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Self-Efficacy and Grade Point Average in Relationship to Academic Success in Baccalaureate Nursing Students

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**SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF NURSING**

**MASTER'S PROGRAM PROJECT OPTION (PLAN B)
PROJECT SIGNATURE FORM**

STUDENT NAME Cynthia Miller

SEMESTER ENROLLED Spring 2006

TITLE OF PROJECT Self-efficacy and grade point
Average in Relationship to Academic Success
in Baccalaureate Nursing Students.

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By Cynthia Miller, BSN, RN and Cynthia Harrison, BSN, RN

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Academic success, defined as the completion of a nursing program and passing the National Council for Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), is the goal of all nursing programs. The identification of specific variables related to academic success could identify students at risk of failing early. The purpose of this research study was to explore the relationship of two variables related to academic success, self-efficacy and grade point averages (GPA), in accelerated and regular BSN students. The results of this study suggest that a statistically significant, positive relationship exists between prerequisite GPA and self-efficacy of BSN students. In addition, the results suggest that a statistically significant difference existed between the prerequisite GPA of the accelerated and the regular nursing students. The conclusion of this research suggests that the combination of self-efficacy and prerequisite grades provides one opportunity for early identification and intervention of at risk students.

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**A Research Manuscript
Presented to the
Faculty of the School of Nursing
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for
Master of Science in Nursing**

**By
Cynthia Miller
Cynthia Harrison
May 2006**

Self-Efficacy and Grade Point Average in Relationship to Academic Success in Baccalaureate Nursing Students

Academic success, defined as the completion of a nursing program and passing the National Council for Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), is the goal of all nursing programs. The identification of specific variables related to academic success could lead to supplementary support programs as well as academic remediation or interventions to promote student success. Identifying students at risk of failing early and developing educational strategies to assist these students in improving their academic performance in nursing courses could ultimately improve NCLEX-RN performance.

In light of the current nursing shortage and the impaction of nursing education programs, nursing schools require confidence that the students admitted will successfully complete their nursing program and pass the NCLEX-RN examination. Thus, the identification of specific variables associated with academic success could ultimately influence criteria for entrance selection in impacted nursing programs. Ultimately, the success of the nursing students will lead to an increase of the available workforce.

Background Literature Review

Self-efficacy and grade point averages (GPA) have been individually identified in the research literature as related to academic success. However, the specific variables of self-efficacy and GPA have not been consistently defined in these studies. The GPA variables identified as predictors of academic success have been inconsistent in respect to whether they were prerequisite, cumulative, or specific nursing course GPA (Arathuzik & Aber, 1998; Barkley, Rhodes, & DuFour, 1998; Beeson & Kissling, 2001; Byrd, Garza, & Nieswiadomy, 1999; Campbell, & Dickson, 1996; Daley, Kirkpatrick, Frazier, Chung, & Moser, 2003; Graham, 1994; Nibert, Young, & Adamson, 2002; Quick, Krupa, & Whitley, 1985; Waterhouse & Beeman,

2003; Yin & Burger, 2003).

Nursing research has examined multiple types of the GPA variable to determine if there was a relationship with academic success. Beeson and Kissling (2001), Giddens and Gloeckner (2005), Daley, Frazier, Chung, and Moser (2003), and Quick, Krupa, and Whitley (1985) have reported that GPA was a relatively accurate predictor of success on the NCLEX-RN, regardless of which GPA variable was used. These research studies report that GPA predicts academic success, both NCLEX-RN success and nursing program completion.

Self-efficacy has been studied in relation to both health behaviors and academic success over the past 2 decades (Andrew, 1998; Choi, 2005; Jeffreys, 1998; Ofori & Charlton, 2002; Pajares, 2002; Schunk, 1990). The focus of educators and researchers has been to identify self-efficacy as one of the predictors for academic performance and success, but the variable of self-efficacy has been defined inconsistently and has been measured by a variety of instruments.

Pajares (2002) asserted that “academic performances are strongly predicted by self-efficacy beliefs (section: Self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement-the research)”. Andrew (1998) found that self-efficacy accounted for approximately 14% of variance in academic performance in nursing science subjects, with higher self-efficacy related to higher performance levels. The major difference between the students being more or less successful was the level of self-efficacy and the self-regulation of learning. Jeffreys (1998) identified a correlation among self-efficacy, academic variables, and environmental variables, and suggested that the combined effect may influence academic success. Ofori and Charlton (2002) described higher levels of self-efficacy as encouraging students to persist in their learning activities, although age was found to be more influential.

In addition, these two studies reported that support-seeking activities were more predictive of academic success than other entry qualifications or demographic factors (Jeffreys,

1998; Ofori & Charlton, 2002). These studies suggested that the direct influence of self-efficacy on academic performance and success may be due to academic support-seeking behaviors of students. The students who had higher self-efficacy scores expected higher grades and as a result were found to seek less academic support. In general, the nursing students had overestimated their capabilities as well as their academic supports and underestimated their need for preparation. Although the study showed a negative correlation between self-efficacy and support seeking, there was no statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and the only measure of academic performance. These research studies support the relationship between self-efficacy and academic variables (Jeffreys) and suggest that persistence and support seeking also influence academic success (Ofori & Charlton).

There was limited research regarding the variables that contribute to academic success in accelerated nursing programs versus regular nursing programs, specifically comparing GPA and self-efficacy of these students. McDonald (1995) compared accelerated baccalaureate nursing (BSN) students with regular BSN students. His findings described higher academic success in accelerated BSN students as compared to regular BSN students, but there were no significant differences related to age, gender, or GPA. In contrast, Youssef and Goodrich (1996) reported that GPA was significantly higher in accelerated associate degree nursing (ADN) students when compared to regular ADN students. Boylston, Peters, and Lacey (2004) observed that overall satisfaction with a nursing program was higher among accelerated BSN students compared to regular BSN students, which was consistent with past research studies that suggested that academic success was influenced by program satisfaction (Bean & Bradley, 1986).

Other factors related to academic success identified in the literature are demographics. Multiple demographic factors have been studied in relation to academic success. For example, Beeson and Kissling (2001) and Ofori & Charlton (2002) found that academic success was

positively influenced by age and parental education. Internal and external factors that impeded academic success were identified as family responsibilities, emotional distress, fatigue, financial responsibilities, and work responsibilities (Arathuzik & Aber, 1998; Jeffreys, 1998). The nursing students in these studies perceived the internal and external variables as more influential on grades than the academic variables. However, these studies have not identified a consistent predictor of academic success.

Current literature suggests that self-efficacy and GPA are related to academic success (Aber & Arathuzik, 1996; Andrews, 1998; Arathuzik & Aber, 1998; Jeffreys, 1998; Ofori & Charleton, 2002; Schunk, 1990). Further research on variables associated with success in nursing programs would be beneficial to nurse educators for the early intervention for nursing students at risk of not meeting academic standards.

The purpose of this research study was to explore the relationship of self-efficacy and prerequisite GPA in three different cohorts of entry level baccalaureate nursing students. The specific research questions of this study were: (a) What is the relationship between self-efficacy and grade point average of baccalaureate nursing students? and (b) Is there a difference in self-efficacy or pre-requisite GPA between accelerated and regular baccalaureate nursing students?

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1994) Social Cognitive Theory provided the theoretical basis for this research study. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains human behavior in terms of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in which the expectations to succeed are based on the individual's belief of his/her capability to meet these expectations. Self-efficacy determines motivation, behaviors, and feelings through four major psychological processes, which are cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective. These processes facilitate goal setting and analytical thinking to produce the behaviors in which certain outcomes are expected and attained.

Academic success is influenced by self-efficacy through “the acquisition of cognitive skills, modeling effects, feedback, and goal setting” (Pajares, 2002, section: Self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement-the research). The students’ self-beliefs or self-efficacy about their academic capabilities are crucial elements of academic motivation and self-regulated learning skills that lead to academic success. Thus, self-efficacy is logically related to GPA, one indicator of academic success.

As the relationship between self-efficacy and different variables for success is identified, outcome expectations and specific academic behaviors can be modified through specific intervention programs to improve success. Modifying motivation and behaviors is possible through assessment, goal setting, role modeling, verbal encouragement, and feedback, which could alter and strengthen self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 2002). As the nursing students’ self-efficacy is strengthened, they should feel more empowered to succeed

Methodology

This research study was a cross-sectional correlational study that was part of a larger longitudinal study following several cohorts of baccalaureate (BSN) nursing students. This cross-sectional study aimed to analyze self-efficacy and the prerequisite GPA in a BSN program. The subjects for this study were recruited from accelerated and regular cohorts in a large metropolitan university school of nursing baccalaureate program. The accelerated cohort was participating in a compressed baccalaureate nursing program that was 18 months in length with no breaks, with admission criteria that included (a) an overall minimum GPA of 3.4, (b) a minimum prerequisite course GPA of 3.4, and (c) successful completion of all non-nursing graduation requirements. The regular cohort was participating in the standard baccalaureate nursing program that was 3 years in length, which included no nursing courses in the summer. This cohort had admission criteria that included (a) minimum GPA of 2.5 in 30 most recent semester/quarter units, (b)

minimum prerequisite course GPA of 2.75, and (c) successful completion of anatomy, physiology, and microbiology with a grade of C or better within 5 years.

The convenience sample consisted of one cohort of accelerated students ($n_1=31$) and two cohorts of regular students ($n_2=62$, $n_3=85$). The convenience sample of volunteers was obtained, and individuals were assigned a number to link data over time. Confidentiality was maintained by the use of identification numbers; only the principal investigator had the list of names and numbers, which was kept locked and will be destroyed at the end of the study. Only aggregate data will be presented. IRB-HS permission was obtained prior to beginning research.

Variables/Measurement

The data collection for this study included prerequisite GPA obtained from the students' records and the results from two questionnaires. Prerequisite mean GPA for the nursing program included anatomy, physiology, microbiology, writing composition, and introductory psychology. Demographic variables were measured by a 28-item questionnaire. This 28-item questionnaire gathered information on background, language, and socioeconomic variables.

The second questionnaire measured self-efficacy, the belief in one's self-regulated learning skills that are needed to successfully complete the nursing program, study skills, organizational skills, and motivation (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy was measured by an 11-question self-efficacy scale on self-regulated learning that used a 7-point Likert scale in which the answers ranged from 1 (*not well at all*) to 7 (*very well*). The scale measured the students' perceived capability of regulating their own learning skills that enabled them to succeed in their academic endeavors. This scale was adapted from a subscale from Bandura's Children's Self-Efficacy Scale and used in Terry's (2002) research study. The research study conducted by Rule and Grisemer (1996) tested the validity of the 11 question self-efficacy scale and the coefficient was computed at the $\alpha = 0.81$ level.

Data Analysis

Data from the demographic questionnaire were summarized with descriptive statistics. Prerequisite GPA and self-efficacy scores were examined using the Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine if a relationship existed between the prerequisite mean GPA and the mean self-efficacy scores. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the differences in the prerequisite mean GPA and the mean self-efficacy scores between the accelerated and regular cohorts. A post hoc multiple comparisons analysis using the least significant difference (LSD) was performed to further clarify significant differences in the ANOVA analysis.

Results

Description of Sample

Three cohorts of BSN students participated in this study. Each of the cohorts was different from each other in regard to demographic data as shown in Table 1. The accelerated cohort ($n_1=31$) consisted of a higher percentage of men (25.8%), commuters (100%), married students (32.3%), and older students (over 25, 54.9%). The regular cohorts ($n_2=63$, & $n_3=86$) were similar to each other and consisted of a higher percentage of women (85.5%, 80%), predominantly single (82.3%, 85.9%), and younger students (18-24, 77.4%, 81.2%). In addition, each cohort differed slightly in being the first member of their family to attend college ($n_1=19.4%$, $n_2=24.2%$, $n_3=31.8%$)

All three cohorts had a high percentage of minority students. The ethnic distribution was different within each cohort, particularly in relation to the percentage of Asian Americans, White and Hispanics. The ethnicity of the accelerated cohort reported 55% Asian, 35% Whites, and 12.9% Hispanic. The regular cohorts (n_1 , n_2) consisted of 58.1%, 71.9% Asian, 24.2%, 23.5% Whites, and 14.5%, 7.1% Hispanic. The ethnic distribution was calculated and totaled at 107.8%.

The disparity of the total percentage was attributed to some participants selecting more than one ethnic group affiliation.

Self-efficacy and GPA

The prerequisite GPA ($n=177$) and the self-efficacy scores ($n=175$) of the total sample were analyzed. First, the mean scores were calculated and a Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if a relationship existed between the variables. The mean prerequisite GPA was 3.10 and the mean self-efficacy score was 5.47 (range = 1-7) for the total sample, with a correlation coefficient of $r=0.162$ ($p=.032$). The correlation coefficient indicates that the higher the prerequisite mean GPA, the higher the reported self-efficacy (Table 2).

A one-way ANOVA analyzed whether a significant difference existed between the three cohorts' (n_1 , n_2 , n_3) mean prerequisite GPA or mean self-efficacy scores. The ANOVA revealed that a statistically significant difference did exist between the three cohorts in regard to the mean prerequisite GPA ($F=35.76$, $p=.000$). However, no significant difference was found among the cohorts in regard to the mean self-efficacy scores ($F= 1.43$, $p=0.24$). Post hoc analysis of the mean prerequisite GPA using the LSD was performed to determine which cohort's mean prerequisite GPA was significantly different. The results indicated that a statistically significant difference existed between all three cohorts ($p=.000$, $\alpha=0.05$). That is, the accelerated cohort's (n_1) prerequisite mean GPA of 3.5 was significantly higher than the regular cohort's (n_2) prerequisite mean GPA of 3.1, which was significantly higher than the other regular cohort (n_3) prerequisite mean GPA of 2.8.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore academic success by determining if there was a relationship between self-efficacy and GPA of BSN students as well as to determine if there was a difference in self-efficacy and GPA between accelerated and regular BSN students. As one of

the outcomes of this study was to identify a possible early indicator of academic performance to promote academic success of BSN students, the variable of prerequisite GPA was selected. GPA has been found to be a consistent predictor of academic success and the specific type of GPA variable was not relevant (Beeson & Kissling, 2001; Giddens & Gloeckner, 2005; Daley, Frazier, Chung, & Moser, 2003; Quick, Krupa, & Whitley, 1985). Bandura (1994) and Pajares (2002) indicate that self-efficacy is logically related to GPA and academic performance. The results of this study suggest that a statistically significant, positive relationship exists between prerequisite GPA and self-efficacy of BSN students, which answered the first research question.

The positive correlation of self-efficacy and prerequisite GPA has many implications for nurse educators. Students with low prerequisite GPA or low self-efficacy scores could be identified early in their academic progression as at risk students. As this initial identification could occur upon admission to the nursing program, early intervention could be initiated immediately. Subsequently, at risk students with continued low GPA could be reevaluated for their self-efficacy scores leading to further intervention. The identification of the specific areas could lead to referrals to existing academic support services, remediation, or personal counseling.

With the early identification of at risk students and the continual assessment of their GPA, specific educational strategies to increase the students' self-efficacy would be appropriate. As academic success is influenced by self-efficacy through "the acquisition of cognitive skills, modeling effects, feedback, and goal setting" (Pajares, 2002, section: Self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement-the research), the strategies of goal setting, role modeling, verbal encouragement, and feedback could alter and strengthen the students' self-efficacy beliefs. Based on these strategies, faculty could develop new programs targeting self-efficacy. The increase of the nursing students' perceived self-efficacy should in turn lead to increased academic success as

reflected by GPA. Increasing the self-efficacy and GPA factors that influence academic success could positively affect retention and attrition of the nursing students.

The second research question was to determine if a difference existed between the accelerated and regular BSN students for either self-efficacy or GPA. The results of this study suggested that a statistically significant difference existed between the prerequisite GPA of the accelerated and the regular nursing students, as well as between the two cohorts of regular students. The difference between the GPA of the accelerated and the regular BSN cohorts was expected due to the different admission criteria used for each nursing program. However, the significant difference between the two regular cohorts was an unexpected result. A possible factor was the timing of the admission selection for each cohort. The accelerated cohort (n_1) with higher GPA was selected at the same time as the first regular cohort (n_2), leaving more students with lower GPA in the first regular cohort. The last regular cohort (n_3) was selected 6 months later.

Other demographic factors that could have influenced the differences in GPA between the cohorts were age, gender, family responsibility, and educational history, which were consistent with previous research (Arathuzik & Aber, 1998; Jeffreys, 1998). Older students may have had more academic experience compared to younger students, which could have contributed to higher GPA. The cohorts with higher GPA also had a higher percentage of males. In the regular cohorts there was a higher percentage of single students and a higher percentage of students who were the first in their family to attend college, which may have affected GPA and self-efficacy. All of these demographic factors would require further research to identify their significance in relation to self-efficacy and GPA.

The findings indicated that a statistically significant difference did not exist between the self-efficacy scores of the three cohorts of BSN students. One factor, as outlined in the literature

(Jeffreys, 1998; Ofori & Charlton, 2002) that may have influenced this result was that some of the students may have overestimated their capabilities and underestimated their need for preparation for academic support. That is, instead of perceived self-efficacy leading to effort and persistence; it may have undermined the students' effort in some cases. The students with high self-efficacy scores and low GPA potentially could be identified as at risk students; however, the relationship found between self-efficacy and GPA suggests that this was not widespread in this study. Further research could identify low performing students to describe their particular self-efficacy ratings to further this line of research.

The differences found between accelerated and regular students have implications for faculty related to the retention of students. Providing faculty development with specific strategies to recognize and increase student self-efficacy would be important since the results of this study supported the position that these two variables were positively correlated. If a student's self-efficacy can be increased, the student could feel empowered to succeed, thus increasing the likelihood of their academic success.

Limitations and Further Research

This study was limited by design and sample. The cross-sectional design does not demonstrate how these students succeed over time in relation to self-efficacy and GPA. Examining the long term effect of these two variables would be beneficial. Another confounding factor was the high percentage of minority students in all three cohorts (74.1%, 83.9%, 83.8%). The unique ethnic distribution was not representative of most schools of nursing in California (California Board of Registered Nursing, 2006), which limits the generalizability of the research data. In addition, the manner in which the ethnic distribution affected self-efficacy scores and GPA was not addressed in this study. This would be an area for further research. Other areas recommended for further research are issues related to accelerated and regular BSN students, as

well as the demographic variables of gender, educational history, and work and family responsibilities as they relate to self-efficacy and GPA since the research has been limited.

The urgency of promoting academic success of BSN students, both accelerated and regular, requires that faculty and nursing programs identify specific variables related to program completion and NCLEX-RN success. The combination of self-efficacy and prerequisite grades provides one opportunity for early identification of at risk students. Development of programs utilizing the early identification information and referrals to existing academic support services will improve student academic performance and promote academic success.

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Table 1. Demographics

	Total Sample		Accelerated, n_1		Regular, n_2		Regular, n_3	
	$N = 178$	%	$n_1 = 31$	%	$n_2 = 62$	%	$n_3 = 85$	%
Gender								
Female	144	80.9	23	74.2	53	85.5	68	80
Male	34	19.1	8	25.8	9	14.5	17	20
Ethnicity								
White	46	25.8	11	35	15	24.2	20	23.5
Hispanic	19	10.7	4	12.9	9	14.5	6	7.1
Asian	114	64.1	17	55	36	58.1	61	71.9
African American	4	2.2	1	3.2	2	3.2	1	1.2
Native American	2	1.1	0	0	1	1.6	1	1.2
Other	7	3.9	1	3.2	4	6.5	2	2.4
Age Range								
18-24	133	74.7	14	45.2	49	77.4	70	81.2
25-34	21	11.8	9	29	11	17.8	12	14.2
35-55	24	13.5	8	25.9	2	9.7	3	5.9
Marital Status								
Single	140	78.7	16	51.6	51	82.3	73	85.9
Married	28	15.7	10	32.3	8	12.9	10	11.8
Dependents								
No Children	139	78.1	19	61.3	49	79	71	83.5
Children	38	21.9	12	38.7	13	21	13	16.5
Commute								
Commuter	170	95.5	31	100	60	96.8	79	92.9
Non-Commuter	8	4.5	0	0	2	3.2	6	7.1
First to College	48	27	6	19.4	15	24.2	27	31.8
Prerequisite GPA	177	3.10	31	3.57	62	2.84	84	3.12
Self-efficacy	175	5.47	31	5.68	61	5.43	83	5.41

Table 2. Prerequisite GPA and Self-Efficacy

	N	Mean	SD	r	P (2-tailed)
Prerequisite GPA	177	3.10	0.47		
Self-Efficacy	175	5.47	0.79	.162	0.032

Table 3. Accelerated versus Regular Students

		N	Mean	SD	F	p
PREREQ GPA	Accelerated n ₁	31	3.57	0.29	35.762	.000
	Regular n ₂	62	2.84	0.49		
	Regular n ₃	84	3.12	0.35		
SELF EFFICACY	Accelerated n ₁	31	5.68	0.58	1.439	0.24
	Regular n ₂	61	5.43	0.87		
	Regular n ₃	83	5.41	0.78		