

Self-Efficacy for Pleasing the Instructor: A Validation Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop and validate the construct of self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor (SEPI) and explore its usefulness as an alternative to global measures of perceived ability. The results of three studies are presented in this report. Study one was conducted to define the construct SEPI from a student perspective. Study two was conducted to verify the internal consistency reliability of the SEPI scale that reflected students beliefs about pleasing the instructor. The purpose of the third study was to establish further evidence of the construct validity for the SEPI scale and explore its relationship with academic achievement and other motivation constructs. The results provide evidence of a two dimensional construct of SEPI: presenting a positive social image and meeting the instructors expectations. Regression analysis suggests that SEPI - meeting the instructors expectations, may be a significant predictor of academic persistence. Further research may want to be conducted with courses that tend to produce greater student diversity and performance variability.

Self-Efficacy for Pleasing the Instructor: A Validation Study

Self-efficacy is defined as “Peoples’ judgments of their capability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986). Researchers generally believe that self-efficacy has an effect on student effort, persistence and achievement (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares, 1996). Students with a high sense of self-efficacy for a task are more likely to put forth effort into the task and persist longer when the task becomes difficult. Students who doubt their ability to perform a task are more likely to avoid it, or they will engage in the task with minimal effort and persistence. In the latter case, the individual is likely to become frustrated and give up when the task becomes difficult.

It is important to note that self-efficacy beliefs reflect a person’s judgments of his/her ability related to specific performances or tasks. An example of this is when a student rates his/her ability to solve a particular math problem, let’s say $5 \times 5 = .$ The task specific nature of self-efficacy poses a particular problem for motivation researchers who conduct survey research. Seldom are researchers able to focus on specific academic tasks related to a domain, so most researchers assess a global sense of self-efficacy or perceived ability for a class or subject area. Examples can be found in the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, and McKeachie, 1991), and The Attitude Toward Mathematics Survey (Miller, Green, Montalvo, Ravindran, and Nichols, 1996).

The distinction between task specific self-efficacy and global self-confidence/perceived ability is important. Bandura (1986) cautions that measures of global self-confidence/perceived ability often fail to predict specific task performances. Pajares (1996) reiterated this concern years later saying “It is not altogether easy to see what value composite scores provided by multiple-scale instruments may have if one wishes to predict relatively discrete academic outcomes” (p. 547). We undertook the current study

with the belief that self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor could be a viable alternative to global measures of self-confidence/perceived ability because teachers define the tasks that students must complete, provide feedback, and evaluate student performance. It is our contention that teachers/instructors serve as the focal point of student work.

The construct of self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor is a result of work conducted by Montalvo (1997) in which students rated their confidence in their ability to please the instructor. In this early work it was argued that self-efficacy for pleasing the teacher, like other forms of self-efficacy, could predict student effort and persistence on academic tasks and also influence the type of social interaction students have with their teachers. A student who feels highly capable of pleasing the teacher might try harder to please or satisfy the teacher with his/her academic performance and social behavior. Conversely, a student who doubts his/her ability to please or satisfy the teacher might put forth minimal effort and persistence on academic tasks, and likely have little social interaction with the teacher. In the study Montalvo (1997) found that self-efficacy for pleasing the teacher was a significant predictor of effort, persistence, and achievement particularly when students like their teachers, and that it is a significant predictor of persistence even when students dislike the teacher.

In a subsequent study by Montalvo and Mansfield (1999), college students were asked to rate their ability to please their college instructors. The findings also showed that self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor was a significant predictor of college student effort, persistence, and achievement depending upon student liking or disliking of the teacher/instructor. However, the two studies received criticism for using a one-item scale to measure self-efficacy for pleasing the teacher/instructor. To address this limitation, a multi-item scale of self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor was developed. The current paper describes the process used to develop and validate the construct of self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor and explores its relationship with other motivation constructs and academic achievement.

Method

Study 1

Study 1 was conducted to identify beliefs held by college students about the notion of pleasing the instructors. In the study, fourteen-college students from a pre-service teacher education program in the mid-west participated in four focus groups sessions. The focus groups followed recommendations outlined by Folch-Lyon and Trost (1981). Focus group questions were revised from those used by Montalvo and Reodel (1995) to reflect the change in student populations. Throughout the discussion, the moderator was responsible for maintaining a group focus and identifying questions overlooked in the planning phase. To minimize social desirability and conformance pressures, students were allowed to talk in terms of what other students might think or do regarding pleasing the instructor, although their personal experiences were not discouraged. Each taped session lasted 40 to 50 minutes. The findings from the focus group reveal 12 beliefs about the concept of pleasing the instructor that could be used to create multiple items related to students' beliefs about their ability to please their instructors. The following are beliefs that emerged from the focus groups:

- Doing what the instructor requires
- Living up to the the instructor's standards
- Doing a good job on assignments
- Meeting the instructor's expectations
- Making the instructor proud of you
- Making the instructor think you want to learn
- Providing the instructor what he/she is looking for on exams
- Proving yourself to the instructor
- Providing the instructor what he/she is looking for on assignments
- Pleasing the instructor with verbal responses in the classroom
- Exceeding the instructor's expectations
- Pleasing the instructor with social behavior in the classroom

Study 2

Next, a pilot study was conducted to verify the internal consistency reliability of a 12 item scale that reflected the 12 beliefs about pleasing the instructor. Each item was constructed using the individual beliefs described in the focus groups. Each item began with “Can you...” to reflect their certainty in accomplishing each of the beliefs identified in the focus groups (i.e., Can you meet the instructor’s expectations?) Students were asked to respond to each item on a 10 point scale from “Cannot do at all” and “Certain can do.”

Participants included 131 undergraduates in a pre-service teacher education program. The initial reliability estimate (Cronbach’s alpha = .59) was lower than expected. A review of the inter-item correlation matrix revealed that one item (Can you do what your instructor requires of you?) had a low correlation with the other eleven items in the scale. Because of this, the item was removed from the analysis. This measure improved the reliability of the overall scale with a Cronbach’s alpha = .86.

Study 3

In study 3, the remaining 11 items were incorporated into The Survey of College Student Learning and Motivation (Montalvo and Mansfield, 1999). The survey was administered to 189 college students enrolled in a pre-service teacher education program. The purpose of the third study was to establish further evidence of the construct validity for the pleasing the instructor subscale and explore its relationships with academic achievement and other motivation constructs. The revised Survey on College Student Learning and Motivation includes 39 items measuring self-efficacy for pleasing the teacher, effort, persistence, perceived ability, learning goals, performance goals, perceived instrumentality, and pleasing the family. A five point Likert-type format anchored with “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” was used for all items except effort. The effort item, which asked students to rate their typical amount of effort for this teacher as compared to classes taught by other teachers, was anchored with “Extremely High” and “Extremely Low.” (All of the items used in *The Survey on High School Student Motivation* are found in Appendix A.)

A major concern in the development of a self-efficacy scale involves the potential collinearity it might have with students’ general perceptions of ability. Because of this, an exploratory principle components factor analysis was conducted using the self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor items and

the perceived ability items to verify the uniqueness of the new subscale. Unexpectedly, the results of the factor analysis revealed a three factor solution with two separate self-efficacy factors involving the pleasing the instructor items and one for the perceived ability items . Table 1 includes the Eigen values and percent of variance for each factor. On further examination three of the self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor items seem to measure an aspect of pleasing the instructor that involves presenting a positive social image. The remaining items seem to measure self-efficacy for meeting the instructors expectations. These results suggest two different dimensions of pleasing the instructor. The remainder of the paper we will refer to the two as SEPI – Social image and SEPI – Expectations . Table 2 includes the factor loadings for the three factor solution.

Table 1

Eigen Values, Percentages of Variance, and Cumulative Percentages for Factors of the Self-efficacy for pleasing the teacher and perceived ability items.

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	6.21	41.39	41.39
2	1.54	10.25	51.64
3	1.26	8.38	60.02

Table 2

Summary of items and factor loading for oblique three-factor solution for self-efficacy for pleasing the teacher and perceived ability items.

Items	Factor Loading			Communality
	1	2	3	
SPL4. Can you make the instructor proud of you?	.77	.24	-.25	.60
SPL3. Can you meet the instructor's expectations?	.77	-.33	.21	.78
SPL2. Can you do a good job for your instructor on assignments?	.73	.11	-.03	.56
SPL1. Can you live up to your instructor's standards?	.70	-.30	.22	.67
SPL8. Can you give the instructor what he/she is looking-for on assignments?	.66	.23	.08	.62
SPL7. Can you prove yourself to your instructor?	.63	.09	.22	.61
SPL10. Can you exceed the instructor's expectations?	.49	-.16	.38	.55
SPL6. Can you give the instructor what he/she is looking-for on exams?	.47	.20	.30	.54
SPL5. Can you make your instructor think you want to learn?	.10	.70	-.06	.51
SPL9. Can you please your instructor with your verbal responses in the classroom?	-.10	.65	.35	.54
SPL11. Can you please your instructor with your social behavior in the classroom?	.29	.57	.07	.51
PA4. I am certain I understand the material presented in this class.	.06	.05	.81	.72
PA 3. I have a good understanding of the concepts taught in this class.	.02	-.02	.80	.65
PA 2. Compared to other students in class, I think I am good at the subject.	.03	.16	.73	.60
PA 1. I think I am doing better than other students in this class.	.05	.01	.70	.53

Subscale Reliabilities and Descriptive Statistics

Internal consistency reliability coefficients were run for the self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor sub-scales. Cronbach's alpha for the SEPI – social image subscale was .55 and SEPI – expectations subscale was .87. Internal consistency reliability coefficients were also computed for the items used to measure perceived ability, persistence, learning, performance, perceived instrumentality, pleasing the family. Cronbach alpha coefficients for these subscales ranged from .74 to .88.

Table 3

Subscale means, standard deviation, reliability coefficients

Subscale	Means	SD	Alpha
SEPI – social	4.18	.80	.55
SEPI – expectations	4.65	.66	.87
Percieved Ability	4.49	.74	.80
Learning Goals	4.30	.85	.82
Performance goals	3.19	1.02	.76
Perceived instrumentality	3.92	.79	.74
Pleasing the family	4.33	1.23	.88
Persistance	4.60	.80	.77
Effort	3.65	.78	1 item
Academic Achievement	89.6	7.26	

Correlations among Variables

The Pearson Product Moment correlations among the two self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor scales and other motivation variables and academic achievement provide further construct validity

evidence. To control for inflated error due to the testing of multiple correlations (17), the significance level was set to .003, thus holding alpha at .051 for the set of tests. The SEPI – social image subscale had positive relationships with perceived ability ($r = .35$), performance goals ($r = .36$), perceived instrumentality ($r = .28$), and pleasing the family ($r = .28$). The SEPI – expectations subscale had positive relationships with perceived ability ($r = .64$), learning goals ($r = .42$), perceived instrumentality ($r = .36$), pleasing the family ($r = .22$), and persistence ($r = .39$).

Table 4

Intercorrelations for Motivation Subscales and Academic Achievement

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. SEPI – social	--									
2. SEPI – expectations	.43*	--								
3. Percieved Ability	.35*	.64*	--							
4. Learning Goals	.19	.42*	.42*	--						
5. Performance goals	.36*	.20	.14	.12	--					
6. Perceived instrumentality	.28*	.36*	.22*	.25*	.50*	--				
7. Pleasing the family	.28*	.22*	.13	.11	.52*	.39*	--			
8. Persistance	.07	.39*	.35*	.46*	.01	.18	.12	--		
9. Effort	.01	.16	.27*	.30*	.04	.09	-.00	.23*	--	
10. A. Ach.	.00	.14	.25*	.09	.11	.22*	.05	.17	-.00	--

Note. * $p < .003$

Regression Analyses

To further explore the relationship of the two self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor subscales the two were included in regression analyses that examined the variance in academic achievement, effort, and persistence. Based on previous work by Montalvo and Mansfield (1999), we expected that self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor would be a significant predictor of student achievement, effort, and persistence. To test this a backward stepwise regression was used in each analysis. In the first analysis, academic achievement was regressed on SEPI – social image, SEPI – expectations, effort, persistence, perceived ability, learning goals, performance goals, perceived instrumentality, and pleasing the family. The final model included perceived ability ($B = .21$) and perceived instrumentality ($B = .18$). The multiple R for the model was .30 ($F(2,186) = 9.42$). The two variables explained 8 percent of the variance in academic achievement.

In the second analysis, effort was regressed on SEPI – social image, SEPI – expectations, perceived ability, learning goals, performance goals, perceived instrumentality, and pleasing the family. The final model included learning goals ($B = .23$) and perceived ability ($B = .17$). The multiple R for the model was .34 ($F(2,186) = 12.14$). The two explained 11 percent of the variance in effort.

In the third analysis, persistence was regressed on SEPI – social image, SEPI – expectations, perceived ability, learning goals, performance goals, perceived instrumentality, and pleasing the family. The final model included learning goals ($B = .36$) and SEPI - expectations ($B = .24$). The multiple R for the model was .51 ($F(2,186) = 32.77$). The three explained .25 percent of the variance in persistence.

Discussion

The results of the current set of studies provide evidence for two constructs that assess self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor. The results of studies 1 and 2 led us to believe that self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor as existed would be a one scale construct. The results of the exploratory factor analysis suggests two elements associated with the concept of self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor,

one that involves a social image aspect of pleasing the instructor (i.e. pleasing with verbal and social behavior) and one that involves more academic expectations (i.e. meeting the instructor's standards and giving the instructor what he or she is looking for on assignments). However, we do have some concerns about the validity of the self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor - social image subscale. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .55) was lower than we would hope for a valid scale (Alpha above .65). Further research needs to be done to more clearly define this subscale.

While we did expect to find positive relationships among the self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor subscales and perceived ability, the bivariate correlations show the two subscales have different correlation patterns with the other motivation variables. Probably the most salient difference between the two self-efficacy subscales involves their relationships with persistence, learning goals, and performance goals. The self-efficacy for meeting the instructor's expectations was found to have significant positive relationships with the persistence and learning goals, while the self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor – social image was found to have significant positive relationship with performance goals.

The regression analyses also provide additional evidence for the two self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor subscales. Self-efficacy for pleasing the instructor – social image was not found to be a significant predictor of academic achievement, effort, or persistence. Self-efficacy for meeting the instructor's expectations was found to be a significant positive predictor of persistence. This latter finding is especially important given that general concepts of perceived ability related to a course have been shown to be a significant predictor of student persistence. When placing the emphasis on the teacher, it seems that self-efficacy for meeting the teacher's expectations, along with learning goals, may be a more useful predictor of persistence. While predictive of persistence, self-efficacy – expectations was not a significant predictor of effort and achievement. This finding may be partially explained by

the relatively low variability in students' grades. Further research may want to be conducted with courses that tend to produce greater student diversity and performance variability.

Appendix A

Subscale items on

The Survey on High School Student Motivation

Self-efficacy for Pleasing the Instructor – Social

1. I can make my instructor think I want to learn.
2. I can please my instructor with my verbal responses in the classroom.
3. I can please my instructor with my social behavior in the classroom.

Self-efficacy for Pleasing the Instructor – Expectations

1. I can live up to my instructor's standards.
2. I can do a good job for my instructor on assignments.
3. I can meet my instructor's expectations.
4. I can make the instructor proud of me.
5. I can give the instructor what he/she is looking-for on exams.
6. I can prove myself to my instructor.
7. I can give the instructor what he/she is looking-for on assignments.
8. I can exceed my instructor's expectations.

Perceived Ability

1. I think I am doing better than other students in the class.
2. Compared to others in this class, I think I am good at the subject being taught.
3. I have a good understanding of the concepts taught in this class.
4. I am certain I understand the material presented in this class.

Learning Goals

1. I do the work assigned in this class because I like to understand the material I study.
2. I do the work assigned in this class because I like to understand complicated ideas.

3. I do the work assigned in this class because I like learning interesting things.
4. I do the work in this class because I like to solve challenging problems.

Performance Goals

1. I do the work assigned in this class because I don't want other students to think I'm not smart.
2. I do the work assigned in this class because I don't want to be the only one who cannot do the work well.
3. I do the work assigned in this class because I want to look smart to my friends.
4. I do the work assigned in this class because I would be embarrassed if I could not do the work.

Perceived Instrumentality

1. I do the work in this class because good grades are essential to remaining in college.
2. I do the work in this class because if I do well I get rewards from people at the university.
3. I do the work assigned in this class because I get some reward or recognition from others at the university for doing well.
4. I do the work assigned in this class because doing well is necessary for admissions to certain degree programs.
5. I do the work assigned in this class because I receive recognition or honors at school for earning good grades.
6. I do the work assigned in this class because getting into graduate school is important to me.
7. I do the work in this class because good grades are important for obtaining and maintaining scholarships.
8. I do the work in this class because doing well will help me get a good job after college

Pleasing the Family

1. I do the work in this class because I want to make my family happy.
2. I do the work assigned in this class because I want my family to think I am a good student.
3. I do the work assigned in this class because that is what my family expects of me.

Persistence

1. When I run into a difficult part of a homework assignment I give up and go on to the next problem. (reversed scored)
2. If I have difficulty with part of an assignment, I keep working until I understand it.
3. If I have trouble understanding an assignment, I go over it again until I understand it.
4. If I have trouble with part of an assignment, I don't do it. (reverse scored)

Effort

1. How would you rate your effort for this teacher as compared to your typical amount of effort for other teachers?

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