

## **Efficacy of Personality Development Program on Self-Efficacy of College Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Universities and Colleges are nowadays implementing soft skills training program apart from imparting core subject knowledge, to improve the Employability skills of their students. Classroom misfortunes, conflicts with peers, and failures in love can make college a breeding ground for self-esteem issues, which ultimately affects their academic performance and well-being. Self-efficacy has emerged as a highly effective predictor of students' motivation and learning (Zimmerman, 2008). Personality development is a potential intervention tool which helps an individual to gain confidence and improved self-efficacy. Personality Development is just not outer physical looks, but it also includes grooming one's inner self to bring about a positive change in one's life. The present study examined the impact of personality development training program on self-efficacy of 150 male (N=58) and female (N=86) post graduate college students. The study also evaluated the training program, by administering quantitative feedback about the program after the completion of the program. The study used one group Pre-test, Post-test research method. The age group of the sample ranged from 19-23 years and they were all single. They belonged to both Science and Arts stream. The sample was assessed on their self-efficacy by using General Self-Efficacy scale by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995). Data were collected at 2 time periods i.e. before the training and a week after completion of training. The personality development program with relevant modules was conducted by trained psychologist over a period of continuous 15 weeks (one 2 hour session/week). 150 students participated in 5 batches for the personality development program. 6 students did not fill the questionnaire properly, hence deleted from the research. The 144 data were statistically analyzed using Percentage analysis, t-test, and qualitative analysis. The results showed that the personality development program improved the self-efficacy among college students. Moreover, the intervention did not have any impact on gender and stream of education of college students. However, the results may only be indicative, as there is no control group in the present study. Overall, the Personality development program was found to be effective in improving self-efficacy of students and was well received by them.

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The real purpose of the education is to equip students with the potential to meet both personal and professional challenges in life. One of the outcomes of education is to satisfy the employment needs of employers and graduates. Graduates seek to obtain rewarding employment opportunities and employers pursue suitable new work force from the pool of graduates to fill job openings. Employers recruit new employees based on competencies both in technical and nontechnical or soft skills. Technical skills, which are also referred to as hard skills, are defined by Litecky, Arnett, & Prabhakar (2004) as “those skills acquired through training and education or learned on the job and are specific to each work setting”. The term soft skills, used interchangeably with nontechnical skills, is defined as the “interpersonal, human, people or behavioural skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace” (De Villiers, 2010).

However, a long-standing complaint of employers as well as the managers, is that the newcomers i.e. students fresh out of college/universities lack soft skills and are unemployable (Dharmarajan, Pachigalla, & Lanka, 2012; Williams, 2015). The disparity in the goals of the education system and the expectations of employers contribute to the gaps that are evident in the students or graduates’ poor performances at interviews and work experience opportunities (Williams, 2015). Meeting the soft skills needs of the workforce must be of concern to educators and employers. To fill this gap, many Universities and Colleges are nowadays providing soft skills programs with the objective of equipping graduates with the necessary soft skills. One of the soft skills courses offered by Psychology department, University of Madras is ‘Personality Development’ course.

Even though colleges may believe that they are using effective approaches to develop and reinforce soft skills, if they are not consistently assessed and part of a feedback loop to the student and institution, the skills gap and the perception gap are likely to go unaddressed. Soft skills (Personality development) program has become an increasingly common method to skill development. However, very few empirical studies have tested its capacity to generate outcomes. To address this lacuna, an attempt was made to evaluate the efficacy of the ‘Personality Development’ program, in improving the general self-efficacy of students. Generalized self-efficacy was chosen as the outcome variable as it was found relevant to the study undertaken. Classroom misfortunes, conflicts with peers, and failures in love can make college a breeding ground for self-esteem issues, which ultimately affects their academic performance and well-being. Self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be sensitive to subtle changes in students’ performance context, to interact with self-regulated learning processes, and to mediate students’ academic achievement. Social–cognitive theory and its central variable, self-efficacy, have been the focus of a voluminous amount of research in psychology. Self-efficacy, per Bandura (1999), is a mechanism of personal agency consisting of individual’s beliefs regarding performance

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capabilities in a domain. In this sense, self-efficacy can be defined as being a prospective competence-based variable that predicts action (Bandura, 1999). More specifically, perceived self-efficacy represents an optimistic sense of personal competence accounting for motivation and performance in multiple life domains (Scholz, Gutiérrez-Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). In fact, previous studies have consistently found a significant and positive correlation between perceived self-efficacy and successful performance (Beefink, Van Eerde, Rutte, & Bertrand, 2012; Hughes, Galbraith, & White, 2011).

Pinquart, Juang, and Silbereisen (2003) showed that self-efficacy beliefs were associated with low unemployment and high job satisfaction in early adulthood. Personality development is a potential intervention tool which helps an individual to gain confidence and improved self-efficacy (Nebhinani et al., 2015).

*In this regard, the present study attempted to,*

1. To find out the effect of Personality development program on self-efficacy of postgraduates in Arts and Science education stream.
2. To evaluate the personality development program.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants and Procedure***

The study was conducted among 150 male and female postgraduates belonging to Arts and Science stream who underwent Personality Development program, offered by Psychology Department in University of Madras, Chennai City. The study was approved by the concerned authorities. 'One group Pre-test, Post-test' research method was adopted for the present study. The study also evaluated the training program, by administering quantitative and qualitative feedback about the program after the completion of the program. A total of 150 students (Male – 58 and Female – 86; Arts – 61 and Science - 83) and who belonged to 5 different batches participated in the research after getting their informed consent. Out of which, 144 data were only appropriate for analysis due to incomplete information.

Data were collected at 2 time periods i.e. before the training and a week after completion of training.

### ***Tools***

The tools used for the study was General Self-Efficacy by Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M (1995) to measure self-efficacy of students. Other relevant data like age, gender, and course taken, were also collected. Intervention was evaluated through 'partially open ended anonymous structured feedback'. Close-ended questions regarding program evaluation and 6 open-ended questions pertaining to how the program influenced the lives of participants were collected. The test-retest reliability value for the Self-efficacy scale was .76 and Cronbach-alpha was 0.85.

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### *Intervention*

The personality development program with relevant modules designed by the Department of Psychology was conducted over a period of continuous 15 weeks (one 2-hour session/week). Training was given by researcher who is a psychologist and a well-trained professional with ample experience in the field of psycho-social training. The protocol followed was,

1. Pre-assessment
2. Implementation of the intervention (Personality development program)
3. Post-assessment

The major components of the program were,

1. About personality development
2. Self-awareness (SWOT & Johari Window)
3. Self-esteem
4. Positive Attitude
5. Motivation & Goal-setting
6. Social skills & Presentation skills
7. Communication & Interpersonal skills
8. Management of emotions
9. Stress Management

The intervention used experiential learning and was proactive and eclectic. Practice of skills between sessions was encouraged. Psycho education, role play, team activity & games, modeling, self-monitoring of responses, assignments, case studies, story-telling, and image-guided relaxation techniques were used as the modes of training.

### *Data Analysis*

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-Version 17) was used to conduct data analysis. Relevant checks like scale of measurement, normality of distribution, and test of homogeneity of variance were made. The homogeneity of demographic variables (Gender and Education Stream) during pre-test was also tested. Descriptive statistics were applied to the data and the data were analyzed using Percentage analysis, t-test, and qualitative analysis. The responses of the participants were made as a transcript sorted by question and summarized by the researcher. Comments by the participants were evaluated using best practices to divide the comments into positive, neutral, or negative categories.

## **RESULTS**

The scores of the sample in the present study were normally distributed. The homogeneity of demographic variables namely gender and stream of education, was established during pre-test. The age of the participants ranged from 20-25 and all were single (not married).

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Table 1 shows the effect of personality development program on self-efficacy of college students. The Table shows that the post-test self-efficacy scores were significantly higher compared to the pre-test self-efficacy scores.

**Table 1 Effect of Personality Development Program on Self-efficacy of College Students (N=144)**

SN	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean Difference	Standard Error	df	t
1	29.76 ± 4.14	32.79 ± 3.80	3.01	0.35	1.43	8.37 **

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the effect of personality development program on gender and educational stream of college students. The Table shows that intervention did not have any impact on gender and stream of education of college students.

**Table 2 Effect of Personality Development Program on Gender and Stream of Education of College Students (N=144)**

SN	Variable	n	Post-test	Mean Difference	Standard Error	df	t
<b>Gender</b>							
1	Male	58	33.43 ± 3.85	1.07	0.64	57	1.66 NS
2	Female	86	32.36 ± 3.73			85	
<b>Stream of Education</b>							
1	Science	83	32.54 ± 3.60	1.07	0.64	82	0.91 NS
2	Arts	61	33.13 ± 4.06			60	

NS – Not Significant

Table 3 shows the evaluation of the intervention.

**Table 3 Evaluation of Personality Development Program (N=144)**

SN	Items	M ± SD	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)
1.	I will be able to apply the knowledge learned	4.74 ± 0.45	74	26
2.	The training objectives for each topic were identified and followed	4.89 ± 0.32	89	11
3.	The content was organized and easy to follow	4.89 ± 0.32	89	11
4.	The materials distributed were pertinent and useful	4.96 ± 0.19	96	4
5.	The trainer was knowledgeable	4.83 ± 0.33	97	3
6.	The quality of instruction was good	4.93 ± 0.27	93	7
7.	Class participation and interaction were encouraged	4.85 ± 0.36	85	15
8.	Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion	4.85 ± 0.36	87	13

### DISCUSSION

Many surveys have proven that employers find a high percentage of college graduates unprepared for the workplace (Dharmarajan et al., (2012), Williams (2015). They often complain that fresh graduates and postgraduates lack the soft skills needed for success in the workplace. In response, several employability programs have begun to incorporate soft skills training, but to date there has been little evidence as to the effectiveness of such programs. In the present study, Personality development program was found to be effective in improving the self-efficacy of college students. This is in line with the previous study where Direito, Pereira & Duarte (2012) found that self-efficacy is promoted by soft skills development, and it is fundamental to competent performance.

On analyzing the responses to a questionnaire on evaluating the personality development program, it was found that clear majority of the participants strongly agreed to all aspects pertaining to the quality of the training programs such as content, training objective, materials used, knowledge of trainer, quality of instruction, class participation, time given for question and discussion and about applying the knowledge learned from the sessions. This indicated that participants had favorable attitude towards various aspects of the training program. The qualitative feedback collected a week after the training program was found to be overwhelmingly positive. Comments by the participants were evaluated using best practices to divide the comments into positive, neutral, or negative categories. Of the 140 feedback forms returned, all were judged to be very positive in their comments and very meaningful, pertaining to its use in their daily lives. Many participants specifically detailed significant changes in their academic and personal lives which they attributed to the training.

Nebhinani et al., (2015) also conducted a similar study among medical and nursing students and reported that majority of the medical as well as nursing students found personality development program relevant, comprehensive and useful. Majority had perceived some improvement in their confidence, interpersonal relationships, time schedule, emotional regulation, and stress management. Greater proportion of students appreciated interactive activities and trainer's approach. Their contents of the training program are also similar to the present program.

The study also found that gender and educational stream did not have any influence on the effectiveness of the training program. This indicates that irrespective of whichever stream (Arts/Science) students belong to, the effectiveness of the program was same. Similarly, whichever gender they belonged to, the effectiveness of the program was still the same. This implies that the program can be used across gender and educational streams. However, the results may only be indicative, as there is no control group in the present study. Overall, the Personality development program was found to be effective in improving self-efficacy of students and was well received by them.

## CONCLUSION

The present study substantiated the effectiveness of personality development program on self-efficacy of college students. A strength of the current study is that it used qualitative approach along with standardized outcome measure to efficacy of personality development program. The present study used self-report survey data which has inherent limitations. However, data were collected by the investigator after direct interaction with the sample. In view of lack of available literature on personality development, we could not compare the present findings. Therefore, generalizability of our findings needs caution and replication in wider population samples. Conversely, future investigations can include other outcome measures like interpersonal skills, work ethics, emotional intelligence, communication skills etc. The present study has implications like using the training program across engineering and medicine streams also to improve their beliefs to taking up challenges in life and work. Further, it is recommended to use this program to be part of curriculum for all graduates to improve one's belief in one's ability to succeed in tasks and life's challenges.

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