

THE CHANGING LIVES OUTREACH PROGRAM, INTERPERSONAL SKILLS, AND GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY

Ashley Larson, Elizabeth Moore,
Grand Canyon University

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of The Changing Lives Outreach Program in developing self-efficacy and communication skills in undergraduate college students. It also aims to investigate the effectiveness of The Changing Lives Outreach Program's effectiveness, focusing on its goals of developing soft skills in undergraduate psychology and behavioral health students. To assess these goals, researchers compared levels of these skills before and after these students participated in one month of The Changing Lives Outreach Program. The results showed a significant increase in both students' self-efficacy and interpersonal communication skills over the course of their participation in one semester of The Changing Lives Outreach Program. This study emphasizes the importance of developing these schools to boost career success in these student populations after graduation.

Keywords: *General Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Communication, Mastery Experiences, The Changing Lives Outreach Program*

INTRODUCTION

The Changing Lives Outreach Program aims to increase the skill sets of Grand Canyon University's (GCU) students by providing real-life experience within their field of study (The Changing Lives Outreach Program, 2023). The Changing Lives Outreach Program allows students to volunteer their time co-facilitating psychoeducational support groups in local schools. These students gain important clinical and professional skills while being supported by behavioral health faculty and professionals in the field. Volunteers meet weekly to reflect on their experiences in the classroom and learn new skills for handling new situations. These student volunteers must utilize social, emotional, and other skills to connect with children in the classroom and teach them coping skills. One of the primary goals of The Changing Lives Outreach Program is to help students develop self-efficacy and interpersonal communication, as

they have positive outcomes both academically and professionally. The primary purpose of this study is to examine whether students are experiencing changes during their tenure in the program.

General Self-Efficacy

General Self-Efficacy (GSE) impacts multiple major life domains and outcomes, as indicated by extensive psychological literature examining self-efficacy in various contexts. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perception of their ability "to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1977, p. 2). Albert Bandura was first responsible for introducing self-efficacy into psychological research, and it has had a significant impact on continuing research since. Bandura (1977) examined self-efficacy from the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests that an individual's characteristics, behavior, and the surrounding environment interact constantly. He developed a theory

of four possible sources of self-efficacy, including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional arousal. His theoretical framework regarding self-efficacy emphasizes that one's expectations for personal mastery and success determine whether one engages in a particular activity. Bandura's (1977) work has provided a structured direction for further research concerning self-efficacy.

The presence of self-efficacy is significantly associated with important outcomes in many domains. Two of these domains, academia and professional contexts, are relevant to the current study. College students with higher levels of self-efficacy perform better academically and may even be able to cope with stress during college more effectively (Khan, 2023). Svartdal et al. (2022) found that academic self-efficacy was negatively associated with procrastination as it played a role in translating knowledge and skills to action through studying.

Self-efficacy is also relevant to career variables. Engaging in career preparation behaviors is related to higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2022). Demir (2022) conducted a correlational study examining teachers' self-efficacy regarding several variables and suggests that increased self-efficacy correlates to increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, and job involvement. The positive correlations between self-efficacy and several key career variables foundationally support this study's claims regarding the importance of self-efficacy and engaging in behaviors that promote self-efficacy.

Interpersonal Communication

Communication is the exchanging of messages to others (Fahmi & Ali, 2022). In the workplace, communication can be used to lead teams, exchange ideas, and understand roles and tasks. Some even argue that communication is a critical skill in the workplace (Coffelt & Smith, 2020). Employers place a high level of value on communication skills. Individuals with interpersonal expertise to translate, relate, and execute through communication are more successful in the workplace (2020). Communication also positively affects decision-making, a central skill needed for many jobs and future career planning (Fahmi & Ali, 2022). Even in informal settings, communication skills are linked with higher perceived job sat-

isfaction, effectiveness, and productivity (Koch & Denner, 2022).

Typically, students improve their communication through experience (Perryman et al., 2021). However, with the growing demands for mental health and clinical professionals to care for individuals needing psychological and psychiatric care, it is becoming more important to build these skills in undergraduates so they are better equipped to perform well in their work after college (Fraino & Selix, 2021). Moreover, transitioning from college to the workplace can positively or negatively affect early and future career success (Presti et al., 2021). Advancing career competencies such as self-efficacy and communication is one way to lessen the shock of this transition for better career outcomes.

Impact of Mastery Experiences

College students' self-efficacy skills can be strengthened through intentional efforts focused on mastery experiences. Alfaiz et al. (2021) found that higher levels of mastery correlated with high levels of career readiness levels, leading to self-efficacy. This demonstrates some evidence that mastery experiences influence both achieving and underachieving individuals' self-efficacy. The results of this study support Bandura's (1977) suggestion that mastery experiences impact an individual's self-efficacy. He also described mastery experiences as the most influential factor in one's self-efficacy, especially one's perceptions of mastery performance rather than objective performance (Bandura, 1977). This research can be applied to support future literature related to increasing college students' self-efficacy through mastery experiences.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of The Changing Lives Outreach Program in developing general self-efficacy and interpersonal communication skills. Focusing on these two variables allows a better understanding of how to develop these skills in undergraduate students to prepare them for their careers after college. It also allows for an investigation of The Changing Lives Outreach Program's effectiveness, focusing on its goals of developing transferable skills in undergraduate psychology, behavioral health, and counseling undergraduates. The following research questions were examined:

1. Will undergraduate students experience a significant change in general efficacy after completing The Changing Lives Outreach Program?
2. Will students experience a significant change in interpersonal communication after completing The Changing Lives Outreach Program?

The study's overall hypothesis is that students will report an increase in both general self-efficacy and interpersonal communication after participating in The Changing Lives Outreach Program.

METHODS

Methodology

This correlational study was conducted using volunteers in The Changing Lives Outreach Program. Volunteers took a survey containing general self-efficacy and interpersonal communication scales. The research question used multiple one-tailed *t*-tests to measure the relationship between volunteerism communication and self-efficacy.

Participants

Participants ($n = 8$) were recruited through The Changing Lives Outreach Program at Grand Canyon University (GCU). The study population consisted of 48 volunteers who had participated in one semester of volunteer work through The Changing Lives Outreach Program between September 2023 and December 2023; however, due to attrition, only eight volunteers could complete both the pretest and the posttest. To qualify for the study, students had to be enrolled in The Changing Lives Outreach Program. Students completed the surveys during their training before completing their volunteer hours and after one semester of volunteering. All data collection was voluntary.

Procedure

During training for The Changing Lives Outreach Program, a QR code was presented to members, which linked them to the survey materials. Participants were given time during their training session to complete the surveys. Any individuals unable to access the survey link using the QR code had the opportunity to request a direct link to be sent to their GCU email. The first page of the survey involved signing the informed consent and agreeing to participate in the study. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, they

took one survey at two different times. The survey for the pretest took place before volunteers began participating in the program, and the posttest survey took place after volunteers finished participating in their first semester of The Changing Lives Outreach Program. Data was collected through a survey containing the New General Self-Efficacy (NGSE) scale (Chen et al., 2001) and the Interpersonal Communication scales (Rubin et al., 2010) during volunteers' process groups. Participants completed the survey on their laptops or cell phones. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

MATERIALS

New General Self-Efficacy Scale

Self-efficacy was measured using the New General Self-Efficacy (NGSE) scale (Chen et al., 2001). The NGSE measures self-efficacy by evaluating participants' confidence in their ability to adapt and be effective in various situations, their confidence in themselves during difficult tasks, and their confidence in achieving their goals. The NGSE scale is an eight-item measure rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). This scale has demonstrated internal reliability ($\alpha = .86$) and test-retest reliability ($r = .67$) (Chen et al., 2001).

Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale

Interpersonal communication competence is defined as an impression or judgment formed about one's ability to manage interpersonal relationships in community settings (Rubin et al., 2010). This is measured by assessing participants' competence in altercentrism, expressiveness, self-disclosure, empathy, social relaxation, assertiveness, supportiveness, immediacy, interaction management, and environmental control. Interpersonal communication competence was measured using the Interpersonal Communication Competence scale (Rubin et al., 2010). This is a 10-item, 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale has demonstrated internal reliability ($\alpha = .63$), as Rubin and Martin (1994) demonstrated.

DATA COLLECTION

Pretest data was collected on the first day of student volunteers' training near the beginning of the academic semester. Posttest data was collected at the end of the academic semester after partici-

pants finished volunteering in The Changing Lives Outreach Program. At both data collection points, research team members attended a Changing Lives Outreach meeting to provide participants with verbal instructions regarding participation and a QR code that allowed access to a Survey Monkey link hosting the informed consent and both surveys. The participants scanned the QR code and completed the informed consent form and surveys using their electronic devices. Physical copies of the informed consent forms were optionally provided for participants.

Participants were assigned an alphanumeric code maintained in a master list by the primary investigator. This code was used to match participant data from Time 1 and Time 2. Only the primary investigator has access to this list. Demographic information, including age and biological sex, was also collected. No other personally identifiable information was gathered.

Ethics

Approval from the Grand Canyon University Institutional Review Board was obtained before researchers began the study. The purpose of this study was explained to volunteers, emphasizing that their information would not be used to rate their effectiveness as a volunteer or affect their future participation in the program. Participants were informed that their information would be

kept confidential by only linking their identity to a research ID. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without punishment or penalty. In addition, they signed informed consent forms to confirm their willingness to participate in the study and ensure they were being treated ethically throughout the study.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Before descriptive statistics were generated for the sample, all data was checked for incomplete answer sets and response sets. In this sample, zero cases were removed. Descriptive statistics were generated for each variable, interpersonal communication competence, and self-efficacy, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum values, skewness, and kurtosis. Results are presented in Table 1.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Two paired sample *t*-tests were used to test the hypotheses: (1) Will undergraduate students experience a significant change in general efficacy after completing The Changing Lives Outreach Program, and (2) will undergraduate students experience a significant change in interpersonal communication competence after completing The Changing Lives Outreach Program? These tests were conducted incorporating an alpha level of .05.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for ICC and Self-efficacy

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Self-Efficacy Pretest	33.5000	1.60357	31.00	36.00	.000	-.311
Self-Efficacy Posttest	36.0000	3.46410	30.00	40.00	-.605	-.586
Interpersonal Communication Competence Pretest	112.8750	5.40998	106.00	122.8750	.423	-.442
Interpersonal Communication Competence Posttest	118.7500	9.13001	108.00	118.7500	.360	-1.371

N = 8

For hypothesis 1, the results indicated that general self-efficacy ($M = 36.0000$, $SD = 3.46410$) was significantly higher after one semester in The Changing Lives Outreach Program, $t(-2.175) = 7$, $p < .05$, one-tailed. For hypothesis 2, the results indicated that interpersonal communication competence ($M = 118.7500$, $SD = 9.13001$) was significantly higher after one semester in The Changing Lives Outreach Program, $t(-2.253) = 7$, $p < .05$, one-tailed.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact of participation in The Changing Lives Outreach Program on volunteers' reported perceptions of their self-efficacy and interpersonal communication skills. Significant changes consistent with the researchers' hypothesis were found for both self-efficacy and interpersonal communication. Consistent with past literature, engaging in mastery experiences that require self-efficacy and interpersonal communication in the context of The Changing Lives Outreach Program may positively impact self-efficacy and interpersonal communication.

This study does include limitations. This study is limited to claiming only that there is evidence for a positive correlation between the mastery experience of volunteering in The Changing Lives Outreach Program and reported self-efficacy and interpersonal communication. There is no evidence for a causal claim, and this is due to the correlational design of the study. The sample size ($n = 8$) is an additional study limitation.

There are several recommendations for future studies. The first includes adding a control group to the study design to eliminate the limitation of using a correlational design. Future researchers should also include a larger sample size to eliminate the second limitation of the original study design. Lastly, future researchers can extend the statistically significant results of the original study by measuring additional variables relevant to behavioral health students. These recommendations for future researchers will ensure a robust research design that seeks to extend significant literature.

References

- Alfaiz, A., Hidayat, H., Yandri, H., Sari, A. T. L., Sendayu, F. S., Suarja, S., & Arjoni, A. (2021). Identification of perceived self-efficacy to predict student's awareness in career readiness. *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal*, 4(1), 124–132. <https://doi.org/10.25217/igcj.v4i1.933>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/14678721.00064>
- Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3), 75–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214211068838>
- Chen, G., Gully, S. M., & Eden, D. (2001). Validation of a New General Self-Efficacy Scale. *Organizational Research Methods*, 4(1), 62–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109442810141004>
- Coffelt, T. A., & Smith, F. L. M. (2020). Exemplary and unacceptable workplace communication skills. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 83(4), 365–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490620946425>
- Demir, E., & Çetin, F. (2022). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding out-of-school learning activities. *Uluslararası Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 12(1), 147–166. <https://doi.org/10.31704/ijocis.2022.007>
- Fahmi, I., & Ali, H. (2022). Determination of career planning and decision making: Analysis of communication skills, motivation and experience (literature review human resource management). *Dinasti International Journal of Management Science*, 3(5), 823–835. <https://doi.org/10.31933/dijms.v3i5.1222>
- Fraino, J., & Selix, N. (2021). Facilitating well-rounded clinical experience for psychiatric nurse practitioner students. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 17(8), 1004–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nurpra.2021.05.015>
- Khan, M. (2023). Academic self-efficacy, coping, and academic performance in college. *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*, 5(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.7710/2168-0620.1006>
- Koch, T., & Denner, N. (2022). Informal communication in organizations: Work time wasted at the water-cooler or crucial exchange among co-workers? *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 27(3), 494–508. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-08-2021-0087>
- Lee, S., Jung, J., Baek, S., & Lee, S. (2022). The relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy, career preparation behavior and career decision difficulties among south Korean college students. *Sustainability*, 14(21), 14384. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114384>
- Perryman, T., Sandefur, C., & Morris, C. T. (2021). Developing interpersonal and counseling skills through mixed-reality simulation in communication sciences and disorders. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, 11(1), 33–44. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_PERSP-20-00118
- Presti, A. L., Capone, V., Aversano, A., & Akkermans, J. (2021). Career competencies and career success: On the roles of employability activities and academic satisfaction during the school to work transition. *Journal of Career Development*, 49(1), 107–125. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0894845321992536>
- Rubin, R., & Martin, M. (1994). Development of a measure of interpersonal competence. *Communication Research Reports*, 11(1), 33–44. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238318722_Development_of_a_measure_of_interpersonal_competence
- Rubin, R. B., Rubin, A. M., Graham, E. E., Perse, E. M., & Seibold, D. (2010). *Communication research measures II: A source-book*. Routledge.
- Svartdal, F., Sæle, R. G., Dahl, T. I., Nemtcan, E., & Gamst-Klaussen, T. (2022). Study habits and procrastination: The role of academic self-efficacy. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 66(7), 1141–1160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.1959393>
- The Changing Lives Outreach Program. (2023). *The Changing Lives Outreach Program* [Brochure].