



Self-Assertiveness and the relationship with Academic Self-Efficacy and Student Engagement of Jordanian Students: A Descriptive, Correlational Study

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Abstract: This study explored self-assertiveness of Jordanian students and its relationship with student engagement and academic self-efficacy in Arab Open University students. The sample consisted of 35 participants out of 109. Seventy-four students were removed due to the lack of seriousness of the respondents. The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS), Self-efficacy scale by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001), and the Student Engagement Scale by Gunuc and Kuzu, (2014) were used for data collection. Data was analyzed using means, standard deviations, and t-tests. It was found that there was a positive correlation between student self-efficacy and student engagement and there was also a significant positive correlation between reported self-assertiveness and self-efficacy. There was no significant difference between genders in the reported self-assertiveness measure. Students with the lowest income (less than 200 JDs) reported significantly lower levels of self-assertiveness when compared to the students who reported an income of more than 500 JDs ($p < .032$). A significant difference between academic major groups was found, in business administration and education. No other significant differences between groups was found in English literature or computer sciences. A significant difference between students with an 'acceptable' and 'good' GPA in the levels of self-assertiveness was found. Based on these findings, further research is recommended in using different variables.

Keywords: Self-assertiveness; academic self-efficacy; student engagement; Arab Open University students.

INTRODUCTION

This descriptive, correlational study was designed to investigate the relationship between self-assertiveness, self-efficacy, and student engagement in relation to gender, level of income, academic major, and GPA.

BACKGROUND

Assertiveness fosters personal well-being and is an important social skill. Most definitions of assertiveness emphasize direct expression of feelings, desires, and thoughts in interpersonal contexts. Definitions of assertive behavior focuses on individual rights. Alberti and Emmons (2008) clarified that "assertive behavior promotes equality in human relationships, enabling students to

act in their own best interests, to stand up for themselves without unnecessary anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably, to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others. Assertiveness is a mode of personal behavior and communication characterized by a willingness to stand up for one's needs and interests in an open and direct way. The assertive person stands up for things that matter to him or her while at the same time respecting the things that matter to others. Assertiveness has also been defined as the process of direct and appropriate communication of a person's needs, wants and opinions without punishing or putting down others (Arrindell and Ende, 1985). It can be used as an instrument for introducing and sustaining socially supportive relationships



and hence enjoying better emotional wellbeing (Eskin, 2003).

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Sitota, (2018) aimed to investigate the relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement motivation of adolescent students in selected secondary schools of Harari Peoples Regional State. Findings revealed that Harari students participating in the study were scored low on assertiveness; male adolescents were found to be better in their levels of assertiveness than their female adolescent counterparts. Furthermore, it was found that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between parental educational status and assertiveness.

Kumar, Parray (2016) explained the assertiveness level of students with reference to their gender, residence and stream of study. Results revealed there is no significant difference between students in their level of assertiveness with respect to gender, residence and stream of study.

Paezy, Shahraray, Abdi (2010) examined the influence of assertiveness training on assertiveness, subjective well-being and academic achievement of thirty female secondary students which randomly were placed in experimental and control groups. The results showed a significant difference between assertiveness and well-being scores in pre-test, post-test, and follow-up for the experimental group. In addition, assertiveness training improved math scores in post-test and in the follow-up for the experimental group.

According to (Albert Bandura 1997) an influential social cognitive psychologist, self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.

In addition, self-efficacy beliefs as clarified by (Albert Bandura 1997), "is one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. One's sense of self-efficacy can play a major role that how one

approach goals, tasks, and challenges." This means, learners can master academic challenges if personal efficacy is high. They will accomplish an assignment compared to students who do not because of a low personal efficacy level. There are four sources of self-efficacy: a. physiological emotions, b. verbal persuasion c. vicarious experiences d. mastery experiences. Students can increase their ability to accomplish goals if these experiences are encouraged.

The term of student engagement has revealed recognition since the 1990s. Pascarella and Terenzini were the first scholars to employ the concept of engagement in the process of learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student engagement refers to the point of involvement of students in their learning process. Students' effort, energy, and time are devoted to formal learning activities such as course work and school-related educational projects. Student engagement consists of being an active learner, but it also refers to sense-making and emotions. It is an important aspect of the field of education psychology. (Harper and Quaye, 2009).

Skinner and Belmont (1993, p. 572) describe student engagement as "sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by positive emotional tone." Distinguishing this type of engagement from satisfaction, Barkley (2010) highlights that "...engaging students doesn't mean they're being entertained. It means they are thinking." (p. xii).

Student engagement was explained by Gunuc and Kuzu (2014) as "the quality and quantity of students' psychological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions to the learning process as well as to in-class/out-of-class academic and social activities to achieve successful learning outcomes."

This study used the Student Engagement Scale (SES) developed by Gunuc and Kuzu (2014) as a multidimensional scale. Gunuc's and Kuzu's (2014) study examined two main aspects of student involvement which are campus engagement and class engagement.



There are six dimensions of class engagement: Behavioral Engagement, Relationships with the Faculty Member (Emotional Engagement-II), Sense of Belonging, Peer Relationships (Emotional Engagement-I), Valuing, and Cognitive Engagement.

Lindsey (2017) conducted a study with 161 community college students. partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS SEM) was used to understand the links between participants' understanding of a basic statistics course program, their engagement and self-efficacy. The study revealed connections between students' theoretical comprehension of self-efficacy so as to learn statistics and to be engaged in the course. The study demonstrated that engaged students mediate the effect of self-efficacy for learning statistics at the beginning of the course.

The link between student engagement, academic performance, self-efficacy and academic motivation to determine the academic achievements was examined by Dogan (2015). The study demonstrated that self-efficacy is the key component of educational and academic achievements of middle school and high school students. The study also proposed that cognitively and academically involved learners will do well in educational activities.

Chang, Chien, (2015) examined the link between student engagement and academic self-efficacy through meta-analysis. The results show: (1) There is a link between student engagement and academic self-efficacy; (2) In different school level., the moderating influence on behavioral engagement and academic self-efficacy is demonstrated.

Linnenbrink & Pintrich, (2003) offered suggestions for teacher practice, and demonstrated how motivational, cognitive, and behavioral engagement is facilitated by self-efficacy.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the relationship between self-efficacy, assertiveness, and student engagement among learners.
- To examine if there is any significant difference in their assertiveness, based on the following demographic variables:
 - (1) Gender
 - (2) Level of income
 - (3) Academic major
 - (4) GPA

METHOD

Type of Study

This study utilized descriptive and correlational methods. Descriptive studies examine situations as they exist at the moment that research is conducted. A correlational study examines connections and relationships among and between variables.

Sample

The study sample consisted of 35 participants out 109. Seventy-four participants were removed due to the unseriousness of the respondents; that is, some items in the questionnaire were added to measure the seriousness of the respondents, when data were analyzed all 74 responded without reading the items, so their responses did not reflect the reality, so they were excluded, this was a kind of cleaning data, so results are reflective and insightful. Thirty - five participants were from 4 departments, namely: business administration, education, English literature, and computer science at Arab Open University in Jordan. Data were collected from 20-minute online scales. Participants' approval was taken in advance.



Table 1
Participants' Demographic Characteristic results

Gender	
Male	29
Female	6
SES	
Low (less than 200)	7
Medium (201 – 499)	16
High (500 – 999)	8
Very high (1000+)	4
Academic Major	
Education	17
English Literature	5
Business Administration	9
Computer Sciences	4
GPA	
Acceptable	4
Good	8
Very Good	21
Excellent	2

Instruments

The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) (1978) was used to examine the assertiveness of students. It is a standardized instrument consisting of 30 situational statements for which the subject is asked to rank the degree to which each statement is descriptive and characteristic of his/her behavior (–3 to +3) resulting in a total assertiveness score between –90 (least assertive) and +90 (most assertive). A Cronbach's alpha of 0.894 for the translated self-assertive scale reveals that it was of strong reliability.

The self-efficacy scale by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001) is an eight-item measure scale that assesses participants' belief that they can achieve their goals, despite whatever obstacles they may confront or have. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.962 for the self-efficacy measures reveals that it was of strong reliability.

The Student Engagement Scale developed by Gunuc and Kuzu (2014) (SES) is a six-factor measure of student engagement that analyzes both class and campus engagement. The behavioral, cognitive, and affective components of class engagement are examined. It is based in the tripartite attitude conceptualization of student engagement, and also considers the macro (i.e., campus) and micro (i.e., class) aspects of student engagement. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.952 for the student engagement (campus engagement: 0.892; class engagement: 0.927) reveals that it was of strong reliability.

Results and Discussion

To examine the factors that play a role in students' self-assertiveness, between-group factors such as gender, academic major, and GPA were examined in terms of their contribution to students' self-assertiveness. Then examining how each of the specified within-group variables described above (e.g., self-efficacy, student engagement) correlate with students' reported self-assertiveness.

A calculation of Pearson's correlation coefficient only revealed a significant positive correlation between student self-efficacy and student engagement, $r(35) = .391, p = .020$. This link was also apparent even when student engagement was analyzed separately by campus, $r(35) = .377, p = .025$, and class engagement measure, $r(35) = .375, p = .027$. Interestingly, there was also a trend towards a significant positive correlation between reported self-assertiveness and self-efficacy, $r(35) = .316, p = .064$. In other words, in line with the authors' expectations, students who reported higher levels of self-assertiveness were also the students who had higher reported levels of self-efficacy. These results were also consistent with previous research illustrating that international students with reported higher levels of self-assertiveness also had high academic self-efficacy (Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002). See Table 2 for all reported correlation coefficients.



Table 2
Correlations Between Self-Assertiveness Measure and Other Variates.

	M	SD
1. Self-assertiveness	3.64	.81
2. Student engagement	3.97	.62
3. Campus engagement	3.90	.71
4. Class engagement	4.04	.58
5. Self-efficacy	4.32	.80

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, † = .064

Given that between-subject factors were collected categorically, we determined it would be most meaningful to analyze the data using *t*-tests. Indeed, an independent samples *t*-test revealed no significant difference between gender in the reported self-assertiveness measure, $t(33) = -1.067$, $p = .294$. In fact, this was true for all the measures that were examined in the current study, $t_s < .747$, $p_s > .460$.

Interestingly, however, a series of one-way ANOVAs revealed some critical findings (see Table 2 for all means and standard deviations). First, a significant difference between SES groups was found, $F(3, 34) = 4.328$, $p = .012$. Post-hoc assessments for multiple comparisons showed that this significance was due to students with the lowest SES (less than 200 JDs). Specifically, students with the lowest reported SES reported significantly lower levels of self-assertiveness when compared to the students who reported an income of more than 500 JDs ($p_s < .032$). There were no other significant differences between SES groups. This is a critical finding as it reveals that indeed students who come from blue- or white-collar families may differ in their ability to assert themselves. That said, it is important to examine how the cultural context may also play a role in determining the extent to which self-assertiveness may play out.

Second, an important difference between academic major groups was found, $F(3, 34) = 4.829$, $p = .007$. Post-hoc tests for multiple comparisons uncovered that this significance was due to the difference between students majoring in business administration and education ($p = .005$). No other significant differences between groups was found. Further examination of the means and standard deviations (see Table 3) reveals that, in fact, students majoring in business administration had the highest reported levels of self-assertiveness. This is perhaps no surprise given that individuals who seek entrepreneurship possess leadership and persistence qualities that may not be as apparent in other fields such as education, English literature, or computer sciences. Significantly, however, this is perhaps the first research that reports significant differences between the self-assertiveness of students from different academic majors. Future research should further examine other differences that may contribute to these differences between the academic majors.

A trend towards a significant difference in reported self-assertiveness was found when examining student GPA groups, $F(3, 34) = 2.682$, $p = .064$. To examine this trend more closely, post-hoc analyses with a Bonferroni correction was conducted, revealing only a significant difference between students with an 'acceptable' and 'good' GPA ($p = .050$). This illustrates the importance of assertiveness in the repertoire of student skill and success. Although training modules have been conducted with female students Mehrabizade, Taghavi, & Attari, 2009), future research should consider developing training modules for student-assertiveness among gender-inclusive college students given that the results here and in previous studies illustrate a positive relation between assertiveness and academic performance (Mehrabizade, Taghavi, & Attari, 2009; Mofrad & Mehrabi, 2015).



Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of the Self-Assertiveness Measure for Each Group

	N	M	SD
Gender			
Female	29	3.56	.86
Male	6	3.96	.45
SES			
Low (less than 200)	7	2.87	.54
Medium (201 – 499)	16	3.65	.68
High (500 – 999)	8	3.98	.88
Very high (1000+)	4	4.25	.74
Academic Major			
Education	17	3.33	.75
English Literature	5	3.43	.84
Business Administration	9	4.40	.47
Computer Sciences	4	3.46	.70
GPA			
Acceptable	4	2.78	.41
Good	8	4.08	.76
Very Good	21	3.62	.81
Excellent	2	3.78	.26

The results of the current study provide the first insight into how Jordanian students' self-assertiveness relates to other factors that are critical to future success. Although the retention rate was high, it is believed that the final sample provides a clear and accurate picture of self-assertiveness among Jordanian students. Ultimately, the results from the current study provide an innovative framework for academic institutions and future programs to develop interventions that can help students develop

healthy assertiveness based on the factors that have been identified in the current study. With this in mind, one can be sure that especially students struggling in low-SES situations may find the skills and assertiveness to pull through their cycle and achieve future success.

LIMITATION

- The study focuses on some variable that lead to achieving self-assertiveness at Arab Open University, so the results might not be applicable for other variables or in other institutions.
- It is difficult to disseminate results due to the limited sample size. However, it provides promising insights for academic institutions to help students develop healthy assertiveness

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