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THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-EFFICACY ON CHILDREN'S DRAWING IN GHANA

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Abstract

This study explores the role of self-efficacy in shaping children's drawing practices across Ghana's rural, peri-urban, urban, and metropolitan contexts. Guided by the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1977), the research investigates how mastery experiences, observational learning, and supportive feedback from teachers and parents influence children's artistic confidence and expression. Employing a qualitative, multiple-case study design within a social constructivist framework, data were collected through spontaneous and directed drawings, semi-structured interviews, and field observations involving pupils aged 7-10, their parents, and teachers. Findings reveal that children with high drawing self-efficacy frequently choose familiar and culturally resonant subjects, reflecting lived experiences and environmental familiarity. Repetition, guided practice, and positive reinforcement significantly enhanced artistic performance and emotional engagement. Feedback from teachers and parents, when constructive and affirming, was found to foster motivation, resilience, and willingness to experiment with key traits of creative growth. Conversely, environments lacking in encouragement or cultural relevance diminished artistic confidence. The study enriches existing literature by expanding the focus beyond urban settings and highlighting the socio-cultural dynamics that mediate self-efficacy in artmaking. It concludes that cultivating children's drawing self-efficacy requires not only pedagogical skill but also culturally responsive strategies and active parental involvement. Recommendations include practice-based and observational learning tasks, training in feedback delivery, and policies that integrate culturally grounded art education into early childhood curricula.

Keywords: Pedagogy, drawing self-efficacy, children's artistic confidence, art education, early childhood.

1. Introduction

Children's drawings are more than playful marks; they are visual expressions shaped by internal beliefs and external influences. Central to this creative act is *self-efficacy*, a learner's belief in their ability to

succeed in specific tasks (Bandura, 1997). In educational psychology, self-efficacy has been shown to enhance motivation, persistence, and skill development (Arhin, 2021; Basileo et al., 2024). Within artistic contexts, it fuels experimentation, risk-taking, and expressive freedom (Kocaarslan & Eryaman, 2024; Steffens, 2022). When children believe they can draw, they draw more, try harder, and express themselves with greater confidence.

In Ghana, drawing is often children's first medium for communicating identity, emotion, and lived experience (Adu-Agyem et al., 2009; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Yet, most local studies on children's drawings have emphasized cognitive development or symbolic content without foregrounding self-efficacy as a mediating factor (Navei et al., 2022; Quaye, 2009). These studies, while valuable, have largely focused on urban contexts, excluding the diverse socio-cultural realities of children in rural and peri-urban regions.

This study bridges this gap by aligning Bandura's self-efficacy theory with children's drawing behaviour across Ghana's varied educational landscapes. Drawing on multiple case studies from rural, peri-urban, urban, and metropolitan settings, the study explores how children's confidence is cultivated through facilitation, feedback, and prior experience. It shifts the discourse from drawing as innate talent to drawing as a practice built through environmental support and belief in one's ability. By doing so, it offers a culturally grounded, psychologically informed lens for understanding and enhancing artistic development in early education.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Bandura's Self-Efficacy in Drawing

Anchored in the self-efficacy theory of Bandura (1977), part of a broader social cognitive framework, this perspective emphasises the role of belief systems in shaping learning and behaviour. Self-efficacy refers to a child's belief in their ability to successfully complete tasks, such as drawing. As demonstrated in the findings of this study, such beliefs significantly influence children's motivation, persistence, and creative engagement. Bandura identifies four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional states. These were clearly reflected in children's drawing behaviours. For example, children's confidence grew when they repeatedly drew familiar objects or observed drawings by others, and they were especially motivated when teachers and parents provided constructive feedback. These dynamics were vividly illustrated across the diverse Ghanaian contexts explored rural, peri-urban, urban, and metropolitan, showing that self-efficacy is shaped by sociocultural exposure and relational support.

The application of this theoretical lens, shifts attention from innate talent to the contextual, emotional, and social factors that influence artistic growth. This framework supports targeted strategies like teacher facilitation, parental encouragement, and culturally situated drawing tasks as practical avenues for boosting artistic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Grandstaff, 2012). The explanation provides a contextual justification for framing the study with self-efficacy theory situated within Bandura's social cognitive framework (Figure 1).

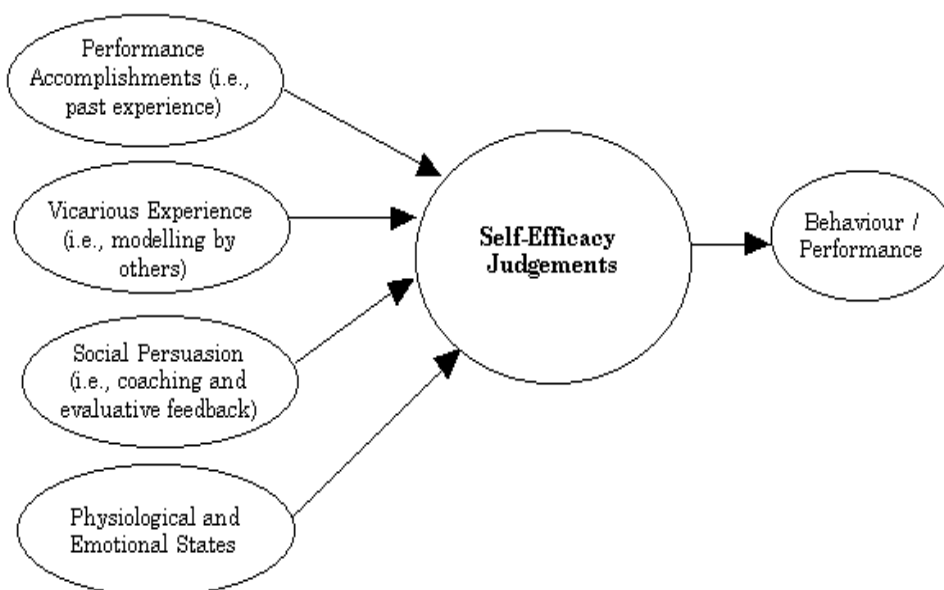


Figure 1: Bandura's Social Cognitive and Self-Efficacy Theory Concept (Source: Bandura, 1977).

2.2 Empirical Review: Influences on Children's Drawing

Children's drawings are the outcome of a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, social, and environmental factors, all of which relate to the development of self-efficacy. Cognitive development, as theorised by Piaget, Lowenfeld and Kellogg, outlines sequential stages in children's artistic growth. These stages mirror the observed progression in children's drawings from simple symbols to realistic representations as their self-confidence and conceptual maturity increase (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987).

The socio-cultural environment also plays a pivotal role. In this study, urban children frequently depicted structured objects like furniture and technology, while rural children focused on farming and animals. These differences align with findings by Duako (2018) and Quaye (2009) and affirm Bandura's assertion that vicarious and mastery experiences within a child's environment contribute to self-efficacy development. Furthermore, emotional and psychological states influence drawing behaviour. Children who feel encouraged and emotionally safe are more likely to take creative risks, as found in this study and supported by Thomas and Silk (1990). Lastly, educational practices and parental involvement remain central to cultivating drawing self-efficacy. Where teachers offer guided practice and constructive feedback, as shown in the current study children display enhanced skill and motivation (Anning, 1999; Grandstaff, 2012). Unfortunately, in Ghana, visual art often receives minimal emphasis at the basic level (Opoku-Asare et al., 2015), limiting opportunities for such self-efficacy to be nurtured.

In sum, both theory and empirical evidence converge to support the study's key findings on children's belief in their artistic capabilities, shaped by experience, guidance, and context, is foundational to their drawing development. This literature anchors the study within a robust theoretical and practical framework that informs both its analysis and recommendations.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and children's drawing expression, guided by a social constructivist framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017) and social cognitive theory by Bandura (1977). While social constructivism provided a lens for understanding how cultural and social contexts shape learning, Bandura's theory allowed for a focused

examination of how self-beliefs influence artistic performance particularly through mastery experiences, observational learning, social persuasion, and emotional states. A multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) was adopted, treating each child and their district as a distinct case. This enabled cross-contextual analysis across four culturally diverse districts Bia West, Kumasi Metropolis, Keta Municipal, and Tempane Municipal, representing Ghana's western, middle, southern, and northern zones. Districts were selected based on cultural distinctiveness, urban-rural diversity, and accessibility, to ensure variation in drawing experiences and exposure to art education. Participants included Basic One to Three pupils (aged 7-10), their teachers, parents, and district cultural coordinators.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure cultural diversity across regions and participant groups, while convenience sampling was applied in selecting children based on willingness and availability. The sample size was determined to ensure depth over breadth, reaching thematic saturation through repeated patterns across data sources. Data was triangulated using three primary sources: (1) spontaneous and directed children's drawings, (2) field observations, and (3) semi-structured interviews. Drawings served as expressive artefacts that reflected both personal experiences and conceptual understanding. Observations captured real-time behaviour during drawing tasks, while interviews allowed participants, especially children, to explain their artwork, reducing researcher inference and enhancing credibility.

Visual data were analysed using a model of Duncum (1992), categorising drawings as factual/fictional, narrative/separate object, or borrowed/self-generated. This was supported by the six-step thematic analysis by Nowell et al. (2017), which ensured a systematic approach to coding, theme development, and interpretation. Each data source was mapped to key dimensions of self-efficacy practice (mastery), observation, adult facilitation (social persuasion), and affective response, allowing for analytical consistency. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed researcher reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical approval was obtained, with parental consent and child assent secured. This approach offered deep insight into how children's drawing capabilities are shaped by self-efficacy, grounded in both their personal experiences and sociocultural contexts

4.1 The Influence of Self-Efficacy on Children's Drawing Capabilities

This study investigated the role of self-efficacy in shaping children's drawing behaviours. Self-efficacy was analysed across three dimensions: prior experience, adult facilitation and feedback, and observational learning. Emotional states were considered, though no direct links to drawing outcomes were observed. The evidence suggests that children's confidence in their drawing abilities is closely tied to what they have done, seen, and how adults have supported their efforts.

4.1.1 Prior Experience and Practice

Children who had prior experience drawing specific objects showed more confidence and fluency in their work. Common subjects in spontaneous drawings, such as flowers, boxes, and domestic animals were those the children had frequently practised, either at school or at home. This repeated engagement enhanced their sense of competence.

At home, practice was also facilitated by parents. One parent reflected:

She started drawing at a younger age and I think her past experience of learning to draw at a younger age has a major influence on her when growing up. That made her develop a passion for drawing (Parent, personal communication, March 2022).

This aligns with the theory by Bandura (1997) that mastery experiences are the most effective source of self-efficacy. Early success builds belief in one's abilities, motivating further effort and persistence in drawing tasks.

4.1.2 Observational Experience

Children also relied heavily on what they had observed in their environments. During a directed task, drawing a sun with a human face and a family of five, many children deviated from the template. Some omitted the human face on the sun, drawing it instead as they typically perceived it. Similarly, several children drew families of varying sizes. For instance, Figure 2 shows a family of three with personalised details, suggesting the child depicted their own family from memory.

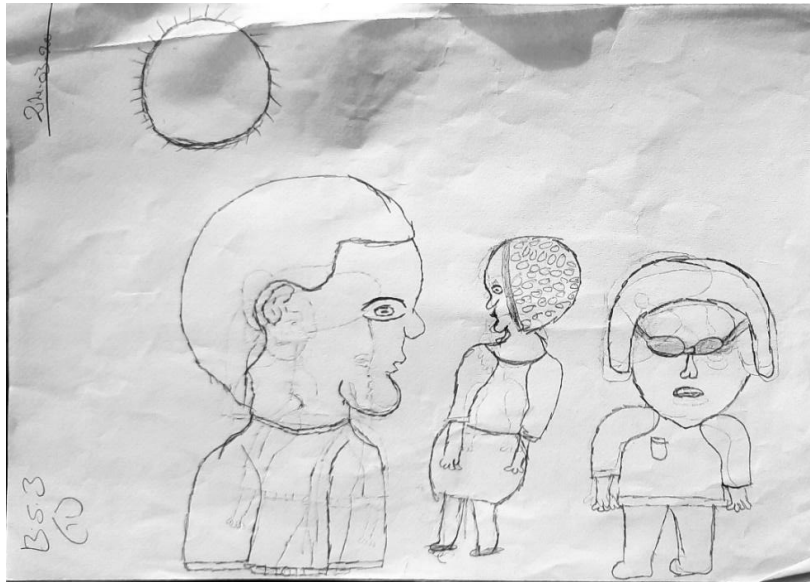


Figure 2: Self-efficacy - Detailed Representation of a Family of Three (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

These deviations indicate that children prioritise familiar visual experiences over abstract instruction. As Fox and Lee (2013) suggest, observational experience can serve as a strong source of creative self-efficacy, especially when it aligns with the child's lived reality.

A cultural coordinator in the Volta Region (VR) observed:

Sometimes children draw objects slightly different from what is presented to them because they would rather try to depict what they know... they draw to represent the natural expression of their observational experience (Cultural Coordinator VR1, personal communication, 15 March 2022).

This commentary highlights how observation strengthens self-belief, allowing children to reinterpret tasks through the lens of what they already know.

4.1.3 Personal Meaning and Ownership

Children's self-efficacy also appeared stronger when they had personal attachments to the objects they were drawing. One eight-year-old, after drawing a bicycle, explained, "This is my bicycle" (Basic 2 pupil-participant 2, personal communication, 10 March 2022). The accuracy and confidence shown in the drawing suggest that ownership enhanced observational detail and expressive intent.

Likewise, Figure 3 portrays a nine-year-old cooking rice an activity she had never performed herself but had frequently observed. Her use of a coal pot and specific actions reflected confidence in representing familiar domestic routines, further underscoring the role of observational learning in fostering self-efficacy.



Figure 3: Self-efficacy – A Drawing of a Child Representing Cooking at Home (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

In another spontaneous drawing (Figure 4), a child illustrated their domestic environment complete with a house, fridge, and a sibling fetching water. These elements, rooted in daily observation, reveal how confidence grows when children feel connected to their subjects. The child's explanation during the interview revealed that adult encouragement ("Your drawing is nice") also contributed to their willingness to add detail and personalise their work.



Figure 4: Self-efficacy – A Child Representing Her Residential Environment (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

4.2 Facilitation and Evaluative Feedback: Strengthening Children's Drawing Self-Efficacy

Building on earlier findings on experience and observation, this section explores how facilitation and evaluative feedback influence children's drawing self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), feedback and social persuasion are powerful sources of efficacy beliefs. The findings affirm that supportive adult involvement significantly boosts children's confidence and motivation to draw.

Children often cite encouragement and guidance from adults as factors that made drawing enjoyable and meaningful. A Basic 3 pupil shared:

My teacher always guides me to draw in class... My mother always encourages me to draw and praises me every time I draw something. When they talk about my drawings, I feel happy, and I like to draw things so I can show them to them again (Basic 3 pupil-participant 2, personal communication, 4 February 2022).

This reflects how consistent encouragement from teachers and parents affirms children's efforts, motivating them to engage more frequently with drawing tasks. The emotional response feeling happy and seen feeds into their growing belief in their artistic capability.

Another child remarked:

My teacher guides me to draw by watching me and also directs me to do it this way or that way (Basic 2 pupil-participant 3, personal communication, 4 February 2022).

This illustrates how instructional facilitation, including verbal cues and close supervision, reinforces children's belief in their ability to succeed. As Bandura (1997) notes, supportive guidance helps learners persist through difficulties, especially when paired with positive feedback.

Teachers and parents echoed the importance of their role. One teacher explained:

My facilitation or evaluative feedback helps in bringing the children's mind on what they draw, and it enables them to better their drawing skills (Teacher participant 2, personal communication, 4 February 2022).

This view reflects the intentional use of feedback to support metacognitive development and confidence central to enhancing self-efficacy.

A parent added:

By educating the children to know that drawing is not only about special objects but also includes events, activities or occasions... It helps in developing their drawing skills and brings out their creative talents (Parent-participant 1, personal communication, 4 February 2022).

This expands children's perceptions of what constitutes a valid subject for drawing. For this, adults validate children's perspectives and reinforce their confidence in expressing themselves visually.

4.3 Comparative and Cross-Discursive Insights

In continuity with earlier findings, this study confirms that self-efficacy in children's drawing is shaped through three interconnected experiences: practice, observation, and feedback. Children repeatedly chose to draw what they had practised or observed in their daily environments, underscoring the importance of familiarity in shaping confidence and output. This aligns with Allen et al. (2016), who stress the value of visual exposure in building drawing competence, and Quillin and Thomas (2015),

who link frequent practice with skill development. Feedback and facilitation emerged as equally crucial. Interviews revealed that positive reinforcement and instructional support motivated children to draw more frequently and with greater assurance. These findings affirm the claim by Akkuzu (2018) that evaluative feedback enhances artistic engagement and self-belief.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirms that self-efficacy is a decisive factor in shaping children's drawing capabilities, particularly through experiential learning and supportive adult interactions. It was found out that drawings from the social cognitive theory of Bandura (1997) demonstrate that children's belief in their ability to draw is significantly influenced by past experiences, both practised and observed, and by the quality of facilitation and evaluative feedback from teachers and parents. Children drew with greater accuracy, confidence, and expressive depth when working with familiar subjects encountered through repeated exposure at home or school. This reinforces the idea that self-efficacy is strengthened when tasks align with the child's lived environment and cultural context. In several instances, children altered assigned drawing tasks to reflect their personal or cultural realities, illustrating how self-efficacy fuels autonomy and creative decision-making.

Equally influential was adult support. Facilitating guidance and positive feedback reinforced children's confidence and interest in drawing. Encouragement from adults fostered a safe and motivating environment, turning drawing into a meaningful and enjoyable process rather than a performance task. Based on these findings, it is recommended that art educators design drawing tasks grounded in students' everyday experiences, cultural contexts, and personal memories. Repetitive yet varied practice, coupled with process-focused feedback, can further strengthen drawing competence and self-belief. Parents should also be encouraged to engage children in informal drawing activities at home, using familiar objects and routines as visual prompts. Future research should explore the impact of emotional states such as stress, fatigue, or confidence fluctuations on children's drawing performance, to further illuminate how affective factors intersect with self-efficacy in creative development.

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