a purely quantitative research method to analyze the Research Question. The Research Question was answered with a statistically significant Pearson Correlation Coefficient at the 0.01 level.*

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

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

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 self-efficacy and a student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English in an 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.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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

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

(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 research in this study focused on self-efficacy's influence on a student's self-reported belief on what his or her success in the first-year composition class, as well as its impact on a student's self-apprehensiveness and perception of their prior teacher's effectiveness. Variables B, the student demographics and interests, are not discussed in this research.

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.

The reason why it was critical to study a student's writing self-efficacy was because even if they successfully completed their first-year composition course, they would still be expected to further build upon their writing skills in order to earn their associate's, and potentially bachelor's, degree. In fact, Caron (2008) concluded that the issue students have with writing was a thinking problem over a writing problem.

## REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE/ DATA SOURCES

By studying the self-efficacy of the student's 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. 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 self-reported self-assessed level of preparation for college level English 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).

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**

To what extent does a student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English (SALPCE), 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-apprehensiveness (SA)?

This research study utilized a Pearson correlation coefficient for the Research Question. A seven-point Likert scale, ranged from strongly disagreeing to the ability of performing the designated activity (a score of 1) to strongly agreeing that the student believed they can succeed in the activity very well (score of 7), was used to collect the quantitative data, which in turn was used to address the Research Question.

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-assessed level of preparation for college level English, 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.

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 for the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-assessed level of preparation for college level English 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:  $r(N-2) = .300, p < .01$  and  $r(N-2) = .730, p < .01$ .

The Research Question inquired as to what extent the student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English correlated with the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness and self-apprehensiveness. Cohen's scale showed that there was a low correlation between the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness and the student's self-assessed level of preparation for college level English, but 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 the relationship between the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness and their self-assessed level of preparation for college level English was far weaker. This could be due to the number of survey questions for each variable – twenty-one questions were for the self-assessed level of college level English, seven questions were for self-apprehensiveness, and only two questions were for the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness - or because the student's perception of prior teacher effectiveness was simply not as correlated a variable as the other two.

### **EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

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. 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.

This research informs us as practitioners, parents, and people, that it is our job to remind students, children, and ourselves that we can, and will, succeed at a college-level composition course. By boosting the confidence level of our students, we will be creating less apprehensive writers for the future generation, as well as more successful writers in our college composition classroom.

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