SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS AS PREDICTORS OF WRITING PERFORMANCE OF COLLEGE FRESHMAN STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study examined if there is a relationship among self-concept, self-efficacy, and writing performance of 211 freshman college students. Questionnaires were administered to assess their writing self-concepts and writing self-efficacy beliefs. Performance was assessed using a comparison-contrast essay grades as a requirement in their English class. Means and standard deviations were used to determine the levels of self-concepts, self-efficacy, and writing performance. Multiple regression was used where self-concept and self-efficacy were the predictors for writing performance. Although the factors self-concept, self-efficacy, and writing performance are all significantly related, it was noted that self-efficacy beliefs are better predictors of their writing performance.

Keywords: self-concept beliefs; self-efficacy beliefs; writing performance; self-beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Students' academic performance and the various factors that contribute to it have been investigated for several decades now. Much of the initial work advanced sociocognitive theories and the development of performance models based on these theories. Subsequent work sought to differentiate and measure the influence of sociocognitive and other factors on academic achievement through an analytical process known as path analysis. Over time the evidence garnered through this collective body of research illuminated the importance of self-perceptions, motivation, and aptitude, among others, on academic achievement. In addition, it became increasingly clear that interactions existed across many of the factors evaluated (Carroll & Garavalia, 2004).

Social cognitive theorists contend that self-perceptions strongly influence the choices people make, the effort they expend, the strength of their perseverance in the face of adversity, and the degree of anxiety they experience (Bandura, 1986). In part, they believe these self-perceptions can be better predictors of behavior than actual capability because such self-beliefs are instrumental in determining what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have. The mediational role these beliefs play also helps explain why people's performance attainments may differ even when they have similar knowledge and skills.

Research has identified how self-perceptions such as self-efficacy and self-concept can predict academic success and/or failure.

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to achieve certain performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997). These beliefs are seen as the generative mechanism through which persons integrate and apply their existing cognitive,

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behavioral, and social skills to the performance of a task. It is expressed as personal confidence in the ability to successfully perform tasks at a given level.

Self-concept, on the other hand, refers to self-perceptions formed through experience with the environment and, in particular, through environmental reinforcements and the reflected appraisals of others (Marsh & Craven, 1997; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). It is typically measured at a higher level of generality than self-efficacy (Pajares & Miller, 1994).

Having significant predictive values as regards academic achievement, these two have received considerable attention from scholars (see Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1993, 1997, 2006; Schunk, 1983; Schunk & Hanson, 1985; Norwich, 1987; for self-efficacy studies, Pajares, 1996b, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Pietsch, Walker, & Chapman, 2003, for self-concept investigations).

Shell, Murphy, and Bruning (1989), for example, reported a significant correlation between students' confidence in their writing skills and their holistic score on a 20-minute essay. In addition, Pajares and Johnson (1994) reported that writing self-efficacy, perceived usefulness, and previous writing achievement correlated with the writing performance of undergraduates. Similarly, Pajares and Valiante (1997) reported that self-efficacy made an independent contribution to the prediction of essay writing of elementary school students (P = .356) in a path model that included writing apprehension, perceived usefulness, and writing aptitude.

Researchers who have investigated the processes in which writers engage as they compose text have primarily attempted to understand the cognitive processes underlying students' compositions (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Goelman, 1982). The more that researchers have learned about the relationship between cognition and writing, the more complex the relationship seems to be. Some have addressed this complexity by investigating affective factors involved in writing (e.g., Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003). Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe, and Skinner (1985, in Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 2003) concluded that students' self-beliefs play a prominent role in writing. In addition to self-efficacy, these beliefs include the writing apprehension that students feel as they attempt writing tasks; how useful they perceive writing to be; the self-regulatory strategies in which they engage; and the feelings of self-worth associated with writing, or writing self-concept.

However, while these empirical studies provide some insights into how self-beliefs impact academic achievement, they fail to provide an adequate picture because as Pajares (2002) laments, "few researchers have explored the relationships among self-efficacy, domain-specific self-concept, and academic performances; and results are inconsistent."

It is against this backdrop of inconcsistent and inconclusive research findings that this study was conducted. Notwithstanding this fact, however, it can be hypothesized that self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs as constructs would have an equal impact on the students' writing performance because both involve students' beliefs in their capabilities and attitude required to attain a given task. Furthermore, it can be conjectured that self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate more predictive utility than self-concept beliefs because of the performance focus of self-efficacy items in comparison with the personal characteristic focus of self-concept items.

Thus, the present study was designed to examine the role of self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs in first year college students' writing performance. This study was guided by the

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following research questions: Are self-concept beliefs, self-efficacy beliefs and writing performance related? If so, which self-beliefs can predict students' writing performance?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Two hundred eleven randomly selected freshman students from various colleges (i.e., Liberal Arts, Education, Computer Science, Science, Business) enrolled in English One classes of a co-educational private university in Manila participated in this study. Most of the participants are graduates of private institutions—either from exclusive for boys or girls or co-educational private secondary schools—who live within Metro Manila area and are from the upper- to middle-class socio-economic brackets.

Procedure/Data Analysis

Two English One classes from five colleges in the said university were chosen to participate in this study. Specifically, 50 students were identified as possible participants. The researcher solicited the consents of both the faculty and the students to answer the various questionnaires prior to their writing of the comparison-contrast essays. Answers to the questionnaires were tallied and the data were initially imported and formatted in Microsoft Excel 2007 and later on imported into the SSPS statistical analysis application. Means and standard deviations were used to determine the levels of self-efficacy, self-concept, and writing performance. The multiple regression is used where self-efficacy and self-concept were the predictors for writing performance.

Instruments

Writing self-efficacy. This was operationalized as students' judgments of their confidence that they possess the various composition, grammar, usage, and mechanical skills appropriate to their academic level (see Appendix A). The Writing Skills Self-Efficacy Scale (adapted from Pajares, Miller, and Johnson, 1999) consisted of ten items asking students how sure they were that they could perform specific writing skills on a scale from 0 *(no chance)* to 100 *(completely certain).* Pajares and Valiante (1997) reported coefficient alpha reliability of .88 and positive and above .68 correlations between items and scale scores on a sample of Grade 5 students.

Writing self-concept. Based on Marsh's (1990, in Pajares, Miller & Johnson, 1999), this is operationalized as students' assessment of their feelings towards writing (see Appendix B). Directions asked students to "use the following scale to respond to the following statements as you believe they apply to you" (sample item: "Writing is one of my best subjects "). The 6-point Likert scale ranged from 1 *(definitely false)* to 6 *(definitely true).* Marsh (1990) obtained alpha coefficients ranging from .88 to .94 for the various academic areas with students in Grades 5 and

6. Pajares, Miller, and Johnson (1999) who used the same instrument in their study obtained an alpha coefficient of .86.

Essay-writing performance. Consistent with procedures used by self-efficacy researchers (Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989, 1995; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 2003), teachers asked their students to write a 2-page comparison-contrast essay on two items of their choice after receiving instruction/lecture on how to write this kind of essay. To ensure that students would take the task seriously, they were informed that scores would count as part of their final grade. The essays then were rated by their teachers using a holistic scoring method developed and are used by the Department. Consistent with guidelines of social cognitive theory, criteria for scoring were the same as those on which students were asked to assess their writing self-efficacy, that is, in terms of students' demonstration of purpose/theme, grammar, usage, composition, and mechanical skills, etc. (see Appendix C for the writing prompt and the criteria for scoring rubric).

Results

Means and standard deviations used to determine the levels of self-efficacy, self-concept, and writing performance are provided in Table 1. As can be gleaned in the Table, both self-efficacy and self-concept are above the median score of 50 and 30, repectively. Likewise, the writing performance of the participants is high as shown in the same table.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Self-efficacy, Self-concept, and Writing Performance

	N	M	SD
Self-efficacy	211	65.26	18.34
Self-concept	211	38.49	11.42
Writing performance	211	42.39	5.51

With regard to the relations among the three variables examined here, the data shown in Table 2 below indicates that all three are significantly related, $p<.01$. However, the relationship between self-efficacy and writing performance is observed to be higher than the rest of the correlations ($r=.36$).

Table 2. *Correlation Matrix for Self-efficacy, Self-concept, and Writing Performance*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Self-concept	---		
(2) Self-efficacy	0.36**	---	
(3) Writing performance	0.19**	0.21**	---

$**p<.01$

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The multiple regression is used where self-efficacy and self-concept were the predictors for writing performance (see Table 3 below).

Table 3, *Predicting Writing Performance through Self-concept and Self-Efficacy*

	b*	SE	b	SE	t(169)	p-value
Self-concept	0.13	0.08	0.04	0.02	1.60	0.11
Self-efficacy	0.16	0.08	0.08	0.04	2.00	0.04

R= .23826881 R²= .05677203 Adjusted R²= .04560956
F(2,169)=5.0860 p<.00716 Std. error of estimate: 5.3819

The regression performed was rather a poor fit (Adjusted R^2= 5%). When writing performance was regressed with self-concept and self-efficacy, writing performance increased by .13 for increase of self-concept, and increase by .16 for self-efficacy. Only, the effect of self-efficacy was significant, $t(209)=2.00$, $p<.05$.

Discussion

This study was designed to address issues concerning (a) the strength of the relation between self-beliefs and performance in writing for freshman college students and (b) which beliefs can better predict their writing performance. Concerning the strength of relations, results indicate that both self-concepts and self-efficacy beliefs are significantly related to writing performance. As predicted by researchers (see, for example, Bandura,1986; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989), self-efficacy beliefs were more strongly related to achievement in both reading and writing. The findings in the present study confirm previous studies that also indicated that self-efficacy is the more potent of the two belief mechanisms (Pajares & Schunk, 2002) and suggest that perceptions of ability are more strongly related to performance than affective perceptions. Thus, this study did not support or found weak the hypothesis that self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs as constructs would have an equal impact on the students' writing performance because both involve students' beliefs in their capabilities and attitude required to to complete a given task. One possible explanation is that writing requirements in college are different from their high school experiences given the fact that college writing is academic in nature and structure; hence, more difficult, than the personal essays that they wrote in high school. In many high schools where literature is the focus of language instruction, academic writing is given little systematic writing instruction.

Furthermore, findings in this study confirm the second hypothesis that self-efficacy beliefs is a better predictor of writing performance of the participants. This, despite the fact, that the regression performed in this study was rather a poor fit as mentioned in the Results Section. This could be attributed to the more predictive utility of self-efficacy beliefs than self-concept beliefs. It is worth mentioning here that this is due to the performance focus of self-efficacy items in comparison with the personal characteristic focus of self-concept item.

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Conclusions

This study attempeted to investigate the relations among self-efficacy beliefs, self-concept beliefs, and writing performance of 211 undergraduates students of a private university in Manila. Moreover, it looked into the issue concerning the predictive value of self-concept vis-à-vis self efficacy beliefs in relation to writing performance of the participants. Overall, the results of this study indicate that the three variables are significantly related despite the fact that the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and writing performance is observed to be higher that the relationship between self-cocncept and writing performance. Results of multiple regression performed in this study indicate that self-efficacy beliefs are better predictor of students' writing performance. Further research is necessary to determine how family and/or school intervention can aid in improving self-beliefs to impact positive academic performance.

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Appendix A

Writing Prompt for the Comparison-Contrast Paragraph/Essay

In a 2-page essay, compare and/or contrast two items using at least three points of analysis. Discuss in detail their similarities and/or differences by giving specific examples to support your ideas. State your thesis explicitly and provide a good beginning, body, and ending sentences/paragraphs for your essay. Your paper will be graded using the Evaluation Rubric for a Compare/Contrast Essay which your teacher will provide you.

Rating Rubric for a Compare/Contrast Essay
(Adapted from English One, DEAL, DLSU)

Title: _____ Code _____

Rating Scale: 1 to 5. 1=very weak, 2=weak, 3=okay, 4=very good, 5=excellent

*	Criteria	R	Comments
1	Opening catches reader's interest.		
2	Thesis states topics and the main idea.		
3	Features or subjects are discussed in the same order.		
4	Order in which features are discussed is logical/consistent.		
5	Specific examples are used to support ideas.		
6	Wording and ideas are fresh and interesting.		
7	Compare/contrast clue words are used.		
8	Grammar		
9	Mechanics (Spelling, Punctuation, Capitalization)		
10	Citations/Documentation		

Rater #: _____

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Appendix B

Writing Self-Efficacy Scale
Confidence Judgments (Adapted from Pajares, Miller, and Johnson, 1999)

Directions: On a scale from 0 *(no chance)* to 100 *(completely certain),* how sure are you that you can perform each of the *writing skills* below? Remember that you may use *any* number between 0 and 100.

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

No chance   Completely certain

_____ 1. Correctly *spell* all words in a two-page essay.
_____ 2. Correctly *punctuate* a two-page composition.
_____ 3. Correctly *cite sources*.
_____ 4. Write *grammatical sentences.*
_____ 5. Write an *effective thesis statement* for a comparison-contrast essay.
_____ 6. Correctly use *transitional devices to show similarities/differences.*
_____ 7. Write strong *paragraphs* that have good *topic sentences* or *main ideas.*
_____ 8. Write a body paragraph with *details that support the main idea.*
_____ 9. Organize sentences into a paragraph that *clearly expresses an idea.*
_____10. Write a *well-organized and well-sequenced essay* that has a good introduction, body, and conclusion

Appendix C

Writing Self-Concept Beliefs
(Adapted from Pajares, Miller, and Johnson, 1999)

*Directions: U*se the following scale from 1 *(definitely false)* to 6 *(definitely true)* to respond to the following statements as you believe they apply to you.

1	2	3	4	5	6

Definitely false   Definitely true

_____ 1. "Writing is one of my best subjects."
_____ 2. "I do badly in tests of writing."
_____ 3. "I have always done well in writing."
_____ 4. "I have trouble understanding anything with writing in it."
_____ 5. "I often need help with writing."
_____ 6. "I get good marks in writing."

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_____ 7. "I enjoy studying for writing."
_____ 8. "I never want to take another writing course."
_____ 9. "I look forward to writing classes."
_____ 10."I hate writing."