

Exploring How Pedagogical Strategies Change Student Perceptions of Writing Apprehension

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Abstract

Writing skills are imperative for students in any career; however, many students have acknowledged avoiding courses that emphasize writing. These same students fail to learn proper mechanics during their post-secondary education. Writing intensive courses have served as a place where students have the opportunity to improve confidence, minimize avoidance-like attitudes, and improve writing techniques. Prior literature has found a relationship between self-efficacy and writing apprehension; additionally, research has suggested how pedagogical strategies can be used to improve self-efficacy. This study sought to explore how the implementation of pedagogical activities changes self-efficacy and the student's level of writing apprehension. A qualitative research design allowed for a thick description of the students' perceptions and reactions to pedagogical activities. The findings suggested pedagogical practices and the role of the instructor played important roles to improve student confidence in writing. Specifically, practicing writing, opportunities to edit and reflect, following a guide, and writing about what matters may be used in courses to improve confidence and writing skills. Additionally, the instructor should provide constructive criticism and serve as a coach during the learning process. In order to improve writing curriculum and student confidence toward writing, instructors should incorporate these recommendations into their curriculum.

Keywords: Writing apprehension, writing-intensive courses, post-secondary education, written communications, self efficacy

Introduction and Literature Review

Although written communication skills have been found to be imperative in any field a college graduate chooses, many college students avoid courses that focus on writing skills, and thus fail to learn proper mechanics during their post-secondary education (Belkin, 2015; Leef, 2013). Popular press authors have indicated employers are frustrated with their recent graduates' lack of writing skills (Anderson, 2014; Selingo, 2012), and some have suggested college-level instructors must make student learning of writing skills a higher priority (Leef, 2013). Similarly, research in the realm of agricultural education and communications has discussed the need for agricultural education and communications graduates to have well-developed writing skills (Ahrens, Meyers, Irlbeck, Burris, & Roach, 2016; Davis & Jayaratne, 2015; Irlbeck & Akers, 2009; Morgan, 2010). Graduates within the agricultural sciences must be able to clearly, correctly, and articulately express

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themselves as they enter graduate school and the professional workplace setting (Lindner, Murphy, Wingenbach, & Kelsey, 2004).

Historically, agricultural communications programs, instructors, and faculty have emphasized writing as a necessary skill (Ahrens et al., 2016). Additionally, with a growing need for sophisticated written communications skills, instructors across the agricultural sciences have incorporated writing intensive assignments (Trojan, Meyers, & Hudson, 2016). Although instructors stress the need for students to improve writing skills, students have shown writing apprehension, or avoidance-like attitudes toward writing, causing them to not take writing courses seriously (Ahrens et al., 2016; Daly & Miller, 1975). In fact, writing apprehension is one of the main factors that affect a student's motivation and confidence when writing. High writing apprehension also leads students to avoid the learning process (Daly & Miller, 1975; Daly, 1978).

Writing apprehension, a term coined by Daly and Miller (1975), describes the interaction between attitudes toward writing and an individual's motivations, confidence, and skills to complete a written task. Writing apprehension occurs when an individual tends to avoid situations they perceive to demand writing and some form of evaluation (Daly, 1978). Daly (1978) explained that although students need some apprehension to be careful and attentive writers, high and low levels of writing apprehension have been found to be a barrier in the development of a student's written communication skills (Faris, Golen, & Lynch, 1999). Apprehension is scored on a continuum from 26 to 130 with a mean of 75. Individuals with a score between 60 and 90 do not show a significantly unusual level of writing apprehension and tend to have the best motivation while writing. However, those with high writing apprehension tend to write with poor mechanics (grammar, spelling, and punctuation) and tone. Although those with low writing apprehension tend to not fear the writing process, these individuals may exhibit a lack of motivation to complete writing assignments and may be unmotivated to check their work for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors (Daly, 1978). Although students may fear a writing task, the importance of learning these imperative writing skills is crucial to students' career success (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015). In order to continue to improve writing curriculum in agricultural education and communications, faculty and instructors must understand the students' fears and attitudes toward writing (Leggette & Jarvis, 2015) and identify techniques to help students overcome these fears.

Writing intensive courses have served as places where students are able to improve their confidence and writing techniques (Leggette, McKim, & Dunsford, 2013; Trojan et al., 2016). These courses are dependent upon teachers who develop effective pedagogical strategies and coach or train students to develop writing skills (Leggette, 2015; Trojan et al., 2016). According to Hudd, Sardi, and Lopriore (2013), writing instructors perform two roles in the writing intensive course: 1) to act as coaches who help students to guide discovery, creativity, and critical thinking, and 2) to act as teachers who help students understand the proper writing components and standards of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. However, the teaching of writing is time consuming and many students fail at writing because the instructors do not provide enough time or effort to coach students through the learning process (Bean, 2011; Leggette, 2015). Instructors must be able to "help their students during the development stages of the writing process" (Leggette, 2015 p. 104) by providing a varied amount of "assignments, resources, reaction, and instruction" (p. 107).

Theoretical Framework

The concept of self-efficacy, a component of social cognitive theory, was used as a framework to explain how pedagogical strategies and the role of the instructor contributed to a change in writing apprehension throughout the duration of a one-semester writing intensive course. According to Bandura (2012), social cognitive theory explains how "human functioning is a

product of the interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behavior individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge upon them” (p. 11). This theory has been used to describe how an instructor should begin to understand the motivation of the student by exploring the student’s interpersonal experiences, behavior, and environment. Bandura (1995) noted a major component of social cognitive theory was self-efficacy, or internal disposition. This concept explained how “beliefs people hold about their abilities and about the outcome of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they will behave” (Pajares & Johnson, 1994, p. 313). The premise of social cognitive theory reflects how someone’s behavior, or motivation toward an action, was shaped by their beliefs in their capabilities (Bandura, 1986; Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Writing apprehension has also been used to judge a person’s competence as he thinks about or performs a writing task and to identify a person’s general self-esteem level when performing a writing task (Daly & Wilson, 1983; Fischer & Meyers, 2017). Further, Pajares and Johnson (1994) found writing apprehension had a strong relationship with self-efficacy. Because self-efficacy is used to describe an individual’s beliefs about their capabilities, the more a student fears or has apprehension toward writing, the more likely the student will not have confidence in his or her capabilities as a writer (Fischer & Meyers, 2017; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Trojan et al., 2016).

Prior research has suggested students’ writing apprehension level can be influenced by increasing self-efficacy (Fischer & Meyers, 2017; Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011; Matoti & Shumba, 2011; Pajares, 2003). Further, teaching strategies and the role of the instructor have been proven to affect students’ ability to be effective writers (Leggette, 2015). Bandura (1977) identified four factors of self-efficacy that influence confidence through teaching strategies and instructor characteristics: performance accomplishments, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and psychological states. Because writing self-efficacy beliefs and writing performances are related, the researchers sought to identify how an individual’s level of self-efficacy may be influenced by these four factors in a writing intensive course.

Performance accomplishments refer to the personal mastery of a specific task (Bandura, 1977). Similar to other skills, learning to write properly requires repeated practice for a long duration of time (Trojan et al., 2016; Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Leggette et al., 2013). Courses involving a writing intensive component allow students to complete multiple assignments and the opportunity to improve their writing skills (Fischer & Meyers, 2017; Trojan et al., 2016). Within these courses, students may immerse themselves in a writing-rich environment (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015). These courses provide opportunities for both small in-class writing assignments as well as larger out-of-class assignments to be evaluated (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015). In addition to providing opportunities to practice writing, these courses also provide places where teachers can push effective writing strategies to higher quality levels. Therefore, continuous practice and multiple assignments may allow individuals to increase their self-efficacy with the completion of these successful tasks and assignments.

While repeatedly gaining success with a task may help to increase self-efficacy, verbal persuasion is another factor that helps students gain confidence in their writing abilities. Verbal persuasion refers to feedback that proves to individuals they had the knowledge and abilities to achieve a task at hand (Bandura, 1977). When an instructor uses verbal persuasion, it gives the students the information they need to improve on a task such as written or verbal feedback on an assignment (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Instructors should provide students with positive feedback on their writing performance several times during the course as it is pivotal in helping improve students’ writing competency (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Leggette et al., 2013; Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Continuous feedback throughout the semester gives the students the opportunity to “learn from their mistakes and improve on the next assignment” (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015, p. 119). Although instructor feedback is pivotal to success, “feedback may be given by the students

themselves if the right conditions exist” (Leggette et al., 2013, p. 2). Further, instructors have used writing intensive assignments to help train students to become better writers ([Authors], 2017). Because writing is “more than rules,” and is a complex procedure, writing must be evaluated through continuous assessment and critical feedback (Leggette et al., 2013, p. 2). As Pajares (2003) stated, “positive persuasions may work to encourage and empower; negative persuasions can work to defeat and weaken self-beliefs” (p. 140). By providing positive feedback and support, students may feel the motivation to complete a task at hand (Crumbo, 1999) while also learning and improving their techniques (Leggette et al., 2013).

Vicarious experiences can be used to increase self-efficacy to show a successful model of completing a task. Bandura (1977) explained, “seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they too will improve if they intensify and persist in their efforts” (p. 197). Writing intensive courses have served as a place where students may observe others performing tasks (Pajares, 2003) such as peer review sessions and examples. As a student views others completing a task, the student will make social comparisons, which “can be powerful influences on developing self-perceptions of competence” (Pajares, 2003, p. 140). One method teachers have used to teach writing is to provide clearly articulated examples of written tasks (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015). However, examples can hinder students’ creative thinking. To overcome lack of creativity, teachers can provide guidance by assigning readings of well-written documents, providing rubrics that address project requirements, and encouraging outlines that help students structure their assignments (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015). Additionally, repetitious project building tasks where students develop a larger project throughout the semester by combining different writing assignments may allow students to develop “their own thoughts and ideas while reflecting on their own thinking” (Leggette & Homeyer, 2015, p. 119).

Efficacy beliefs have been connected to physiological states such as anxiety and stress (Pajares, 2003). In order to decrease anxiety, students must be given the chance to increase self-belief in themselves (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007). Writing is an emotional and psychological process just as much as a cognitive activity (McLeod, 1987). Self-confidence may be increased through Mascle’s (2013) self-reflection. In Mascle’s (2013) model, conversations and self-reflections were used to help students believe they have the power and capability to be a successful. In these self-reflections, students must be given adequate time to allow for both “mental and emotional engagement in the recent experience (Kolb, 1984; Proudman, 1992). During this time, students must be encouraged to make holistic pictures or generalizations about their learning that can then be applied to their lives (Meyers & Arnold, 2015) and future writing endeavors. Leggette et al. (2013) also found that self-reflection and evaluation is a “valuable learning tool that could enhance student’s performance, attitudes, and self-efficacy” (p. 3). Because self-reflection pertaining to assignments allow students to self-identify and recognize what needs to be improved, students who then assess their own work may be better able to identify and correct mistakes before submitting assignments (Leggette et al., 2013). Additionally, self-reflection forces students to understand what attributes are necessary for higher quality writing materials (Andrade, 2008; Leggette et al., 2013).

Purpose & Research Questions

Both academics and employers have suggested college students need to improve their writing skills. As agricultural educators, faculty and instructors must find ways to develop a sufficient scientific and professional workforce that addresses the challenges of the 21st century (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016) and sophisticated writing skills in students are necessary to do so. Prior research has suggested writing apprehension is a major factor contributing to student

avoidance to learn writing skills (Daly & Wilson, 1983). However, writing apprehension may be diminished and skills may be improved by increasing the students' self-efficacy (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Further, in one writing intensive course, [Authors] (2017) found many students lessened their writing apprehension. Based upon the need to improve self-efficacy to change writing apprehension, the purpose of this study was to explore how the factors of self-efficacy influence agricultural student perceptions of writing apprehension in a writing intensive course at Texas Tech University. The following research questions were used to achieve the purpose:

RQ1: What pedagogical strategies helped students gain confidence and motivation toward writing?

RQ2: What was the role of the instructor in helping to change students' perceptions and attitude toward writing?

Methods

Qualitative methodology has often been used to understand complex phenomenon such as attitudes and behaviors toward completing tasks, because this approach allows researchers to derive thick descriptions of a scenario or situation (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). In this study, the researchers examined student self-reflections to understand the participants' experiences in a writing intensive course and to understand how specific course activities impacted students' perceptions of writing apprehension. A case study of students enrolled in a required writing course at Texas Tech University for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources allowed the researchers to investigate a "phenomenon within its real-life context" (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). The population for this study was all previous and future students enrolled in ACOM 2302: Scientific Communications in Agriculture and Natural Resources at Texas Tech University. The sample was comprised of 92 students enrolled in the Spring 2015 semester as these students are assumed to be representative of all students who take this course. This population was selected because students enrolled in previous semesters had expressed fear and avoidance-like attitudes to completing written assignments (Fischer & Meyers, 2017), and this sample was chosen as the researcher had access to students in several majors with varying levels of writing apprehension. Student majors were animal science, crop and soil science, horticulture or turf grass science, agricultural education, and agricultural and applied economics. The majority of students were freshmen or sophomores.

To determine writing apprehension scores, students were asked to take Daly and Miller's (1975) writing apprehension test at the beginning (week 1) and end of the semester (week 15) to determine their writing apprehension scores. Student WA scores were disseminated to students after the completion of both the pre-test and post-test. [Authors] (2017) found a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores and students demonstrated an improvement in writing apprehension throughout the semester.

At three points during the semester, students completed self-reflections about their experiences in the course. In each of the reflections, students commented on instructional techniques, writing projects, and changes in writing apprehension. Merriam (1998) discussed documents as the "umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (p. 112). The documents were gathered and analyzed in order to understand how different factors of self-efficacy affected student perceptions of writing. Table 2 provides the prompts students answered in their reflections.

Table 2

Writing Reflection Prompts

Writing Reflection	Date of Reflection	Number of Reflections	Prompt
Reflection 1	Week 5	81	Describe how your confidence toward writing has changed throughout the semester, so far.
Reflection 2	Week 10	76	Describe how your motivation toward writing has changed throughout the semester. What factors have helped to change your writing apprehension?
Reflection 3	Week 16	78	Describe how course assignments, in-class activities, feedback on grading, self-reflection assignments, or other aspects of the course have changed your confidence and/or motivation toward writing.

Note: Number of reflections differs due to student attendance during that particular class day.

Because self-reflections were assigned as course assignments, the students received a grade if they responded and were required to provide their name. After a grade was assigned, pseudonyms were used prior to data analysis to protect the student's identity and minimize researcher bias because the main researcher was the instructor of the course. These pseudonyms are used in the manuscript to verify that the quotations are from many students.

To demonstrate trustworthiness of the data collection, the researchers used data triangulation via the collection of three self-reflections to improve the credibility of the study (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). Additionally, this research was part of a larger study that also included interviews, observations, questionnaires, and other self-reflections, which provided validity checks across the data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). The self-reflections were analyzed independently and are the only data sources reported in the manuscript. Peer debriefing was used to develop quality reflection questions (Erlandson et al., 1993). Although students were not given a page limit or minimum length, they were asked to write in complete sentences and paragraphs to develop thick descriptions to demonstrate transferability, or the degree in which the findings can be translated to another setting, situation, or participants (Erlandson et al., 1993).

The student reflections were analyzed using thematic analysis via open and axial coding for specific themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The lead researcher, a doctoral student in agricultural communications who was also the course instructor, analyzed the data after final grades were assigned. The immersion of a writing instructor into the student's assignments is necessary for the development of the student's writing skill. Although this immersion leads to bias, the instructor bias was minimized through the use of pseudonyms, transcription to text, and multiple investigators confirming themes. Throughout the study, the researcher documented a "running account of the process of inquiry" in an audit trail (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 34). The audit trail detailed theme formation, document organization, and researcher notes. An additional researcher approved the questions for self-reflection and confirmed the themes that emerged from the data analysis process (Erlandson et al., 1993). Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board approved the procedures for this study before data collection.

Findings

RQ1: What pedagogical practices helped students gain confidence and motivation toward writing?

Thematic analysis of student self-reflections revealed the following pedagogical strategies changed students' writing apprehension throughout the semester: *good practice makes perfect*, *opportunities to edit*, *opportunities to reflect*, *following a guide*, and *write about what matters*.

Good practice makes perfect. The students discussed how multiple writing tasks and assignments during the semester helped them become more comfortable or confident with the writing techniques. Michaela explained how writing more often makes her more at ease with the process. She said, "I think I am more comfortable writing because we have been writing so often for this class" (Michaela, Reflection 1). Vivian discussed how she has been able to improve her writing skills through practice. She said, "I definitely feel a lot more confident. I think this class has given me a lot of opportunity to practice" (Vivian, Reflection 2). Seth discussed, "With multiple writing assignments, I have had more opportunities to improve my writing" (Seth, Reflection 2). Casey revealed that completing several writing assignments helped him improve his writing skills:

Having multiple writing assignments and continuously having feedback returned back with it. I can better myself. The first one I was really nervous about when we turned and talked about our writing apprehension, but as things go on it continuously gets better. I think I can do this I can do better. I can ace this. I know how to do it. It is almost a muscle memory similarly to a sport. Like in basketball you shoot muscle memory for free throws and it's I feel it is just as long as you can keep doing it over and over again it will work out. (Casey, Reflection 2)

In the third reflection, it became more apparent that students felt multiple writing assignments helped them perfect their writing. Cory discussed how it helped him practice his writing when he said, "[Feedback] impacted it greatly through practice makes perfect. Though I still have more improvement, repetition and getting feedback had a huge effect on my skills and techniques" (Cory, Reflection 3). Vivian also stated, "I think my attitude toward writing changed throughout the course. Practice does make me feel more confident about writing" (Vivian, Reflection 3).

Students also discussed how in-class activities helped to engage their interest and give them experience before completing larger assignments. Cory explained, "I'm a big fan of class activities because it actually helps engage my interest even further" (Cory, Reflection 1). Jared discussed how the in-class activities help to give him more experience when he said, "The activities are helpful because it gives me more experiences to write" (Jared, Reflection 1).

Although the majority of the students stated how continuous practice helped them to improve their writing, some students explained how it made them more fearful of writing. "I am a little more afraid to write because I am noticing a lot more errors than previously found. I'm taking two writing intensive courses, so all the assignments are piling up on me" (Omar, Reflection 2).

Opportunities to Edit. The theme of peer editing emerged in the final reflection. The students expressed how editing peer assignments helped them to understand the mistakes of others, which helped them to recognize their own mistakes. David explained, "The peer reviews gave me an opportunity to edit others work which allowed me to eventually begin correcting my mistakes" (David, Reflection 3). Houston explained how peer edits helped him to realize his mistakes before

turning in his papers when he said, “My favorite part of this course was peer editing. This helped me know what I need to work on to get a better grade next time” (Houston, Reflection 3). However, as stated by Austin, the peer review experience depends upon the quality of the peer reviewer, “Sometimes peers do not give enough feedback on your work” (Austin, Reflection 2).

Opportunities to Reflect. At various points during the semester, students were asked to spend one minute reflecting upon their grade and feedback on some of their returned assignments. Terri explained how she thought the one-minute papers were the perfect time for her to reflect on what she was learning. “The reflections [one-minute papers] allow me to reflect on what I am learning and to ensure I understand it” (Terri, Reflection 2). Shelby discussed how it made her think about her assignments in detail when she said, “I think the reflections help a lot because it lets me sit and think about the grade I got and why” (Selby, Reflection 1). One student, Mariela, stated it prompted more writing, “I feel that I may enjoy writing a lot more than I did before. I actually started a journal just to write” (Mariela, Reflection 1). In the third reflection, Michaela showed more confidence, “I think by doing reflections on my writing, I have got more comfortable having my writing reviewed and edited” (Michaela, Reflection 3). One student explained how she did not find value in reflecting, “I don’t think I put to much thought into the reflections. So, I don’t think that they raised or lowered my score by any means. I just wrote something down” (Amy, Reflection 2).

Following a Guide. Writing examples helped them to understand what is expected of them when completing assignments. Cory explained how examples help him improve his writing. “It [examples] has helped me a bunch because I have been able to use them to better my writing” (Cory, Reflection 2). Savannah reflected, “The examples are the best assistance in creating a good paper” (Savannah, Reflection 2). London discussed how examples have helped him to check if his assignments were correct. “I believe my writing apprehension has gone down a little due to the detailed rubrics and examples, which made it easier to check if I am formatting and writing the correct way” (London, Reflection 1). Carly explained how writing was made easier: “Writing is still not my favorite thing in the world. It has been made easier because we have guidelines and examples. If I could always have those writing would not be that bad” (Carly, Reflection 1).

In the third reflection, the idea of organization techniques, or laying out assignments in an organizational manner, was expressed as a tool that helped students understand how to complete an assignment in separate steps. For example, students were provided an outline of the information that should be included in a cover letter. Brandyn explained, “The organizational techniques helped me organize my papers to keep my writing and formatting in order” (Brandyn, Reflection 3). Dylan reflected about how it helped him write in a more methodical fashion when he said, “Instead of looking at it as a whole paper, I break it down into sections” (Dylan, Reflection 3). Vivian expressed how organizing the material into steps helps to make a project less stressful when she said, “The step-by-step building the big project. I really like having my project into broken into smaller pieces to work on and then they all come together at the end. It is really helpful and less stressful” (Vivian, Reflection 3). Further, Alexis said, “Smaller assignments leading to bigger ones helped to curb my anxiety toward a project” (Alexis, Reflection 3).

Write About What Matters. Students explained how their interest in the subject matter or the topic at hand increased their motivation and decreased their fear toward completing the writing task. “My motivation toward writing has increased due to the research paper because it is something I am passionate about. Allow us to write more about what we are passionate about” (Tate, Reflection 2). Richard explained that picking their topics was interesting. “I like writing about things I am interested in that is more motivation than an English class writing about Romeo and Juliet” (Richard, Reflection 2). In Richard’s second reflection he said, “I enjoy writing for a

purpose not just, writing to write” (Richard, Reflection 1). Similarly, Kelsey explained, “Allowing me to write about my own topic will be a huge help when it comes down to writing my paper” (Kelsey, Reflection 2).

Students expressed how business-writing assignments helped to prepare them for their careers. Nick explained how the assignments were useful to preparing him for the workplace:

Assignments that were gone over in the class helped me to realize my writing lows and correct them for future endeavors. I will use what I learned in course assignments to better my writing in the workplace. Clearly, professionalism is an essential there [in the workplace] and this class helped me in that aspect. (Nick, Reflection 3).

Kelsey stated how writing projects that are similar to what she will use in her career helped her to become less apprehensive. She said, “my writing apprehension has changed somewhat because it has become easier for me to write professionally for future references and employers” (Kelsey, Reflection 1).

RQ2: What was the role of the instructor in helping to change student’s attitude toward writing?

Analysis of the reflections revealed that the instructor played a role in helping the students diminish their writing apprehension throughout the semester. The following instructor practices helped to change self-efficacy and writing apprehension: *nothing but the truth and instructor as a coach*.

Nothing but the Truth. Throughout the semester, the majority of students reflected about how feedback made an impact on their writing apprehension. Students discussed how constructive criticism of positive and negative aspects of their writing helped them to improve. Further, students indicated that feedback helped to increase their confidence in writing. Macee said, “I was fairly confident about my writing before and have gained more confidence after seeing feedback. I am pleased with the feedback I have had on my work” (Macee, Reflection 2). Savannah suggested feedback improved her assignments, “Feedback has helped me because it helps me know what I need to change and gives me confidence in my writing” (Savannah, Reflection 1). Taylor simply explained, “I feel as though the feedback in this class has been the biggest factor in improving my writing apprehension” (Taylor, Reflection 1). Carly stated, “Because I was super self conscious of my writing, I always put it off because I didn’t want others to read it or be judged by it. But now, I do the writing assignments right away because I like the feedback” (Carly, Reflection 3).

Students discussed how constructive feedback was necessary to understand the material. Cassidy said constructive criticism helps to make her aware of mistakes when she said, “Continue giving feedback, both positive and negative, on the assignments. The feedback helps enforce good habits and gives a nudge in the right direction on the bad ones” (Cassidy, Reflection 2). Brady discussed, “Having all this feedback has helped me to understand the material better by showing what to do/what not to do, and how to fix anything” (Brady, Reflection 2). Brandon discussed how it helps him to learn through his mistakes when he said, “Keep offering praise for positive aspects of assignments and harsh criticism when necessary. Everyone learns through mistakes, but we must be aware of these mistakes” (Brandon, Reflection 2). In the third reflection, Kelsey explained, “The biggest impact on my writing apprehension in this class was feedback when my work was graded. It made it easy for me to see exactly what I needed to work on” (Kelsey, Reflection 3). Further, Trevor explained how feedback must be clear for the student to understand, “Sometimes I would

like to have more explanation of what I did wrong on the paper and what I have done well. I would like it to be more critical.” Amy also explained how at first feedback hurt her feelings,

At first, it [feedback] made kind of upset in a way because I put a lot of effort into this type of project because it is something that I will use – resume and cover letter – Especially since I took it to the writing center and still had a lot of marks on my paper. (Amy, Reflection 2)

Instructor as Coach. Another dominant theme was the idea of the instructor motivating the students. Students explained how instructor motivation impacts motivation and confidence toward writing. Lynn explained how talking through assignments improved her understanding. “The instructor and TAs [teaching assistants] have helped me to understand the material very well. This motivates me to do better work.” (Lynn, Reflection 2). Nick discussed how it helped him when the instructor went over the assignments. “Y’all do a great job of talking through the assignments which is really helpful when completing them” (Nick, Reflection 2).

Another thing the instructor did was create a classroom environment that improved motivation. “[My] favorite part would be the classroom environment. I liked how we are given the opportunity to freely ask questions and speak out our thoughts” (Cynthia, Reflection 3). Vivian also explained how an approachable instructor made it easier to ask questions and to discuss her issues, “It is easy to ask questions and discuss my issues” (Vivian, Reflection 3). Macee said, “The lectures and PowerPoint’s were very helpful to see how things should be done and determine what is correct and what is incorrect in writing” (Macee, Reflection 3).

Terri reflected on how the instructor in another course caused her to have writing apprehension:

I have had several different professors. This one [professor] is big into research and the way he comes off is a little scary. He makes me scared to death to write, and I don’t know what he is looking for. Others are like, “Have fun with it. We want you to enjoy this, and we want you to be able to use this knowledge to help you go further in your career and studies.” (Terri, Reflection 3).

Similarly, Casey explained how instructors play a role in his writing apprehension:

Because of my first English course, where I probably had the hardest professor that I have had throughout my career. I ended up with a C, and I barely got that C. It was just frustrating! What's wrong with it? That’s why my writing apprehension is so high is because of that class and that teacher. (Casey, Reflection 2)

Conclusions and Discussion

Post-secondary scholars and employers alike have discussed the need for college graduates to be proficient in their writing skills when they enter the workforce (Belkin, 2015; Leef, 2013). Although instructors in college classrooms may stress the importance of writing in future careers, students may still show a lack of motivation or confidence to write (Leef, 2013). Writing apprehension, or the level of fear and the lack of confidence toward writing, has been characterized as a major factor influencing student motivation to master their writing skills (Daly & Miller, 1975). Teaching strategies and the role of the instructor have also been found to impact the effectiveness of students to learn writing skills in the classroom (Leggette, 2015). The researchers explored how specific components of self-efficacy (performance accomplishments, verbal persuasion, vicarious

experience, and psychological states) helped to minimize writing apprehension and increase confidence in writing skills through the use of pedagogical strategies and the instructor interventions in a large-enrollment writing course for agricultural science majors.

During and at the end of the course, the students reflected upon how classroom strategies influenced their writing apprehension. The emergent themes of *good practice makes perfect*, *opportunities to edit*, *opportunities to reflect*, *following a guide*, and *write about what matters* provided implications regarding what strategies make students better writers. These themes are similar to what other researchers have identified as strategies that can be used in the classroom to impact writing apprehension (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Martinez et al., 2011; Matoti & Shumba, 2011; Pajares, 2007). The instructor was also identified to play a key role in providing guidance to students when enrolled in a writing intensive course through the emergent themes of *nothing but the truth* and *instructor as a coach*.

When compared to the four factors of self-efficacy, each of the themes could be placed in a specific area of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments (*good practice makes perfect*), verbal persuasion (*nothing but the truth*, *opportunities to edit*), psychological states (*opportunities to reflect*, *writing about what matters*, *instructor as a coach*), and vicarious experience (*following a guide*). The ability to complete multiple assignments during the semester helped improve student's confidence toward writing. Similar to prior literature, continuous practice allows students to use their writing skills, learn from their mistakes, and perform with a higher quality (Leggette, 2015). When the instructor provides verbal persuasion such as constructive criticism and allows students the opportunity to edit their work and the work of others, students are given the information they need to improve upon tasks and skills (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). The findings of this study suggested when detailed feedback is given multiple times throughout the semester, the students know exactly what needs to be fixed, how to fix it, and how to use the information in later assignments (Leggette et al., 2013; Pajares & Johnson, 1994). The process of modeling was also recognized in the student comments regarding the instructor providing detailed outlines and rubrics as well as reading assignments to share examples of the type of assignments to be completed. Although Leggette and Homeyer (2015) indicated too many examples may inhibit creativity in writing as students may feel constrained to the work of others, the examples and outlines provided guides of prior completed work, while outlines and rubrics provided questions to promote independent thoughts and ideas when writing. Additionally, the students suggested the self-reflection and peer review activities enabled evaluation of their own work as well as the work of others. By understanding how their work and the work of others could be improved, the students invested mental and emotional engagement in a recent experience, and the students were encouraged to generalize about their own learning (Leggette et al., 2013; Meyers & Arnold, 2016). Additionally, the emergent theme of the *instructor as a coach* provided students with encouragement to believe they have the capability to be successful writers. Students also addressed that if the instructor inhibited their confidence, they would not perform well in a course nor would they be confident in their writing.

Prior research has provided evidence that students' writing apprehension level can be changed by increasing self-efficacy. Similar to the results of other studies (Leggette, 2015), the writing intensive course may facilitate improvement in writing skills and attitude toward writing. Findings from this study revealed unique and practical information for educators when planning courses focused on improving students' writing. When classroom strategies are designed to increase a student's confidence in a task, the student is able to become aware of how his or her writing techniques have changed during a semester. Although students expressed they were fearful of feedback on writing assignments at the beginning of the course, they learned constructive

criticism helped them notice and correct their mistakes. Additionally, when the students were able to write on topics that interested them, they provided more detail and attention to their assignments.

Students from a variety of disciplines need to be trained to write correctly because it is imperative for graduate education and as a professional in the workplace (Lindner et al., 2004). Teachers and instructors should use the results of this study to recognize writing apprehension does exist in undergraduate students. To change students' writing apprehension, teachers should focus on developing curriculum structured to increase confidence and motivation toward writing. The results of this study provide recommendations to improve student confidence such as continuous feedback, multiple take home and in class assignments, self-reflection activities, and one-minute papers. Because prior research suggested reflection activities encourage critical and active thinking (Leggette et al., 2013; Meyers & Arnold, 2015), instructors should implement activities that allow students to reflect upon their writing skills. As an example, writing intensive assignments could be modeled in a scaffolding-type approach. This would involve students completing several minimal point value assignments, which the instructor then evaluates and critiques before students incorporate the feedback into a larger final project. Finally, at the end of the larger final project or assignment, the student could reflect upon the experience.

Future research in the realm of writing apprehension should focus on understanding the role of writing apprehension in other courses. Research should seek to identify how writing apprehension is affected when the identified pedagogical strategies are not implemented. The findings from this study were limited to one writing intensive course; therefore, future research should explore the role of writing apprehension at a national or state level on student perceptions of writing. This study could also identify how the role of the instructor changes a student's perceptions of writing and ability to complete writing tasks to a high degree of quality. Quasi-experimental research to test various pedagogical strategies would provide empirical evidence regarding what techniques are most impactful in helping students become more confident writers. As instructors of writing intensive classes implement the insights of these research efforts, they will help students become better writers, which will benefit them in both academic and professional settings.

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