Chapter 15
Making the Connection:
Engaging and Impacting Student Outcomes by Building Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance outcomes. Bandura explained that there are four main sources of efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological reactions. Adapting a class structure and creating scaffolding that supports students does not mean that the content is less rigorous; it means how they meet these challenges is supported and developed with faculty guidance and input. Creating online learning environments that nurture students, motivate them, and engage them requires intentional practice and planning, using techniques to build student self-efficacy can assist in this process. This chapter will address how to identify tools and strategies to develop these skills.

The education landscape has undergone a profound transformation in recent years with the rapid proliferation of online learning platforms. This shift has created unprecedented opportunities for students to access education from virtually anywhere in the world. While online learning offers flexibility and convenience, it also presents unique challenges for educators and learners alike. One of the key challenges in online education for instructors is ensuring that students participate actively and thrive academically. Regarding online teaching, the concept of self-efficacy is particularly relevant because online instructors must navigate a diverse set of challenges compared to traditional classroom instructors. These challenges include technology proficiency, course design for online environments, and facilitating student engagement in virtual settings. "From a theoretical perspective, Self-Efficacy can be strengthened through the experience of mastery, observing someone succeed, and social persuasion such as direct encouragement" (Yokoyama, 2019, p.2).

One of the evident advantages of online learning is that "students can potentially download and stream media, whatever, wherever, and whenever they like, affording great flexibility in learning experiences,

and potentially de-tethering learning from the bricks and mortar university classroom" (Thomson et al., 2014, p.67). This broad-reaching statement assumes that online access is readily available and that the ability to finance this does not present an obstacle. An article in Forbes found that "In 2021, about 60% of all postsecondary degree seekers in the U.S. took at least some online classes. Around 30% studied exclusively online" (Hamilton, 2023, para 6). We need to be able to accommodate this growing demand.

Undergraduate students can present retention concerns, which often occur when they struggle with adjusting to working online, "to address the lack of persistence of undergraduate online students, universities must create and implement interventions that prepare students for the online learning environment and help them develop as autonomous learners" (Stephen, Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021).

Learning can be both formal and informal in nature. When online, there are adaptable formats that can be used, such as videos, texts, audio, and graphics. Faculty have a unique opportunity to communicate with students utilizing structures that are accessible and flexible. Online schooling created a mechanism for students with personal commitments, income limits, disabilities, work responsibilities, and a myriad of other concerns to access a quality education successfully. The education system serves an increasingly diverse demographic of students, which the traditional classroom environment needed to be designed to meet. Adapting a class structure and creating scaffolding to support students' success does not mean that the content is less rigorous; instead, it means these students meet the challenges in supportive environments through the tireless efforts of faculty guidance. Creating online learning environments that nurture, engage, and motivate students requires intentional practice and planning to identify the means for students to not connect with the content and develop a relationship with their instructors.

Through this chapter's exploration of self-efficacy in online learning, we aim to provide educators and institutions with the tools and insights needed to maximize the potential of their online learners and shape the future of education in the digital age and beyond.

WHAT IS SELF-EFFICACY?

Self-efficacy is important in instruction and student achievement. It refers to the person's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997). In the online environment, this is demonstrated when "the capability for learning vicariously allows individuals to acquire beliefs, cognitions, affects, skills, strategies, and behaviors from observations of others in their social environments and vicariously via media outlets" (Schunk & Mullen, 2012, p.221). Bandura explained that there are four primary sources of efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological reactions (1997). Self-efficacy is pivotal in instructional settings and significantly impacts student achievement, particularly in online environments.

Performance Accomplishments

Bandura's concept of "performance accomplishments" plays a pivotal role in understanding self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to carry out specific actions to achieve desired outcomes. A performance accomplishment is when "students who have successfully completed similar experiences in the past will have stronger beliefs about their ability to complete future tasks" (Medaille et al., 2022, p.3). Successful task completion builds a sense of skill development in a student that is only reinforced by repeated positive experiences. "Performance accomplishments, the first source of information, are the

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