

SELF-EFFICACY FOR ONLINE LEARNING
AND DROP OUT INTENTIONS
AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

By

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2008

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
May, 2023

SELF-EFFICACY FOR ONLINE LEARNING
AND DROP OUT INTENTIONS
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Date of Degree: MAY, 2023

Title of Study: SELF-EFFICACY FOR ONLINE LEARNING AND DROP OUT INTENTIONS
AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate three variables of interest which were self-efficacy for online learning, drop out intentions, and the number of online courses students had previously completed. Bivariate correlation analyses were performed to determine if self-efficacy for online learning had statistically significant relationships with student drop out intentions and the number of online courses the students had previously completed. The results of the correlation analyses revealed that statistically significant relationships existed between self-efficacy for online learning and the two other variables of interest.

Specifically, there was a negative correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions ($r = -0.318$, $p < .01$). Therefore, as self-efficacy for online learning increased student drop out intentions decreased. There was a positive relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses completed by the students ($r = .172$, $p < .01$). Therefore, as the number of online courses completed by the students increased the students' self-efficacy for online learning also increased.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Public universities have experienced a steady increase of online enrollments over the past two decades (Seaman et al., 2018). In 2016, 31.6% of university students were enrolled in at least one online course (Seaman, et al., 2018) which increased to 37.2% in 2019 and 75% in 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Students may choose online courses for a multitude of reasons. Among those reasons are the flexibility of self-paced learning, flexibility of time management, geographic flexibility, and self-motivation (Oklahoma State University, 2022). However, a large number of students enrolled in online courses end up dropping out (Bawa, 2016).

Students' reasons for dropping out typically fall within five dimensions: academic factors, economic factors, social factors, institutional factors, and personal factors (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Academic factors include examples such as college entrance exams, grades, and academic readiness (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Economic factors include examples such as financial need, employment status, and family income (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Social factors include examples such as family problems, parental occupation, and community support (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Institutional factors include examples such as campus environment, institutional involvement, and type of high school attended (Alban & Mauricio, 2019).

Personal factors include examples such as intrinsic motivation, level of commitment, and self-efficacy (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Self-efficacy is of special interest to educational psychologists because self-efficacy is a malleable construct that educators can aid students in developing (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2020).

Self-efficacy is a motivational belief regarding one's own capability for performing a specific task at a certain level (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2006). The study of self-efficacy is of great importance for understanding student motivation within classrooms (Wentzel & Miele, 2016). The majority of prior research conducted on self-efficacy within academic contexts has focused exclusively on traditional face-to-face classrooms, with far less research focused on self-efficacy within online classrooms (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Self-efficacy is a domain specific construct; therefore, self-efficacy may not operate the same from one learning environment to another (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). As a result, students may have lower self-efficacy for learning within online classrooms than they do in traditional face-to-face classrooms (Bawa, 2016; Lee et al., 2013; Stephen et al., 2021), which may attribute to the higher drop out rates among students completing courses online.

Statement of the Problem

Rapid shifts in workforce demographics, globalization, and a shrinking middle class, have underscored the importance of a college education (Hanson, 2022; Merriam et al., 2007). Uneducated workers have higher unemployment rates, fewer job opportunities, and make 32.6% less per year when compared to their peers that hold a four-year degree (Hanson, 2022). Currently, there is a 32.9% drop-out rate among undergraduate college students (Hanson, 2022). Some estimate that the drop-out rate is 10%-20% higher among students attending classes online (Bawa, 2016). Many university students may lack the self-efficacy needed to persist and succeed in online learning environments (Bawa, 2016; Lee et al., 2013; Stephen et al., 2021) which could greatly reduce students' opportunities for advancing their university education (Bawa, 2016;

Stephen et al., 2021). Researchers have not yet identified if self-efficacy for online learning relates to drop out intentions among university students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate self-efficacy for online learning within higher-education classrooms. The researcher hoped to achieve this aim by collecting data from undergraduate university students using self-report surveys. The data was used for the development of a thesis that examines how students' self-efficacy for online learning, along with number of online courses taken by the students, relates to student drop out intentions.

The study contributes to expanding our knowledge regarding how self-efficacy for online learning relates to potential drop-out rates. Studies such as this one are important because self-efficacy is a malleable trait. Literature that describes the relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions may aid educational psychologists in developing course designs, teaching practices, and interventions that position students to thrive in online learning environments which may subsequently aid students in completing their degree program.

Significance of the Study

Numerous studies have been conducted attempting to predict which factors most influence an individual's intent to dropout (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Research has shown that dropout intentions are not necessarily related to one factor but rather a host of academic, economic, social, institutional, and personal factors (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Marginalized youth such as those that identify as LGBTQ+ (Mountz et al., 2020), persons from indigenous backgrounds (Garcia-Olp et al., 2020) and those categorized as low socioeconomic status (SES; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2020; Zembrodt, 2021) are at particular risk for dropping out. Students attending university courses online have an even higher risk for dropping out (Bawa, 2016). Thus, students stand to benefit a great deal from preventative interventions that identify intentions to drop out early and aid them in completing their university degree.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Intent to complete degree program:** refers to whether the student anticipates remaining in college or is contemplating withdrawing from college (Jeno, 2018).
- **Learning environment:** the context in which courses are taught.
 - Online learning environment refers to courses being conducted via the internet.
 - Face-to-face learning environment refers to courses being taken in person, on campus, and with a live instructor.
- **Motivation:** one's own initiative to engage in self-directed, goal-oriented tasks (Wentzel & Miele, 2016).
- **Self-efficacy:** one's own personal beliefs regarding one's capability to learn or perform tasks at a specific level (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Limitations of the Study

The data for this study was collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate university students attending Oklahoma State University. Convenience samples inherently introduce bias to studies. It is possible that the sample does not accurately represent all undergraduate university students and therefore may not be generalizable to the entire target population.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The content of this chapter draws from previous research focused on self-efficacy within traditional classrooms, self-efficacy within online learning environments, the relationship between self-efficacy and self-regulation, and nascent research regarding student drop out intentions. This literature review relies upon social cognitive theory as the guiding framework for explaining self-efficacy within classrooms. It is the hope of the author that this paper will contribute to the expansion of social cognitive theory by aiding in the development of a deeper understanding of self-efficacy for online learning. The following literature review will focus on social cognitive theory, the function of self-efficacy within classrooms, self-efficacy for online learning, and how motivational beliefs relate to drop out intentions among online students.

Theoretical Perspective

Motivation, which may be defined one's own initiative to engage in self-directed, goal-oriented tasks, is a topic of great interest within the field of educational psychology (Wentzel & Miele, 2016). Educational psychologists frequently study the influence of motivational beliefs such as self-efficacy within classroom settings (Wentzel & Miele, 2016). *Self-efficacy*, which is a domain specific motivational construct, may be defined as one's own personal belief regarding one's capability to learn or perform tasks at a specific level (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2015). Self-efficacy is closely related to another core motivational construct known

as self-regulation (Bandura, 1997; Bradley et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Zimmerman, 2002).

According to Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020), *self-regulation* is defined as “self-generated thoughts, affects, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward attainment of one’s goals” (p. 5). *Self-regulated learning* refers to self-regulation that is specific to attaining learning goals (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Motivational research has led social cognitive theorists to believe that students’ self-regulatory skills and educational outcomes are directly linked to the self-efficacy of the student (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2008; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). In a process similar to triadic reciprocal causation, self-efficacy and self-regulation appear to work in tandem to spark the motivation that leads to desirable academic outcomes (Pajares, 2008; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2015). However, the majority of educational research regarding self-efficacy has been conducted within the context of traditional face-to-face classrooms (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) aimed to inspire the expansion of the theoretical framework by encouraging a new wave of social cognitive theorists to delve deeper into motivational research. Thus, studies investigating self-efficacy within online learning environments may aid in fulfilling the call for the theoretical expansion of social cognitive theory. The following section provides a brief overview of the principles of motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and triadic reciprocal causation as described by the theoretical perspective of social cognitive theory.

Motivation According to Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory posits that motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy, are the driving force behind sustained motivation (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). When self-efficacious individuals commit to pursuing a difficult endeavor, they recognize that the path will be hard and that the odds may be stacked against them (Bandura, 1997). However, a combination of a strong belief in oneself, an optimistic perception of self-

efficacy, and a commitment to self-regulating one's own behaviors provide one with the determination to persist (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Self-Efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is at the epicenter of motivation. Self-efficacy directly influences beneficial academic behaviors such as self-regulated learning (Bandura, 2002; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). There are four sources that are central to the development of self-efficacy; these sources include enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Mastery experiences are the most powerful source of self-efficacy and occur when one's belief in oneself is bolstered after successful completion of a task (Bandura, 1997, 2008; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Vicarious experiences refer to instances when a person observes the successful completion of a task by a similar other, which sparks the idea that if others can do it, so can they (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Verbal persuasions occur when a credible person expresses their confidence in another person and encourages that person to complete challenging tasks (Bandura, 2008; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Physiological and affective states refer to a person's thoughts, feelings, and emotions, such as excitement or anxiety (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Students' beliefs regarding their own self-efficacy for learning directly influence the goals they set for themselves, how challenging those goals will be, and their commitment to attaining those goals (Bandura, 1997, 2002, 2008; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Thus, one may surmise that self-efficacy is the catalyst that sparks motivation. Self-efficacy is a personal motivational belief that works in tandem with the interrelated behavior of self-regulation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2015).

Self-Regulation. Self-regulation is a personal behavioral process that involves actively monitoring one's own task engagement while continually making efforts to improve strategies for goal attainment (Zimmerman, 2002). There are three cyclical phases of self-regulation:

forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-efficacy beliefs influence every phase of the self-regulatory process (Pajares, 2008).

The forethought phase involves pre-planning and forming strategies for the successful completion of a task (Zimmerman, 2002). During this phase of self-regulation, self-efficacy “functions as a motivational belief” (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016, p. 47). The performance phase occurs when the individual engages in a specific task (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-efficacy exerts influence during the performance phase as individuals monitor their performance, practice time management, and eliminate distractions (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Finally, there is the self-reflection phase which involves thinking about how well one performed the task and evaluating which steps could be taken to perform the task better next time (Zimmerman, 2002). During this phase, learners that are self-efficacious regarding their own self-regulated learning generate adaptive learning strategies and form attributions regarding the causes of their performance (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Triadic Reciprocal Causation. Social cognitive theory is centered around the concept of *triadic reciprocal causation* which posits that three primary determinants cyclically influence an individual’s state of being. The three determinants include the external environment, personal factors such as cognition and emotional states, and the behavior of the individual (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) asserted that not only do individuals act upon their environment but that the environment simultaneously acts upon the individual. Thus, through their own behavior individuals construct and direct their own futures by acting in concert with their environment (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2008). The interrelated constructs of self-efficacy and self-regulated learning represent one example of triadic reciprocal causation. When students engage in the behavior of self-regulated learning to achieve desired environmental outcomes, they simultaneously strengthen their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs regarding their own self-efficacy (Pajares, 2008; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2015).

Self-Efficacy for Self-Regulated Learning

The concept of self-efficacy for self-regulated learning is somewhat ambiguous and remains largely theoretical in nature. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2016) define self-efficacy for self-regulated learning as the “self-efficacy to generate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of learning goals” (p. 46). Social cognitive theorists believe that students who feel self-efficacious about their self-regulated learning are typically more persistent, put more effort into their academic endeavors, embrace a mastery goal orientation, and employ adaptable learning strategies (Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Self-Efficacy Within Traditional Classrooms

A great deal of research has been conducted investigating self-efficacy within traditional classrooms (Klassen & Usher, 2010; Wentzel & Miele, 2016). Goal setting, social comparisons, and enactive mastery experiences have been identified as constructs crucial to sustaining self-efficacy within traditional settings (Bandura, 1997; Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020). Self-efficacious students tend to demonstrate a host of positive academic behaviors within classrooms which typically lead to desirable academic outcomes (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Usher & Pajares, 2008; Usher et al., 2019). Students high in self-efficacy often embrace a mastery goal orientation (Alhadab & Karpinski, 2020), demonstrate optimal levels of competency, self-determination, and self-regulation (Greco et al., 2021), and are less prone to experiencing school burnout (Ozhan, 2021). Self-efficacy appears to have the greatest benefit when the student’s self-efficacy is situated around a specific domain (Mantooth, et al., 2020) and is derived from enactive mastery experiences (Usher & Pajares, 2008; Usher et al., 2019).

Mantooth et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate how student self-efficacy within the domain of statistics differs for students receiving instruction in traditional classrooms when compared to students receiving instruction in technology enhanced classrooms. The researchers found that students receiving instruction in traditional classrooms experienced increased self-

efficacy for statistics as the semester progressed; whereas students receiving instruction in technology enhanced classrooms experienced decreased self-efficacy for statistics as the semester progressed. Self-efficacy for statistics was found to be a significant predictor of final course grades for students in both conditions (Mantooth et al., 2019).

There are marked differences in how online classrooms function in comparison to traditional classrooms (Bradley et al., 2017). Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) acknowledge that the principles of social cognitive theory, derived from research in traditional face-to-face settings, may operate differently in online settings. Because self-efficacy may function differently outside of the context of traditional face-to-face classrooms, there is a need for contemporary research that is specific to online learning environments (Bradley et al., 2017).

Self-Efficacy Within Online Learning Environments

Overviews of literature conducted in previous decades regarding self-efficacy within online classrooms yield mixed results. Alquarashi et al. (2016) conducted a literature review of articles published between 1997 and 2015 that focused on self-efficacy within online learning environments. The authors found conflicting results from the previous research. Some of the studies included in the review showed that there were significant relationships between computer self-efficacy and student satisfaction within online learning environments (Alquarashi et al., 2016). Other studies included in the review showed that there were not significant relationships between the two variables (Alquarashi et al., 2016). Similarly, some studies included in the review showed that internet self-efficacy predicted both student satisfaction and student performance in online classrooms; while other studies showed that there were not significant relationships between self-efficacy, student satisfaction, and student performance.

The mixed findings of Alquarashi et al.'s (2016) literature review may be attributed to the broad time frame of included articles (1997-2015). Gradually, the use of technology has become ubiquitous in the daily life of individuals across the globe (Bulao, 2021; Weigold et al., 2021). The daily use of technology may have resulted in individuals becoming increasingly comfortable

and proficient with the use of technological devices (Bulao, 2021). Advancements in technology coupled with increased comfort and proficiency for technology use may have influenced shifts in students' perceptions of self-efficacy within online classrooms.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation: Interrelated Constructs

Self-efficacy and self-regulation are interrelated constructs (Bandura, 1997; Bradley et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Zimmerman, 2002). Researchers have consistently found that self-efficacy and self-regulation work in tandem to spark motivation (Bandura, 1997; Cho et al., 2021; Zimmerman, 2002). A research study conducted by Bradley et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy and self-regulation have strong correlations with one another in traditional learning contexts as well as in online learning contexts. Research indicates the interrelated constructs of self-efficacy and self-regulation are typically reliable for predicting academic success in online learning environments (Bradley et al., 2017).

There is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and learner engagement within online learning environments (Alemayehu & Chen, 2021). Students with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in their online studies by managing their time, seeking help when they do not understand course content, focusing on course tasks, and applying what they have learned in their courses (Alemayehu & Chen, 2021). Kim et al. (2020) found that pre-existing motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy, influence self-regulated learning strategies. Students that possess high levels of self-efficacy for learning tend to self-regulate better in online learning environments than students with low self-efficacy for learning (Cho et al., 2021).

Students with high levels of self-regulated learning strategies have been shown to achieve at higher levels and procrastinate less when compared to students with lower levels of self-regulated learning (Kim et al., 2020). Self-efficacy and self-regulation both appear to positively predict student satisfaction within online learning environments (Hamdan et al., 2021). This

finding may be of particular importance since student satisfaction has been found to positively predict student persistence in online courses (Lakhal et al., 2021).

There is one important caveat that must be mentioned when discussing self-efficacy and self-regulation. Historically, interventions that were designed to increase students' self-regulated learning did not have lasting results post-treatment (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). For this reason, social cognitive theorists place greater emphasis on research investigating self-efficacy because self-efficacy is believed to be a source of self-regulatory behavior (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008).

Self-Efficacy and Number of Online Courses Completed

Another variable that may play an important role in self-efficacy for online learning is the number of online courses a student has completed (Bradley et al., 2017). Enactive mastery experiences have been identified as the primary source of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Therefore, the successful completion of online courses likely serves in building self-efficacy for online learning, while foiled attempts at completing online courses likely reduce self-efficacy for online learning.

Research conducted by Bradley et al. (2017) indicates that self-efficacy for online learning has a positive relationship with the number of online courses a student has completed. Within Bradley et al.'s (2017) sample, students that had taken two or more online courses had significantly higher levels of self-efficacy for online learning and higher levels of self-regulation than students who had never taken an online course or who had only taken one online course (Bradley et al., 2017). The academic community stands to benefit from studies that further investigate the relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses a student has completed for multiple reasons.

First, with the exception of the Bradley et al. (2017) study, very few studies have been conducted that specifically investigate self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses a student has completed. Advanced searches of the Oklahoma State University library

database and Google Scholar generated very few articles that have investigated the topic. Second, the data for the Bradley et al. (2017) study was collected “at a small university in South Georgia” (p. 521). Therefore, it may be beneficial to conduct contemporary studies in other regions of the United States to determine if statistical analyses generate similar results within those populations. Such studies would serve to expand the literature base and help us understand if the number of online courses completed by students is consistently related to the self-efficacy for online learning of students within various populations.

Measuring Self-Efficacy in Online Learning Environments

Modern researchers have developed instruments that measure self-efficacy for learning within online learning environments (Bradley et al., 2017; Sun & Rogers, 2021; Zimmerman & Kulikowich, 2016). One such instrument is Bradley et al.’s (2017) Online Academic Success Indicators Scale (OASIS). The Self-Efficacy for Online Learning OASIS sub-scale measures students’ motivational beliefs regarding their self-efficacy for online learning by asking questions related to digital competencies, online task completion, effective communication, and knowledge transfer (Bradley et al., 2017).

Digital competencies are very important within online learning environments (Bradley et al., 2017; Sun & Rogers, 2021). Students must rely upon technology to facilitate communications, perform tasks, and retrieve information (Bradley et al., 2017; Sun & Rogers, 2021). Students in online learning environments must complete a multitude of digital tasks which include online homework submissions, taking quizzes and tests, monitoring grades, and participating on online discussion boards (Bradley et al., 2017; Sun & Rogers, 2021).

Effective communications are another vital component of online learning environments because those interactions help students develop social presence (Sun & Rogers, 2021). Social presence refers to the ability to project one’s personality and present oneself as a real person within an online environment (Sun & Rogers, 2021). When students develop social presence, they typically feel a greater sense of belonging and satisfaction (Sun & Rogers, 2021). Such feelings

of belonging and satisfaction are believed to result in better learning and improved retention rates (Sun & Rogers, 2021).

Knowledge transfer is a salient topic amongst educational psychologists. Knowledge transfer refers to a student's ability to retrieve previously learned information and to apply that information to solve problems within new contexts (Schunk, 2020; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). In order for knowledge transfer to occur, students must engage in deep learning (Schunk, 2020; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014). Because knowledge transfer is the primary goal of effective instruction (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014), it is important to evaluate if students believe they are learning and retaining the information that they are being taught in online courses. The Online Academic Success Indicators Scale (OASIS) captures student perceptions of learning when assessing student's self-efficacy for online learning (Bradley et al., 2017).

Motivation and Dropout Intentions

Research indicates that intent to dropout is often linked to motivational issues. Schnettler et al. (2020) found that the motivational constructs of intrinsic value, attainment value, and cost predicted university students' intent to drop out. Cost refers to the negative consequences experienced from devoting one's resources toward university studies (Schnettler et al., 2020). These consequences may include psychological and opportunity costs (Schnettler et al., 2020). Time was also a significant factor in the study (Schnettler et al., 2020). Students' intentions for dropping out increased as the semester progressed from beginning to end (Schnettler et al., 2020). Overall, the study showed that students were more likely to drop out when they perceived studying as not enjoyable, unimportant, and costly (Schnettler et al., 2020). Researchers have identified other motivational constructs that influence drop out intentions.

Jeno et al. (2018) found that controlled motivation positively predicted students' intent to drop out of school. Controlled motivation refers to instances when students engage in a behavior to either obtain external rewards or avoid external consequences. Conversely, students that perceive themselves as competent and that are autonomously motivated have higher levels of

academic achievement and have lower intentions for dropping out (Jeno et al., 2018; Morelli et al., 2022).

Morelli et al. (2022) conducted a research study to determine how self-efficacy and self-regulated learning influence drop out intentions among undergraduate university students. The researchers found that students who were higher in self-efficacy and self-regulated learning had lower intentions for dropping out of school (Morelli et al, 2022). Morelli et al.'s (2022) findings are of particular interest to this study because they provide evidence that drop out intentions are directly related to self-efficacy. However, the researchers did not specifically investigate self-efficacy within the domain of online learning.

Summary

According to social cognitive theorists, self-efficacy is a malleable motivational belief (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2008; Schunk, 2012). Self-efficacy is believed to be a source of self-regulated learning which is a highly beneficial academic behavior (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008; Parajes, 2008). The majority of research investigating student self-efficacy has been conducted within traditional face-to-face classrooms rather than in online learning environments (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Public universities have experienced a steady increase in online enrollments over the last two decades which has positioned online learning as a norm rather than an exception (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Seaman et al., 2018). Therefore, the lack of research within online learning environments is problematic.

Students attending courses online tend to have higher drop out rates than their peers who are attending courses in face-to-face classrooms (Bawa, 2016). Undergraduate students drop out for a host of academic, economic, social, institutional, and personal factors (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Self-efficacy, which is a malleable motivational belief, is among the personal factors that contribute to student drop out (Alban & Mauricio, 2019; Morelli et al., 2022). However, researchers have not yet identified how self-efficacy for online learning relates to drop out intentions among university students.

Many university students may lack the self-efficacy needed to persist and succeed within online learning environments (Bawa, 2016; Lee et al., 2013; Stephen et al., 2021). Researchers have demonstrated that students who have taken a greater number of online courses tend to have higher levels of self-efficacy for online learning (Bradley et al., 2017). There is a need for research that investigates how self-efficacy within online learning environments relates to learning outcomes (Alqurashi, 2019) such as completing a university degree, and if the number of online courses the student has taken consistently relates to self-efficacy for online learning. Educational psychologists may be able to gain a richer perspective regarding how self-efficacy functions within online learning environments by assessing students' self-efficacy for online learning, drop out intentions, and the number of online courses the student has taken. Such a study may aid educators in developing course designs, teaching practices, and interventions that position students to thrive in online learning environments which may subsequently aid students in completing their degree program.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of the study was to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and student drop out intentions?
2. Is there a relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses the student has completed?

The researcher hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and student drop out intentions and a positive correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses the student has taken. Specifically, students with higher levels of self-efficacy for online learning would have lower intentions for dropping out; and students that have taken a greater number of online courses would have higher levels of self-efficacy for online learning.

Research Design

The study assessed three variables of interest: self-efficacy for online learning, student drop out intentions, and the number of online courses the student has taken. Bradley et al.'s (2017) Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale and Hardre and Reeve's (2003) Intentions

to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale are instruments that have been previously validated and that capture the core constructs of interest to this study.

Participants

Population

The objective of the study was to investigate university students' self-efficacy for online learning. The researcher assessed self-efficacy for online learning among undergraduate university students and investigated how self-efficacy for online learning related to drop out intentions and the number of online courses the student had taken. Therefore, undergraduate university students represented the target population.

Sample

Participants in the study were comprised of a convenience sample of students from Oklahoma State University (OSU). According to G* Power, 84 total participants were needed for a two tailed, bivariate correlation, with a medium effect size ($p = .3$), a standard error of $\alpha = .05$, and a power of .80 (Faul et al., 2007; 2009). To be eligible, participants had to be enrolled in a degree program at a four-year university within the United States. Students that did not reside in the United States were excluded from the study.

Data Collection

Study participants were recruited via SONA. As an incentive, participants were offered the chance to win one of ten fifteen-dollar Amazon gift cards. Data was collected from the interested participants using online self-report surveys. The survey assessed student's self-efficacy for online learning using Bradley et al.'s (2017) Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale. The self-report survey also included Hardre and Reeve's (2003) Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out scale. Students were asked how many online courses they have taken. For descriptive statics, participants were asked to provide information regarding age, gender, race, grade point average (GPA), subjective social status, years of study, and their reason for enrolling

in online courses. The online self-report surveys were administered using Qualtrics (a digital platform operated by OSU).

Instruments

Online Academic Success Indicators Scale

Students' self-efficacy for online learning was measured using Bradley et al.'s (2017) Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale. The Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale is a 13-item questionnaire that utilizes a 7-point Likert-scale to measure student's self-efficacy for online learning as it relates to digital competencies, online task completion, effective communication, and knowledge transfer (Bradley et al., 2017). Students are asked to indicate their level of confidence for navigating online courses by rating items such as "learn material presented in and online class" and "recall information presented in the online course at a later date" (Bradley et al., 2017, p. 529). The questions were anchored as follows 1 = not confident, 3 = not too confident, 5 = pretty confident, and 7 = very confident. A high score on the subscale indicates that the participant has a high level of self-efficacy for online learning while a low score indicates a low level of self-efficacy for online learning.

Validity. Bradley et al. (2017) relied upon already existing instruments to construct and validate the OASIS subscale. First, the researchers reviewed relevant literature and previously developed instruments that measured constructs related to self-efficacy for online learning. Then the researchers selected and modified 23 items from three previously validated instruments: the Internet Self-Efficacy scale (Joo et al., 2000); the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990); and the Self-Efficacy for Self-Regulated Learning Scale (Zimmerman et al., 1992). The researchers found that there were strong correlations between the results of the OASIS and the results of the Internet Self-Efficacy scale, the Motivated Strategies Questionnaire, and the Self-Efficacy for Self-Regulated Learning Scale. The aforementioned instruments have been widely used and validated which attests to the construct validity of the OASIS.

Reliability. Bradley et al. (2017) used SPSS to calculate Cronbach's alpha to determine the reliability of the Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale with $\alpha = .91$. Therefore, the Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale (Bradley et al., 2017) has high reliability for internal consistency and is an appropriate instrument for measuring students self-efficacy for online learning.

Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale

Students' drop out intentions were measured using Hardre and Reeve's (2003) Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out scale. The scale consists of a three-item questionnaire which utilizes a 7-point Likert-scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to indicate whether students intend to drop out of their degree program. Sample questions include items such as "I sometimes consider dropping out of school" and "I sometimes feel unsure about continuing my studies year after year" (Hardre & Reeve, 2003, pp. 349-350). The questions were anchored as follows: 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. High scores on the measure indicate that a student intends to drop out, while low scores indicate that a student does not intend to drop out.

Validity. The construct validity of the first two items on the Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out scale (Hardre & Reeve, 2003) "I sometimes consider dropping out of school and I intend to drop out of school" were initially validated by Vallerand et al. (1997) which found that the student responses to the items strongly predicted the drop-out behaviors of students one year after the initial assessment (Guiffrida et al., 2013). Hardre and Reeve (2003) developed the three item scale and measured construct validity by correlating the new three item scale to Vallerand et al.'s (1997) original two item scale. Hardre and Reeve (2003) found that the new three item scale had a high correlation with to the original two item scale with $r = .97$ and $p < .01$.

Reliability. Hardre and Reeve's (2003) three-item Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out scale has been used to reliably measure and predict the drop out intentions of university students (Jeno et al., 2018). The scale has been found to have an acceptable internal consistency with a $\alpha = .79$ (Guiffrida et al., 2013; Hardre & Reeve, 2003). Researchers have found that student

responses strongly predict student drop out behaviors one year post assessment (Guifrida et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS, bivariate correlations, and descriptive statistics. Student scores from the Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale (Bradley et al., 2017) and the Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out scale (Hardre & Reeve, 20023) were compared using bivariate correlation. The results of the bivariate correlation were tested against the null hypothesis which states that there is not a significant relationship between university student's self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions. A separate bivariate correlation was used to compare student scores from the Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale to the number of online courses the student had taken. The results of the second bivariate correlation were tested against the second null hypothesis which states that there is not a significant relationship between university student's self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses the student had taken.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were statistically significant relationships between self-efficacy for online learning, the number of online courses completed by the student, and drop out intentions. A review of the existing literature examining motivational constructs and drop-out intentions indicated that there were gaps in the literature. Prior to this study, researchers had not yet specifically sought to determine if there was a relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions.

The chapter will first summarize the context of the study, the sample, the population, and participant demographics. Then the variables of interest and statistical procedures will be described before stating the detailed results of the study. Finally, the findings will be summarized.

Background and Setting

The participants in this study were undergraduate university students attending Oklahoma State University. Oklahoma State University is an R1 land-grant university located in the North-Central Oklahoma town of Stillwater, OK. Approximately 24,000 students attend the university (Okstate.edu).

Methodology and Research Design

The purpose of the study was to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and student drop out intentions?
2. Is there a relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses the student has completed?

The researcher hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and student drop out intentions and a positive correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses the student has taken.

Specifically, students with higher levels of self-efficacy for online learning would have lower intentions for dropping out; and students that have taken a greater number of online courses would have higher levels of self-efficacy for online learning.

The study assessed three variables of interest: self-efficacy for online learning, student drop out intentions, and the number of online courses the participant had completed. Bradley et al.'s (2017) Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale and Hardre and Reeve's (2003) Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale were used to measure the variables of interest. Participants were also asked to indicate how many online courses they had completed.

Sample

Participants in the study were selected using a convenience sample of students from Oklahoma State University (OSU). Students were recruited from the College of Education, Health, and Aviation. Participation was voluntary. Students that participated received SONA course credit and the chance to enter a drawing for one of ten fifteen-dollar Amazon gift cards. To be eligible participants had to be enrolled in a degree program at a four-year university within the United States. Students that did not reside in the United States were not eligible to participate in the study. Anonymous survey links were distributed via LinkedIn and Facebook but were

ultimately excluded from the study because the researcher believed the data had been corrupted by scammers.

Demographics

There were 295 participants in the study ($n=295$). Personal and academic demographics were collected from the participants and may be found in Table 1. The racial demographics of the sample were as follows: 72.9 % White Non-Hispanic ($n = 215$); 9.2 % Native American or Alaskan Native ($n = 27$); 7.8 % Black or African American ($n = 23$); 5.2 % Hispanic or Latino ($n = 16$); 2.4 % Asian or Pacific Islander ($n = 7$); and 2.4 % Multiracial or Biracial ($n = 7$).

The age demographics of the sample were as follows: 88.5 % of participants were 18-25 years of age ($n = 261$); 7.8 % of participants were 26-35 years of age ($n = 23$); 3.4 % of participants were 36-45 years of age ($n = 10$); and .3 % of participants were 46-55 years of age ($n = 1$).

The gender identities of the sample were as follows: 78.6 % of participants identified as female ($n = 232$); 20.7 % identified as male ($n = 61$); .3 % of participants identified as transgender male ($n = 1$); and .3 % preferred not to answer ($n = 1$).

The grade point averages (GPA) of the sample were as follows: 39.3 % of participants had a GPA ranging from 3.5-3.9 ($n = 116$); 32.5 % of participants had a GPA ranging from 3.0-3.4 ($n = 96$); 13.2 % had of participants had a GPA ranging from 2.5-2.9 ($n = 39$); 10.8 % of participants had a GPA of 4.0 ($n = 32$); and 4.1 % of participants had a GPA ranging from 2.0-2.4 ($n = 12$).

Table 1*Personal and Academic Demographics*

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent
Race		
White Non-Hispanic	215	72.9 %
Native American or Alaskan Native	27	9.2 %
Black or African American	23	7.8 %
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	2.4 %
Multiracial or Biracial	7	2.4 %
Age		
18-25	262	88.5 %
26-35	23	7.8 %
36-45	10	3.4 %
46-55	1	.3 %
Gender Identity		
Female	232	78.6 %
Male	61	20.7 %
Prefer Not to Answer	1	.3 %
Transgender Male	1	.3 %
Grade Point Average		
2.0-2.4	12	4.1 %
2.5-2.9	29	13.2 %
3.0-3.4	96	32.5 %
3.5-3.9	119	39.3 %
4.0	32	10.8 %

Variables and Measures of Variables

The study assessed three variables of interest: self-efficacy for online learning, student drop out intentions, and the number of online courses the student has taken. Bradley et al.'s (2017) Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale and Hardre and Reeve's (2003) Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale are instruments that have been previously validated and that capture the core constructs of interest to this study. Students were asked to self-report the number of online courses the student had taken.

Statistical Procedure

The researcher used SPSS to calculate various statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics frequency charts, normal distributions, and bivariate correlations between the three variables (self-efficacy for online learning, drop out intentions, and the number of online courses completed by the student) were produced. Confidence intervals were set to 95% for the bivariate correlations.

Results

Scale Reliabilities

The researcher conducted scale reliability analyses for the Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale (Bradley et al., 2017) and the Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale (Hardre & Reeve, 2003). The results of the reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach internal consistency reliability for the Online Learning Self-Efficacy OASIS subscale (Bradley et al., 2017) was $\alpha = .867$. The results are consistent with Bradley et al.'s (2017) study in which the Cronbach's internal reliability consistency was $\alpha = .91$. The Cronbach internal consistency reliability for the Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale (Hardre & Reeve, 2003) was $\alpha = .78$. The results are consistent with Hardre & Reeve's (2003) study in which the Cronbach's internal reliability consistency was $\alpha = .79$. Therefore, both scales have high reliability for internal consistency and are appropriate instruments for measuring the variables of interest.

Self-Efficacy for Online Learning, Drop Out Intentions, and Number of Online Courses Completed

Pearson's bivariate correlation analyses with a 95% confidence interval were used to test the hypotheses. The effect sizes of the correlation coefficients were interpreted based upon Cohen's guidelines which state that a correlation coefficient of .10 is small, .30 is medium, and .50 is large (Nolan & Heinzen, 2012). Nolan and Heinzen (2012) note that very few correlations within the social sciences yield results of .50 or larger. Thus, a medium effect size is considered acceptable within the social sciences.

As highlighted in Table 2, the results of the analysis indicate that there was a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions. There was a negative correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions with a medium effect size ($r = -0.318$, $p < .01$). Therefore, as self-efficacy for online learning increased drop out intentions decreased.

The relationship between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses completed by the participants was also analyzed. The analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship between these two variables as well. As highlighted in Table 2, the results showed that there was a positive relationship between the two variables with a small effect size ($r = .172$, $p < .01$). Therefore, as the number of online courses completed by the participant increased the participants' self-efficacy for online learning also increased.

Finally, the relationship between the drop out intentions and number of online courses completed was analyzed. The researcher would like to note that the relationship between drop out intentions and the number of online courses was not included in the research questions nor was a hypothesis formed regarding the two variables. As highlighted in Table 2, the results indicated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between drop out intentions and the number of online courses the participant had completed ($r = -.007$, $p = .904$). The insignificant relationship between the two variables may be due to the use correlation analyses; it is possible

that more sophisticated statistical procedures would reveal a relationship between the two variables.

Table 2

Correlations: Self-Efficacy for Online Learning, Drop Out Intentions, Number of Online Courses Completed, GPA, and Subjective Social Status

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. SE for Online Learning	-	-	-	-	-
2. Drop Out Intentions	-.318**	-	-	-	-
3. Number of Online Courses Completed	.172**	-.007	-	-	-
4. GPA	.171**	-.294**	-.242**	-	-
5. Subjective Social Status	.023	-.239**	-.091	-	-
M	5.398	1.956	7.37	-	5.95
SD	.714	1.286	6.513	-	1.510
Scale Reliabilities	.867	.78	-	-	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Note. Scale reliabilities reported are from current study.

A histogram of the self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions variables was created. The histogram indicated that the sample was not evenly distributed. The results of the histograms indicated that the Online Learning Self-Efficacy Subscale was positively skewed (mean = 5.40, std. dev = .714) while the Intentions to Persist Versus Drop Out Scale was negatively skewed (mean = 1.96, std. dev = 1.29). The data is interpreted to mean that the sample had high levels of online learning self-efficacy and low intentions for dropping out.

Subjective Social Status, Self-Efficacy for Online Learning, Drop Out Intentions and GPA

Though outside the scope of this study, the researcher conducted a statistical analysis of the participants' demographic data. Specifically, the researcher analyzed data related to the participants subjective social status for exploratory purposes. Little research has been conducted regarding subjective social status within the social sciences.

The participants were administered the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000) which asked the participants to provide a number between one and ten to indicate their perceived subjective social status within the social hierarchy of the United States. A

low score on the subjective social status ladder indicated that participants perceived themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy, while a high score indicated that participants perceived themselves at the top of the social hierarchy. The participants subjective social status was compared to the participants self-efficacy for online learning, drop out intentions, and GPA. As indicated in Table 2, the results of the correlations revealed that there was a negative correlation between subjective social status and drop out intentions ($r = -0.239, p < .01$) and a positive correlation between subjective social status and GPA ($r = 0.296, p < .01$). The results suggest that as a participants subjective social status increased their GPA also increased while drop out intentions decreased.

Summary

The results of the study demonstrate that self-efficacy for online learning has statistically significant relationships with both drop out intentions and the number of online courses completed by the participants. There was a negative correlation with a medium effect size between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions. There was a positive correlation with a small effect size between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of online courses completed by the participants. The small effect size may be attributed to the possibility that not all online courses increase self-efficacy for online learning. Poorly designed online courses may reduce self-efficacy for online learning.

There was not a statistically significant relationship between drop out intentions and the number of online courses the participant had completed. Thus, the results of the study showed that as self-efficacy for online learning increased participant drop out intentions decreased. Additionally, as the number of online courses completed by the student increased self-efficacy for online learning also increased.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions within higher-education classrooms. The researcher hoped to achieve this aim by collecting data from undergraduate university students using self-report surveys. The data was used for the development of a thesis that examines how students' self-efficacy for online learning, along with number of online courses taken by the students, relates to student drop out intentions.

Self-Efficacy for Online Learning and Drop Out Intentions

The results of the study demonstrated that self-efficacy for online learning had statistically significant relationships with both drop out intentions and the number of online courses completed by the participant. The negative correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and drop out intentions indicates that as self-efficacy for online learning increased drop out intentions decreased. The positive correlation between self-efficacy for online learning and the number of courses completed by the participants indicates that as the number of online courses completed by the participants increased the self-efficacy for online learning increased as well. Overall, the study provides evidence that educators may be able to reduce drop out rates among undergraduate students by offering students opportunities to increase their online learning self-efficacy.

Implications for Online Instruction

Self-efficacy is a malleable motivational belief that may be increased through enactive mastery experiences, social persuasion, vicarious experiences, and the management of affective states (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2020). Educators may be able to aid their students in developing self-efficacy for online learning by employing teaching practices that are specifically designed to support self-efficacy within online classrooms. Drop out rates have a statistically significant relationship with self-efficacy for online learning. Therefore, such teaching practices may also serve to reduce drop out rates among undergraduate students. This section will provide recommendations for implementing teaching practices that assist in increasing students' self-efficacy for online learning, which may in turn reduce drop out rates as well.

Enactive Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences are the most powerful source of self-efficacy and occur when one's belief in oneself is bolstered after successful completion of a task (Bandura, 1997, 2008; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). When a student successfully completes an online learning task, they are more likely to believe that they are capable of successfully performing that same task again and are also more likely to believe that they are capable of completing slightly more difficult tasks. Goal setting is one way that educators can help students engage in enactive mastery experiences within online classrooms.

Goal setting is most effective when a large goal is broken down into smaller successive sub-goals (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Goals should include specific learning and performance standards (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Many online courses require students to submit a final paper at the end of the semester. Instructors may be able to help students build self-efficacy for online learning by breaking the final paper down into successive sub-goals. Successive subgoals might begin with brainstorming for topics, then requiring students to construct a first draft, followed by multiple revisions of the draft. Subgoals allow students to complete the easiest portion of the task first while successively moving on to the harder portion of

the task (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Such strategies have been shown to increase self-efficacy within traditional classrooms (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020) and could be easily applied to online classrooms.

Social Persuasion

Social persuasion occurs when a credible person expresses their confidence in another person and encourages that person to complete challenging tasks (Bandura, 2008; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016, 2020). Instructors engage in social persuasion when they provide students with feedback (Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016, 2020). For example, an instructor could provide feedback for a rough draft a student has written in the weeks before the final draft is due. Instructors within traditional classrooms can help build the self-efficacy of their students by helping students understand what areas need improvement, providing students with positive feedback regarding their strengths, and conveying that students are demonstrating increased competence (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016, 2020). Such strategies may also help students build self-efficacy for online learning.

Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences refer to instances when a person observes the successful completion of a task by a similar other, which sparks the idea that if others can do it, so can they (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016, 2020). Vicarious experiences, which are largely environmental in nature, provide students with the opportunity to socially compare themselves to their peers and to model the behavior of students perceived as competent (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Educators may be able to motivate students and build self-efficacy within online classrooms by grouping students with competent peers that have similarities in common.

Affective States

Physiological and affective states refer to a person's thoughts, feelings, and emotions, such as excitement or anxiety (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Students typically feel more competent and capable of succeeding when they feel calm rather than anxious (Scunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Educators can facilitate the development of self-efficacy for online learning by helping students manage their anxiety. One way that instructors can help students manage anxiety is by setting clear expectations when the coursework begins and by providing students with straightforward and manageable deadlines (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014).

Conclusion

The results of this study expand our understanding of self-efficacy for online learning. The study provides evidence that self-efficacy for online learning has a significant relationship with the number of online courses a student has completed and that self-efficacy for online learning has a significant relationship with drop out intentions. In some instances, the number of online courses completed by the participants may have served as an enactive mastery experience that strengthened the participants self-efficacy for online learning. However, poorly designed online courses may have served to reduce the self-efficacy for online learning of the participants. Additionally, we know from prior research that self-efficacy has an interrelated relationship with another important motivational construct, self-regulation (Bandura, 1997; Bradley et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020; Schunk, 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Zimmerman, 2002). Therefore, the findings of this study have important implications.

Researchers have consistently found that self-efficacy and self-regulation work in tandem to spark motivation in both traditional classrooms (Bandura, 1997; Cho et al., 2021; Zimmerman, 2002) and online classrooms (Bradley et al., 2017). Students that possess high levels of self-efficacy tend to self-regulate better in online learning environments than students with low self-efficacy (Cho et al., 2021). Self-efficacy is believed to be a *source* of self-regulatory behavior (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Therefore, one may surmise that as students increase their self-efficacy for online learning they are also increasing their ability to self-regulate within online learning environments. This is an important conjecture because research shows that self-efficacy

and self-regulated learning both directly influence drop out intentions within traditional classrooms (Morelli et al, 2022). Therefore, self-regulation likely influences drop out intentions within online classrooms as well.

The recommendations set forth by the researcher for strengthening self-efficacy for online learning (goal setting, feedback, social persuasion, clear expectations) will likely strengthen students' self-regulated learning within online classrooms as well. Goal setting in particular has been shown to increase self-regulated learning (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020). Students stand to benefit a great deal from increases in both self-efficacy for online learning and self-regulation because increases in both motivational constructs should further serve in reducing drop out intentions.

The present generates multiple contributions to the academic community. First, the study broadens our understanding of self-efficacy within online learning environments. Second, the study expands the literature base regarding the relationship between motivational constructs, drop out intentions, and the number of online courses a student has completed. It is the hope of the researcher that the present study will aid educational psychologists in developing course designs, teaching practices, and interventions that position students to thrive in online learning environments, which may subsequently aid students in completing their degree program.

Future Directions

The results of this study indicate that self-efficacy for online learning may be one of the factors that contribute to drop out intentions among undergraduate university students. However, research has shown that dropout intentions are not necessarily related to one factor but rather a host of academic, economic, social, institutional, and personal factors (Alban & Mauricio, 2019). Self-efficacy for online learning may be viewed as a personal factor (largely academic in nature) that relates to drop out intentions. Future studies should investigate social and economic factors that may be related to drop out intentions by delving deeper into existing data and employing more sophisticated statistical analyses.

Social factors are one area that could be explored to form a deeper understanding of the nuanced relationships between the many factors that cumulatively lead to student drop out intentions. Social factors that relate to drop out intentions among marginalized youth are of interest to the researcher. Marginalized youth such as those that identify as LGBTQ+ (Mountz et al., 2020), persons from indigenous backgrounds (Garcia-Olp et al., 2020) and those categorized as low socioeconomic status (SES; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2020; Zembrodt, 2021) are at particular risk for dropping out. Low SES students face numerous obstacles in completing their university degree program, many of which are sociocultural in nature (Zembrodt, 2021). Low SES families often have difficulty providing their children with high quality educational opportunities and consequently their children may have no other options but to attend low quality schools (Bandura, 1997; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2020). Students from low SES families are less likely to have families that value a university degree (Bandura, 1997; Zembrodt 2021) and are substantially less likely to complete a university degree when compared to their higher SES peers (Zembrodt, 2021). However, research indicates that when low SES students are committed to their degree program and are willing to invest the time and financial resources needed to obtain their degree, they increase their chances of obtaining their degree through persistence (Zembrodt, 2021).

For exploratory purposes, participants in the current study were asked to rate their subjective social status using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status. Though outside the scope of this thesis, Pearson's bivariate correlations revealed that as a participants subjective social status increased their GPA also increased while drop out intentions decreased. These findings provide direction for future studies.

A second exploratory question was included within the current study which asked the participants to qualitatively indicate their reason for taking online courses. The researcher has not yet analyzed the qualitative data generated from the exploratory question. Future studies could conduct a qualitative data analysis to investigate and understand why students choose to take online courses.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 10/14/2022
Application Number: IRB-22-427
Proposal Title: Self-Efficacy for Online Learning and Drop Out Intentions Among University Students

Principal Investigator: Tiffney Winchester
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Mike Yough
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form



COLLEGE OF
**EDUCATION AND
HUMAN SCIENCES**

Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study on self-efficacy for online learning. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview/survey at any time.

This study is being conducted by: Tiffiney Winchester, Department of Educational Psychology, Oklahoma State University, under the direction of Dr. Mike Yough, Department of Educational Psychology, Oklahoma State University.

Contact Information

Principal Investigator: Tiffiney Winchester, tiffiney.winchester@okstate.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mike Yough, mike.yough@okstate.edu

Oklahoma State University IRB: irb@okstate.edu

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to complete the following survey regarding self-efficacy for online learning, drop out intentions, and descriptive information. The survey should not take more than 30 minutes to complete.

Compensation

You will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of ten fifteen-dollar gift cards as compensation for your participation. To be eligible to win, you need to complete the entire survey and enter your university email address in a separate form at the end of the survey. Students enrolled at OSU may also receive a SONA course credit of 0.5 unit for serving as human participants in the study.

Risks

There is a potential risk of breach of confidentiality which is minimized by the use of Qualtrics, an encrypted, cloud-based storage system. All data will be password protected.

Confidentiality

The information you give in the study will be stored anonymously. This means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data in any way. Only the researchers will know that you have participated in the study. The researchers will not be able to remove your data from the dataset once your participation is complete.

We will collect your information through an online survey. The results of the survey will be stored in password-protected folders.

The research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider's privacy policy at <https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/>.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

VITA

Tiffiney Dawn Winchester

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: SELF-EFFICACY FOR ONLINE LEARNING AND DROP OUT
INTENTIONS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Biographical:

Education:

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Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Psychology at
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