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Abstract

Many occupational therapy students navigate the transition to the Level II fieldwork experience effortlessly, while others require support due to a lack of perceived self-efficacy. This perception dramatically impacts fieldwork performance and challenges academic fieldwork coordinators to support students struggling to believe in their own capabilities. This study utilized a quantitative quasi-experimental research design with a purposive sample of 16 occupational therapy assistant students to determine if an educational intervention increased perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence. Data collected from the Student Confidence Questionnaire (SCQ) pre, and post-intervention provided insight into the students' report of perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence during the Level II fieldwork experience. This questionnaire assessed the domains of professional competence, communication, adaptability, innovation, risk-taking, supervision, and clinical practice (Derdall et al., 2002). The educational module included an introduction to the key concepts of self-efficacy, self-assessment, and reflection, seven weekly reflective practice journal assignments centered around domains of the SCQ, and feedback using a reflective practice rubric to scaffold the development of self-efficacy. A statistically significant increase occurred in self-efficacy and overall confidence after the intervention across all seven domains of the post-test SCQ. The results indicated that the educational module created an influential impression on the development of self-efficacy and overall confidence during the Level II fieldwork experience. Level II fieldwork performance was not measured. Considering that many students struggle with perceived self-efficacy this educational intervention provides a potential solution to support fieldwork students challenged by a lack of belief in their own capabilities.

Keywords

Occupational therapy, self-efficacy, self-assessment, reflection, fieldwork

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Using Self-Assessment and Reflection to Develop Self-Efficacy in Occupational Therapy Assistant Fieldwork Students

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ABSTRACT

Many occupational therapy students navigate the transition to the Level II fieldwork experience effortlessly, while others require support due to a lack of perceived self-efficacy. This perception dramatically impacts fieldwork performance and challenges academic fieldwork coordinators to support students struggling to believe in their own capabilities. This study utilized a quantitative quasi-experimental research design with a purposive sample of 16 occupational therapy assistant students to determine if an educational intervention increased perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence. Data collected from the Student Confidence Questionnaire (SCQ) pre, and post-intervention provided insight into the students' report of perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence during the Level II fieldwork experience. This questionnaire assessed the domains of professional competence, communication, adaptability, innovation, risk-taking, supervision, and clinical practice (Derdall et al., 2002). The educational module included an introduction to the key concepts of self-efficacy, self-assessment, and reflection, seven weekly reflective practice journal assignments centered around domains of the SCQ, and feedback using a reflective practice rubric to scaffold the development of self-efficacy. A statistically significant increase occurred in self-efficacy and overall confidence after the intervention across all seven domains of the post-test SCQ. The results indicated that the educational module created an influential impression on the development of self-efficacy and overall confidence during the Level II fieldwork experience. Level II fieldwork performance was not measured. Considering that many students struggle with perceived self-efficacy this educational intervention provides a potential solution to support fieldwork students challenged by a lack of belief in their own capabilities.

Introduction

The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) Standards (2018) describe fieldwork education as an essential component of professional preparation. The fieldwork experience “promotes clinical reasoning and reflective practice, transmits the values and beliefs that enable ethical practice, and develop professionalism and competence in career responsibilities” (ACOTE, 2018, p. 39). Many occupational therapy curricula culminate with the Level II fieldwork experience designed to bridge the didactic portion of the curriculum into the clinical experiential component. The Level II fieldwork experience requires the student to transition from the classroom to entry-level competence as a practitioner. The transition requires a multitude of skills which include clinical reasoning, autonomy, reflective capacity, self-directed thinking, innovation, time management, and an internal belief in one’s ability to successfully perform a behavior or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1999).

At the core, perceived self-efficacy serves as an indicator of student success or failure within the fieldwork context, as self-efficacy affects the quality and quantity of effort and motivation to overcome obstacles and work through challenging tasks (Dunn et al., 2014). Andonian (2017) found that students tasked to learn and demonstrate entry-level clinical reasoning in the fieldwork environment may struggle with a sense of competence, which impedes their performance. Consequently, this presents a challenge for academic fieldwork coordinators to best support students struggling with challenges that stem from a lack of belief in their capability. Therefore, this study utilized confidence, not performance, as the intervention target.

Bandura (1982) described self-efficacy as a judgment of “how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122). This definition was used to guide the research question for this study. He noted that perceived self-efficacy affects relationships between a person’s knowledge and behavior. Within the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Bandura described the terms confidence from self-efficacy and provided a suggestion for self-efficacy assessments. “Confidence is a nondescript term that refers to the strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about, and perceived self-efficacy refers to belief in one’s agentive capabilities that one can produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997, p. 382). Therefore, a self-efficacy assessment includes both an affirmation of capability and the strength of that belief (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy assessment does not include skill performance assessment.

A review of the existing professional literature to explore pedagogical tools used to frame and develop self-efficacy yielded themes related to self-assessment and reflection. Self-assessment as a tool of pedagogy promoted deep learning and critical thinking in students, playing an essential role in developing self-perceptions that lead to increased motivation (Kearney et al., 2016; Sargeant et al., 2011; Sharma et al., 2016; Taras, 2010). The self-assessment process required agency and helped extend the

insight needed to identify what went wrong and right during learning processes and products. This wisdom created an internal drive to correct and repeat those behaviors essential for increasing the motivation necessary for future performance and self-efficacy (Cassidy, 2007).

The pedagogical tool of reflection promotes a student-centered educational environment essential for experiential learning in clinical practice that relates to the review, interpretation, and understanding of experiences to guide present and future behavior (Donaghy & Morss, 2007; Embo, 2014; Larsen et al., 2016). Reflection requires scaffolding progressing from a fixed to a less structured format coupled with instructor feedback that develops students' knowledge, skills, and values from the experience to deepen learning (Adeani et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2019; Alt & Raichel, 2020; Hendrix et al., 2012; Quinton & Smallbone, 2010). Roche and Coote (2008) explored students' perceptions and experiences after completing a reflection module and concluded that students perceived both personal and professional benefits. These personal and professional attributes included the ability to competently reflect on action, use reflection to evaluate their performance on personal and professional levels, and adapt future behaviors important for client interactions (Roche & Coote, 2008).

Both self-assessment and reflection contribute to the expectation of learning outcomes and achievements within the higher education environment. However, within the literature questions remain unanswered about using self-assessment and reflection in tandem as pedagogical tools to develop the perception of self-efficacy in students. Few studies explored self-efficacy, self-assessment, and reflection with occupational therapy students further contributing to a void within the literature. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following research question. Will an educational intervention for developing self-assessment and reflection during Level II fieldwork increase perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence in occupational therapy assistant students?

Method

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative, quasi-experimental design that consisted of a pre-test, an intervention, and a post-test to examine if an educational intervention during a Level II fieldwork experience improved perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence. The institutional review board (IRB) at the researcher's university granted approval prior to the start of this study.

Participants

Using purposive sampling, the researcher recruited participants from an occupational therapy assistant cohort before their first Level II fieldwork experience. Participants received information about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent before participation. The sample (n=16) included predominantly females (88%) over the age of 27, slated to complete their first Level II fieldwork experience working with clients with physical disabilities (63%). Table 1 summarizes the descriptive characteristics of the sample.

Table 1*Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants*

Participant Information		Frequency (n)	Percent %
Age Category:	20-23 years	1	6%
	24-26 years	5	31%
	27+ years	10	63%
Gender:	Male	2	12%
	Female	14	88%
Setting:	Acute Care	0	0%
	Rehabilitation	3	19%
	Long Term Care	5	31%
	Community	8	50%
Client Group:	Psychosocial Dysfunction	5	31%
	Physical Dysfunction	10	63%
	Pediatric	1	6%
Previous experience in a related setting:	As volunteer	4	25%
	As employee	1	6%
	Other	1	6%

Measures

This study utilized two measures, the Student Confidence Questionnaire (SCQ) and a demographic survey created by the researcher. The SCQ examined the students' level of perceived self-efficacy before and after their first Level II fieldwork experience. Derdall and colleagues (2002) developed the SCQ as an instrument for occupational therapy students to self-assess their confidence both within and throughout a fieldwork experience. This measure derived from Bandura's work on self-efficacy within the SCT and required students to self-assess both an affirmation of a capability level (e.g., I am confident that I can interact with clients) and strength of that belief on a 5-point Likert scale. Derdall and colleagues (2002) found similarity within the definitions of confidence and self-efficacy, and therefore used the terms synonymously within the context of the SCQ.

A pilot study found the SCQ highly consistent with a Cronbach's alpha = .96, an accurate test for confidence that showed a significant change in total confidence over time ($F(3, 32) = 25.57, p = .00$), and a tool with high internal reliability and validity (Derdall et al., 2002). The SCQ included 41 items divided between the seven domains

of communication, adaptability, innovation, risk-taking, supervision, clinical practice, and professional competence. Participants rated their confidence using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) for each of the 41 items. The researcher obtained permission from the SCQ author to use the questionnaire within this study.

The demographic survey asked participants to respond to demographic questions, including the clinical setting, client group, previous experience in a related setting, gender, and age.

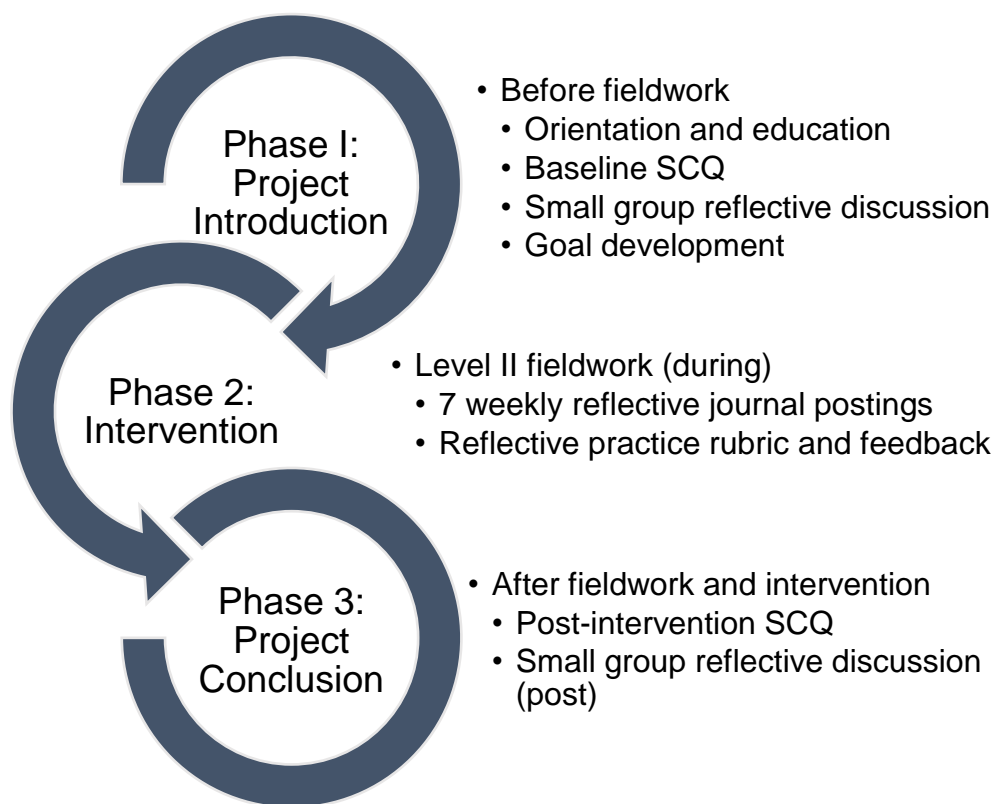
Procedure

The researcher developed and implemented a three-phased intervention grounded in the theoretical framework of SCT to improve self-efficacy and overall confidence using an educational intervention during a Level II fieldwork experience. Self-efficacy was a primary construct in Bandura's explanation of the ability of the SCT to predict, explain and change behaviors (Alishah & Dolmaci, 2013; Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2013; Burrell et al., 2018; Kahraman & Onsekiz, 2014). The SCT explained that behavioral outcomes are the result of individual self-regulation through intentional actions (Alishah & Dolmaci, 2013; Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2013). Self-efficacy enhanced student drive and determination to master challenging tasks (Alt, 2015). This theory provided a foundation for understanding the relationship between student self-efficacy and the impact on skill development. Figure 1 includes a visual timeline of the three project phases implemented during a nine week period. The nine-week intervention began before the participants' first week of the Level II experience and then overlapped with the remainder of their first Level II fieldwork experience.

Before beginning the Level II fieldwork experience, the occupational therapy assistant students participated in a one-day fieldwork boot camp led by the academic fieldwork coordinator and core faculty. During this fieldwork boot camp, the participants began **phase one** of the intervention with an orientation, introduction, and concept definition of self-efficacy, self-assessment, and reflection. Participants utilized self-assessment through a baseline completion of the SCQ. Open-ended discussion questions focused on reflection on the SCQ domain(s) rated the most confident, the least confident, and how the area with the least confidence might challenge performance during a Level II fieldwork experience. Phase one concluded with participants developing two measurable goals to facilitate change in the domain(s) rated with the least confidence and methods to support achievement.

Figure 1

Overview of the Project Phases



Note. SCQ – Student Confidence Questionnaire

Phase two of the intervention occurred during weeks two through eight and overlapped with the Level II fieldwork experience. This phase introduced Gibbs' (1988) reflective model, where the participants used the six stages of reflection, which included description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. Gibbs' reflective model served as a tool to enhance drive and determination to master challenging tasks experienced at fieldwork placements (Johns, 2017). Educators implement the structured framework of the Gibbs reflective circle coupled with guiding questions within journal assignments to facilitate reflection and allow students to explore more deeply (Adeani et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2019; Choo et al., 2018). Each weekly reflective practice journal assignment focused on a core SCQ domain that included communication, adaptability, innovation, risk-taking, supervision, clinical practice, and professional competence.

The Level II fieldwork students participated in a fieldwork experience course that served as a repository within their learning management system to upload fieldwork paperwork (e.g., signed eight-week schedules, signed site specific learning objectives, completed fieldwork educator profiles, and the student evaluation of the fieldwork experience). For ease of access the researcher elected to utilize the fieldwork experience course to house the reflection aspect of the educational framework. Participants voluntarily

completed and uploaded the weekly posts to the respective assignment tab within the fieldwork experience course. Each assignment tab contained the assignment description, and the rubric for reflective practice developed to assess student completion. The researcher coupled the reflective practice rubric with feedback to shape the development of self-efficacy as part of the project intervention. Table 2 contains the rubric developed to assess the weekly reflective practice journal assignments.

Table 2

Rubric for Reflective Practice Journal Assignment

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Does Not Meet Expectations (1)
Description of thoughts, feelings, & evaluation	The reflection demonstrates sophisticated and thoughtful reflection describing a clinical event related to one of the components of self-efficacy components (communication, adaptability, innovation, risk taking, supervision, clinical practice, or professional competence) detailing thoughts, feelings, and evaluation.	The reflection demonstrates an attempt to describe a clinical event related to one of the components of self-efficacy components (communication, adaptability, innovation, risk taking, supervision, clinical practice, or professional competence) detailing thoughts, feelings, and evaluation.	The reflection makes little or no attempt to identify one of the components of self-efficacy, and/or lacked focus on the description of thoughts, feelings, and evaluation.
Analysis	The reflection shows depth and critical thought exploring the details of the why the student's judgement, and challenges.	The reflection shows careful thought exploring the details of the why of the student's judgement, and challenges.	The reflection makes little or no attempt to explore the details of the why of the student's judgement, and challenges.
Conclusion	The reflection shows depth and critical thought exploring the factors that affected the outcome, alternative actions, or	The reflection shows careful thought exploring the factors that affected the outcome, alternative actions, or	The reflection makes little or no attempt to identify the factors that affected the outcome, alternative

	approaches, and what could have been done differently.	approaches, and what could have been done differently.	actions, or approaches, and what could have been done differently.
Action Plan	The reflection shows depth and critical thought describing an action plan that was specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely/linked to a deadline (SMART).	The reflection shows careful thought describing an action plan that was specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely/linked to a deadline (SMART).	The reflection entry did not clearly describe an action plan that was specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely/linked to a deadline (SMART).
Mechanics	No grammar or stylistic errors.	An occasional grammar or stylistic error.	Written mechanical errors (stylistic and grammar) make content very difficult to read.
Instructor Feedback:			

In **phase three** of the intervention, after completion of the first Level II fieldwork experience, the participants completed the post SCQ. Open ended questions in the project conclusion small group discussion focused on reflecting upon how the SCQ ratings changed pre and post-intervention, what participants attributed to the change and how to feed forward these changes into the next fieldwork placement.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data throughout the project, however, only the quantitative data was analyzed for the purpose of this study. Microsoft Excel version 16.48 (2021) was used to perform statistical analyses. Differences between pre and posttest measures of SCQ were examined with a paired sample t-test, setting the significance level at .05. The computed descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage summarized the descriptive characteristics of the participants, whereas the mean and standard deviations summarized the responses on the pre and post intervention SCQ. Each of the seven domains of the SCQ was analyzed. SCQ scores were categorized as low (less than or equal to 157), middle (158-166), and high (greater than or equal to 167) to observe movement in student confidence between categories post intervention (Andonian, 2017).

Results

Table 3 summarizes the mean response and standard deviation for each component of the SCQ and the results of the paired t-tests. The results indicated that the educational intervention of self-assessment and reflection significantly impacted all seven domains of the SCQ which included communication ($p < .001$), adaptability ($p < .01$), innovation ($p < .01$), risk-taking ($p < .01$), supervision ($p < .001$), clinical practice ($p < .01$), and professional competence ($p < .001$).

Table 3

Comparison of Pre and Post-intervention Student Confidence Questionnaire (SCQ) Measures

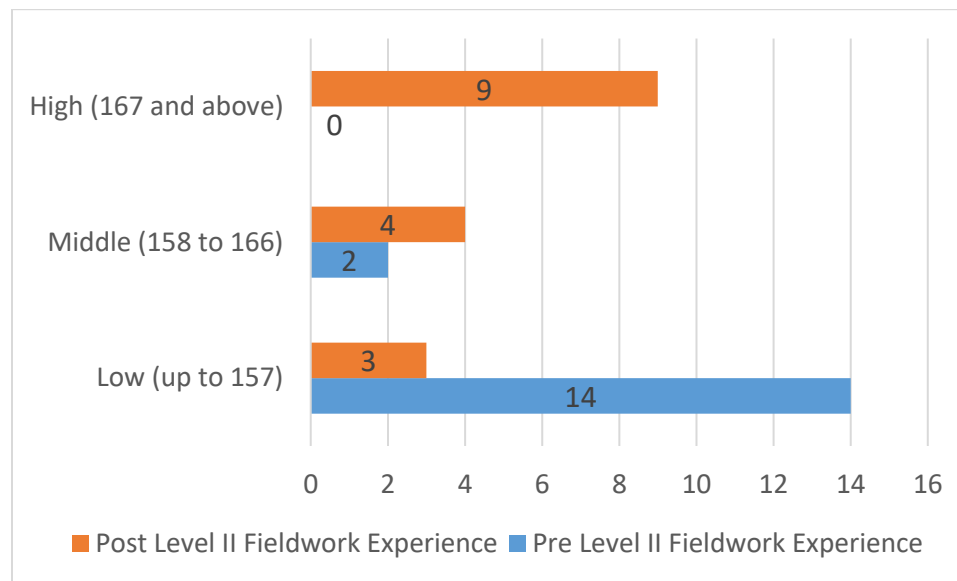
SCQ Component	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)	<i>p</i>
Communication	26.2 (4.46)	33.3 (3.89)	<.001**
Adaptability	17.3 (3.42)	20.5 (2.53)	.002*
Innovation	17.9 (3.05)	21.5 (2.83)	.002*
Risk-taking	13.9 (1.91)	16.8 (2.18)	.002*
Supervision	18.5 (2.71)	22.9 (1.59)	<.001**
Clinical practice	18.1 (3.07)	21.2 (3.19)	.005*
Professional competence	27.3 (5.11)	35.8 (4.86)	<.001**

Note. * Indicates significance at $p \leq 0.01$; ** Indicates significance at $p \leq 0.001$.

Figure 2 summarizes the change in the participants' report of self-efficacy and overall confidence before and after the Level II fieldwork experience. The results indicated that 88% ($n=14$) of the participants reported a low rating of self-efficacy and overall confidence on the pre-test SCQ, compared to 19% ($n=3$) that reported lower self-efficacy and overall confidence on the post-test SCQ. Looking at the combined categories of middle and high, 13% ($n=2$) of the sample reported a middle rating of self-efficacy and overall confidence on the pre-test SCQ, compared to 81% ($n=13$) that reported either a middle or high rating of self-efficacy and overall confidence post-test SCQ.

Figure 2

Participant SCQ Rating of Self-Efficacy and Overall Confidence



Discussion

This study examined whether an educational intervention during a Level II fieldwork experience improved perceived self-efficacy and overall confidence. Results indicated that self-assessment and reflection content within the educational intervention positively influenced all seven core areas included within the SCQ, signifying an increase in participant perception of self-efficacy and overall confidence in the post-fieldwork SCQ ratings. Participants consistently rated themselves higher across the seven domains on the SCQ after the Level II fieldwork experience. The most significant change occurred in the core area of professional competence, and the smallest change occurred in risk-taking. Questions within the risk-taking section on the SCQ asked participants to rate their confidence in using techniques they have practiced, observed, discussed with their supervisor, and learning from mistakes (Derdall et al., 2002). This suggests that opportunities exist to evaluate and enhance occupational therapy curricula in this area.

Both self-assessment and reflection contribute to achievements and the expectations of learning outcomes within the higher education environment. The educational intervention utilized the pedagogical tools of self-assessment and reflective practice journaling with instructor feedback to develop self-efficacy during the Level II fieldwork experience. Participants engaged in self-assessment using the SCQ to increase independent learning, promote deep thinking and achievement within the higher education environment, but specifically within the fieldwork environment (Sahin-Taskin, 2018). The journals focused on reflection to enhance student understanding of the domains of the SCQ that impact self-efficacy and served as a method to document events for later consideration (Daniels et al., 2018; O'Connell & Dymont, 2006). Hendrix and colleagues (2012) concluded that students valued feedback when applying course concepts to the clinical environment. This supported the provision of feedback to shape

self-efficacy development within the reflective practice journal assignments. Fundamentally, the literature supported the connection between increased self-efficacy and the effort an individual puts forth to complete a task and ultimately toward mastering the task, which aligned with the overall purpose of this study (Alishah & Dolmaci, 2013; Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2013; Cassidy, 2007; Colthorpe et al., 2019).

Limitations to this study include a relatively small sample size from one occupational therapy assistant cohort. The researcher conducted this study within the context of an academic course, which required data collection as part of the course assignments. Despite the statistically significant findings, this limited the ability to have a comparison group to better determine if the intervention impacted self-efficacy within the participants. Additionally, purposive sampling may limit the generalization of the results to a larger population of occupational therapy practitioner students.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Education

All occupational therapy students, regardless of the point of entry for the education program, must complete the Level II fieldwork experience. However, some students lack the requisite skills to believe in their ability to succeed. Consistently the literature describes a positive correlation between increased self-efficacy and the effort an individual puts forth to complete tasks ultimately toward mastering the task (Alishah & Dolmaci, 2013; Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2013; Cassidy, 2007; Colthorpe et al., 2019). Within the didactic and experiential portions of occupational therapy curricula, academic fieldwork coordinators and faculty can embed opportunities to develop self-efficacy within their students.

Educators and academic fieldwork coordinators should remain mindful of existing opportunities within their program that promote the development of self-efficacy skills. Programs can utilize the seven domains addressed within the SCQ as a starting point to reflect upon the existing curriculum. Then embed opportunities that require self-assessment and reflection on action during didactic and experiential components to develop these essential skills before the high stakes Level II fieldwork environment. The literature suggests that educators improve student self-efficacy by providing a sense of achievement within demanding tasks, clear-cut definitions of learning goals, criteria for success, and feedback consistent with the findings of this study (Artino, 2012; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Schneider & Preckel, 2017). Additionally, the results of this study suggest that Level II fieldwork students benefit from self-reflection, a scaffolded framework to process through challenges, support, and encouragement from their educators or academic fieldwork coordinators as they navigate the Level II fieldwork experience.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the void in the literature related to the development of self-efficacy in occupational therapy students and identifies the need to address this within occupational therapy curricula. Future studies should continue to build on this knowledge and explore ways to increase self-efficacy for occupational therapy students not only for the high stakes Level II fieldwork environment, but also to create a positive

trajectory for future professional careers. A mixed-method approach with a larger sample size could strengthen the data. The larger sample could capture themes that explain students' perceived challenges in developing self-efficacy. Qualitative data could help to explain how the pedagogical tools of self-assessment and reflection change self-efficacy within the students. Further, introducing a comparison group could strengthen the ability to determine the intervention's impact on self-efficacy within the participants. Educators within occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs can collaboratively replicate this study to expand the sample size and further explore how self-assessment and reflection influence the development of student self-efficacy. Results of this study identify the importance of facilitating the autonomous self-assessment, reflective thinking skills, and building the self-efficacy needed for life-long learning as a practitioner.

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