



Review

The influence of academic self-efficacy on academic performance: A systematic review



Toni Honnicke, Jaclyn Broadbent*

School of Psychology, Deakin University, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This review integrates 12 years of research on the relationship between academic self-efficacy and university student's academic performance, and known cognitive and motivational variables that explain this relationship. Previous reviews report moderate correlations between these variables, but few discuss mediating and moderating factors that impact this relationship. Systematic searches were conducted in April 2015 of psychological, educational, and relevant online databases for studies investigating academic self-efficacy and performance in university populations published between September 2003 and April 2015. Fifty-nine papers were eligible. Academic self-efficacy moderately correlated with academic performance. Several mediating and moderating factors were identified, including effort regulation, deep processing strategies and goal orientations. Given the paucity of longitudinal studies identified in this review, further research into how these variables relate over time is necessary in order to establish causality and uncover the complex interaction between academic self-efficacy, performance, and motivational and cognitive variables that impact it.

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* Corresponding author. School of Psychology, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, Victoria 3125, Australia.

E-mail address: Jaclyn.Broadbent@deakin.edu.au (J. Broadbent).

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Among the various theories that attempt to explain the processes that drive and regulate behaviour, Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) is undoubtedly one of the most prominent. Social Cognitive Theory posits that a combination of external social systems and internal self-influence factors motivate and regulate behaviour (Bandura, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Of these self-influence factors, self-efficacy (SE) is a major component and refers to an individual's judgement of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to achieve desired performances (Bandura, 1997). The influence of self-efficacy has been studied across a range of psychological disciplines, in areas such as smoking cessation, dietary behaviour change, addiction relapse (Conner & Norman, 1995; Povey, Conner, Sparks, James, & Shepherd, 2000), work-related behaviour (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), sporting skill and performance (Owen & Froman, 1988), and academic performance (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Robbins, Lauver, Le, David, & Langley, 2004).

Within an academic context, SE is frequently described in terms of Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE), which defines learner judgements about one's ability to successfully attain educational goals (Elias & MacDonald, 2007). A wealth of literature exists that highlights the importance of ASE for learning and subsequent academic performance. This relationship has been studied in a range of learning environments, including early years (Joët, Usher, & Bressoux, 2011), high school (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011), and university populations (Robbins et al., 2004). Additionally, research has investigated the influence of ASE on academic performance across varying degrees of specificity, such as self-efficacy for successfully completing subject-specific tasks like algebra or geometry problems (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990), self-efficacy for successful performance and attainment of a specific grade in a subject (Neuville, Frenay, & Bourgeois, 2007), and self-efficacy for general success within a university course (Cassidy & Eachus, 2002; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990). Despite the educational setting in which it is measured, ASE has consistently been shown to positively correlate with academic performance, with meta-analytic studies reporting moderate effect sizes (Richardson, Bond, & Abraham, 2012; Robbins et al., 2004). Findings from the meta-analysis conducted by Richardson et al. (2012) suggest that ASE beliefs account for up to 9% of the variance in the overall Grade Point Average (GPA) of university students, however, significant heterogeneity in effect size was also reported across studies ($I^2 = 90.94\%$). In light of these and similar findings, research has focused on investigating those factors that may mediate the relationship between ASE and performance, and uncover moderator variables that may account for the range of variability across studies.

In addition to existing as a central mechanism to explain the self-monitoring processes explained by Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy appears as a key motivational variable within an applied framework for self-regulated learning. The Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) framework (Pintrich, 2004) explains how the interaction of social, contextual, motivational, and cognitive variables influence academic performance outcomes such as Grade Point Average (GPA), examination results, or final course grades. The interaction between ASE and the range of variables within the SRL framework for predicting academic performance in university settings has been extensively studied using a variety of complex data modelling and mediation techniques (Coutinho & Neuman, 2008; DiBenedetto & Bembenuddy, 2011; Diseth, 2011; Ferla, Valcke, & Schuyten, 2010; Lindner & Harris, 1992; Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2013; Pintrich, 2004). Findings from these integrative studies have uncovered complex relationships, suggesting the mechanism for which ASE influences academic performance is moderated and mediated various factors, such as personality, past performance, and self-regulatory learning strategies.

The extant literature provides overwhelming support for the relationship between ASE and academic performance. However, the literature that discusses the interactions and pathways by which this relationship exists is more complex. This is attributed in part to the lack of parsimony in the models that have been tested, the different combinations of variables that have been used in model development and the exploratory, non-causal nature in which much of this research has taken place. Despite the existence of relevant reviews on the relationship between ASE and performance (Richardson et al., 2012; Robbins et al., 2004; Usher & Pajares, 2008), no review of available research exists that has investigated the influence of ASE on academic performance, while including the mediating and moderating factors thought to impact on this relationship in a university population. Additionally, while the most recent review (Richardson et al., 2012) is only 5 years old (search was

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