

An Exploration of Factors Affecting Academic Performance in Higher Education

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Background

Many factors contribute to performance in Higher Education. Previous research has not focused on academic writing at higher education, a skill many students struggle with (Hardy & Clughen, 2012). This work focuses on self-efficacy in academic writing, attitudes towards feedback and locus of control.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a specific situation (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy consistently predicts performance yet it is unsure if this translates to academic writing, a more complex task than those in most previous studies.

Feedback on academic work: Previous research shows mixed results regarding the content of feedback on academic work in relation to academic performance. However, little has been done on student attitudes towards feedback.

Locus of control relates to how in control an individual feels about their actions (Rotter, 1954). Those with an internal locus of control tend to perform better academically (Gifford et al., 2006) which is thought to be because they are more proactive with their learning (Abid et al., 2016). The effect tends to decrease with age (Findley & Cooper, 1983) but there might be an interaction between it and attitudes towards feedback. It is unsure whether this translates to higher education academic writing.

Previous research suggests the above three factors may have interacting effects on academic performance.



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Hypotheses

- H1: Self-Efficacy will be positively correlated with performance in academic writing
- H2: Attitudes towards feedback will be positively correlated with self-efficacy therefore acting as an indirect influence on academic performance
- H3: Locus of control will interact with attitudes towards feedback to strengthen the relationship with academic performance.

Method

Scales:

- Academic self-efficacy: MSLQ (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990). 7-point Likert scale with items such as "I'm confident I can understand the basic concepts taught in the course"
- Attitudes towards feedback: SAAF (Fuentes-Henriquez et al., 2020). 7 point Likert scale with 5 SAAF questions e.g. "I feel good about getting feedback" and 2 new questions e.g. "I'm often frustrated with feedback I receive". Participants were also given the opportunity to leave any further comments about attitudes towards feedback
- Locus of control: ALC-R (Curtis & Trice, 2013). True/False questions e.g. "I never feel really hopeless, there is always something I can do to improve my situation"
- Academic Performance: participants stated the average grade they achieve for academic writing from 0-100
- All scales were adapted due to American phrasing

Results

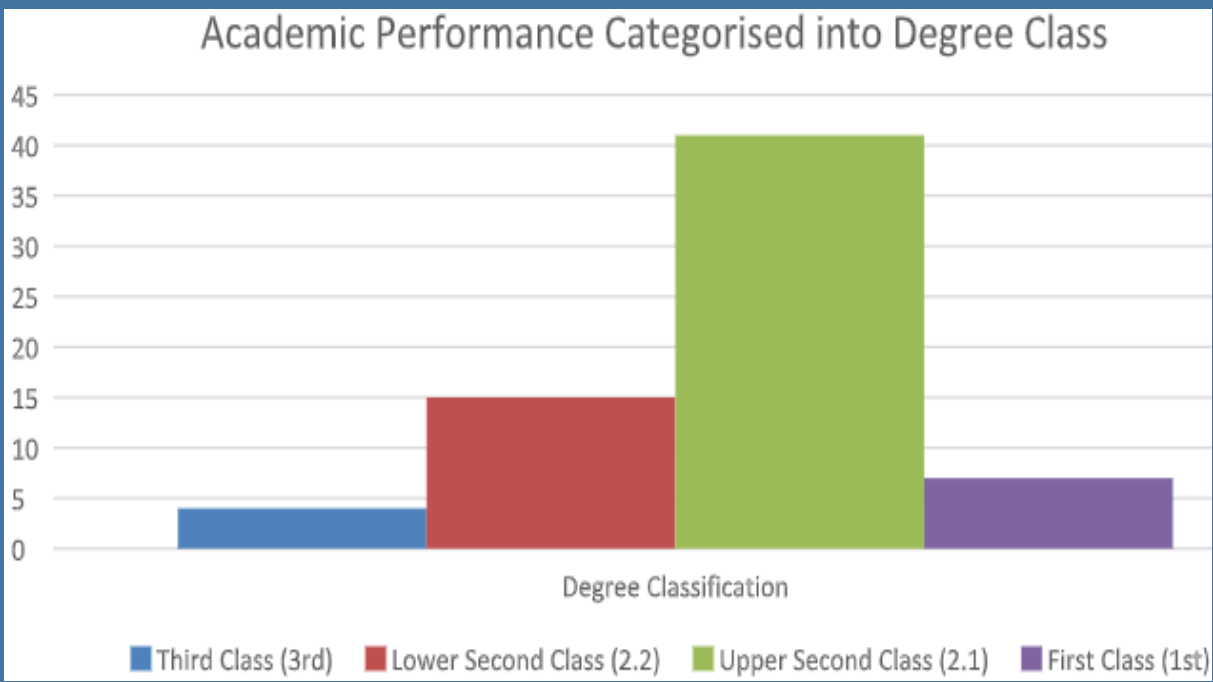
- Significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and academic performance, $r(65)=0.63$, $p<.001$
- Significant positive correlation between attitudes towards feedback and self-efficacy, $r(65)=0.28$, $p=.023$
- Locus of control is a significant predictor of performance, $r(65)=-0.31$, $p=.010$
- The interaction between locus of control and attitudes towards feedback was not significant



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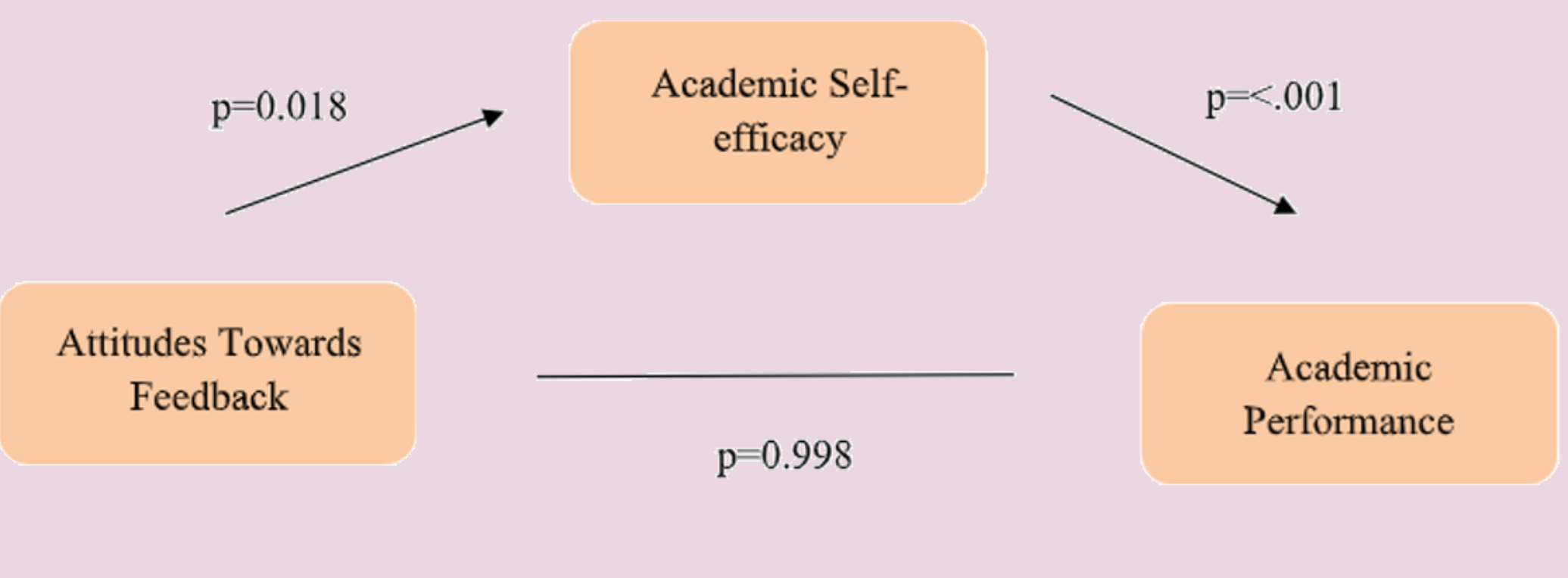
Participants:

- 67 Undergraduate Psychology students at Oxford Brookes University aged 18-54



"Helps nudge me in the right direction"

"Doesn't really help/motivate me"



Applications and Implications

- Psychological factors can affect academic writing in higher education
- As self-efficacy is a significant predictor of academic performance, universities could use self-efficacy measures to identify those at risk of low performance as potentially needing extra support
- Addressing student attitudes towards feedback could improve performance
- Lecturers could be trained to ensure feedback is of good quality to improve attitudes towards it

Conclusions

- Higher self-efficacy predicts better academic performance, supporting Bandura's (1977) theory
- Self-efficacy can predict complex task performance in higher education
- Attitudes towards feedback indirectly predicts academic performance through self-efficacy
- Attitudes towards feedback seems to be affected by the quality of feedback
- Locus of control has a small influence on academic performance

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