

Comparison of Coping Self-Efficacy Levels Between Freshmen and Seniors at Scott Community High School

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the differences in levels of coping self-efficacy among two populations: freshmen and seniors in high school. All participants were asked to complete a nine item, discrete value questionnaire titled the Next Element Outcomes System (NEOS), followed by two open-ended questions. The two types of questions allowed for both quantitative and qualitative results. The NEOS provided quantitative results in three categories: openness, resourcefulness, and persistence. Qualitative data, collected by means of the open-ended questions, provided participants' explanations to their values assigned for coping self-efficacy. Analysis of quantitative data revealed a general trend of increased coping self-efficacy levels following high school education. The difference in mean values on the NEOS, between the two populations, was greater than would be expected by chance ($P=0.00184$). A comparison of individual categories across the two populations expressed a statistically significant difference among resourcefulness ($P=0.030$) and persistence ($P=0.034$), but not openness ($P=0.255$). Qualitative data resulted in a distinction in explanations between the two populations. Freshmen were more likely to provide explanations based on their personality type, while seniors' results included actual experiences leading to such distinctions.

Keywords: Coping, self-efficacy, openness, resourcefulness, persistence.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to cope with challenging circumstances is certainly vital. At times, a person may thrive due to their actual abilities to do so. One's confidence plays a significant role in determining the outcome of situations. Occasionally, being overly confident in one's abilities can lead to failure. This study was designed to observe whether or not high school experiences have an effect on confidence by analyzing levels of coping self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined as the degree of confidence in one's ability to carry out a specific set of behaviors and reach a specific goal (Pajares and Urdan, 2006). The level of self-efficacy refers to its dependence on the difficulty level of a particular task. Coping self-efficacy involves the perceived self-efficacy in dealing with threats. In the present research, levels of coping self-efficacy were investigated among two populations: freshmen and seniors in high school. It was hypothesized that levels of coping self-efficacy will be greater among the seniors in comparison with the freshmen population. Explanations behind such levels were also studied in the research.

Several studies have been performed relating to this topic of research. However, they either involve the broad idea of self-efficacy, or include populations varying from those chosen for this particular study. None of the literature reviewed is specific to the concept of high school experience affecting levels of coping self-efficacy. For example, one particular study examined differences in self-efficacy among college students in good academic standing and college students on academic probation. Results

indicated that self-efficacy and mastery goals were positively related to academic standing.

Both quantitative and qualitative results were collected for this study. Quantitative results were gathered by means of a discrete number questionnaire (NEOS), while qualitative data was based on explanations to two of the items on the questionnaire. The additional questions were useful for providing brief explanations to the values assigned to the two particular questions on the NEOS.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study includes two populations: freshmen and seniors in high school. Both populations were enrolled in Scott Community High School, which is located in the state of Kansas. Participants included individuals of both sexes.

Participants were asked to complete a nine item questionnaire involving coping self-efficacy, followed by two open-ended questions. The questionnaire is titled the Next Element Outcomes System (NEOS). Each of the nine questions on the NEOS requested a rating for two situations: "Me at Work", and "Me at Leisure". These two situations were used together to develop NEOS scores in three categories: openness, resourcefulness, and persistence. Questionnaire results include discrete values ranging from zero to ten.

Qualitative data consisted of two questions. Such questions were based on specific items located on the questionnaire (Hsieh et. al., 2005). These were

open-ended questions involving the participant's opinion as to why he/she chose given values on the NEOS. Interpretation of participants' qualitative results was made by first typing in an easy-to read format. Results were then analyzed for merging themes.

RESULTS

Data from the NEOS produced results for three categories (openness, persistence, and resourcefulness). Scores ranged from zero (no confidence in ability) to ten (high confidence in ability) in each of the three categories. Results from the NEOS were analyzed by means of a Two Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This test allowed for a comparison of the mean values among the two populations, as well as each category individually between the populations.

Overall, as indicated by the ANOVA, the senior class rated themselves higher than the freshmen in coping self-efficacy. The mean score for freshmen was 6.691, while the mean score for seniors was 7.311. This difference is greater than would be expected by chance ($P=0.00184$). A comparison of individual categories across the two populations expressed a statistically significant difference among resourcefulness ($P=0.0300$) and persistence ($P=0.0340$), but not openness ($P=0.2550$). Below is a bar chart, illustrating the differences in results between the two populations.

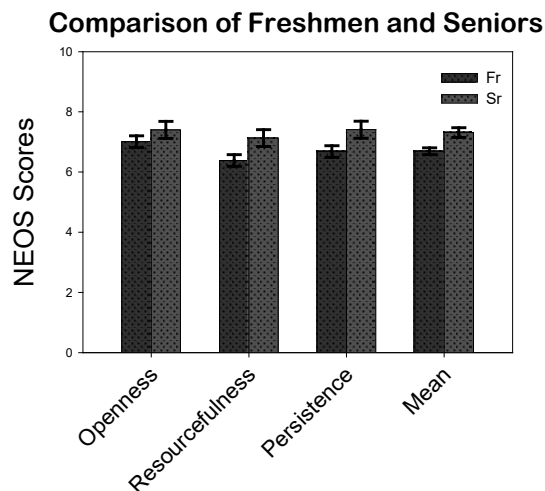


Figure 1: Comparison of freshman and seniors

Qualitative results were interpreted for participants' explanations to their chosen scores. Such results expressed a distinction between the two populations. Freshmen articulated a common theme of basing their opinions of themselves on their personality type. Seniors' results, however, contributed their value outcomes to previous personal experiences.

DISCUSSION

Based on results found from this study, there is a significant growth in levels of coping self-efficacy throughout an individual's time in high school. In addition, one's perceived thoughts of such efficacy tend to be due to personal experiences, rather than personality types, by the end of their education. With these conclusions made, it is important to recognize one main factor that may have altered results.

Freshmen data was collected at the beginning of their class period. On the other hand, senior data was collected following a standardized test. This difference in data collection environments may have been significant. The senior population could have been exhausted from the test, while freshmen were likely refreshed at the beginning of their class. In addition, freshmen likely did not feel a need to rush the questionnaire, while seniors may have felt a sense of urgency to return to their class schedule. These two aspects of the study should not be overlooked when examining the results.

Students were all enrolled at one particular school. This detail assured that the two populations would be as similar as possible. However, with more time, it would be useful to survey populations at multiple high schools for more inclusive results.

In conclusion, findings from the study express a statistically significant difference in coping self-efficacy between the chosen populations. According to results presented, seniors in high school exhibit higher levels of coping self-efficacy than freshmen in high school.

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