

Investigating The Role of Tertiary Self-Efficacy in Higher Education Enrollment

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Abstract

In developed countries where accessibility policies, government funding, and financial aid promote widespread participation in higher education, there is an increasing need for research to shift focus from traditional macro-level indicators—such as socio-economic status—to micro-level psychosocial and cognitive factors. This shift is especially pertinent in contexts like Barbados, where, despite government-sponsored tertiary education for all citizens, enrollment among eligible candidates remains approximately 60%. This study examines tertiary self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their ability to succeed at the tertiary level—as a key psychological factor influencing enrollment decisions. Unlike more commonly studied micro level variables such as academic achievement or general motivation, tertiary self-efficacy offers a domain-specific perspective on the affective, motivational, cognitive, and selective processes that shape students' educational trajectories. Data were collected from 232 final-year secondary school students across Barbados using the Tertiary Education Self-Efficacy Scale (TESSES), which quantitatively assesses overall tertiary self-efficacy along with three subdimensions: academic, self-regulatory, and interactive self-efficacy. Results revealed that students with higher tertiary self-efficacy, and higher scores on the sub categories, were significantly more likely to express intentions to pursue higher education than their peers with lower scores. These findings underscore the importance of integrating psychosocial and cognitive variables into educational policy and intervention strategies, complementing structural accessibility efforts to more effectively enhance tertiary enrollment.

Keywords: accessibility; Barbados; psychology; school; socio-economic status