

Enhancement of Self-efficacy and Interest in Learning English of Undergraduate Students with Low English Proficiency through a Collaborative Learning Programme

Queenie Pui Sze Law^{1*}, Joanne Wai Yee Chung¹, Chi Cheung Leung¹, Thomas Kwok Shing Wong²

¹Faculty of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

²Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

*Corresponding author: s1107458@s.ied.edu.hk

Abstract Self-efficacy and interest are two of the essential motivational factors that influence learning. An exploratory study aimed to discover the development of self-efficacy and interest of learning English through participation in a collaborative learning programme had been organised. Five undergraduate students with low proficiency in English participated in this exploratory study. Pre- and post-questionnaire on self-efficacy were collected. After completing 12 English tutoring classes of teaching experience, the five undergraduate students were invited to attend a focus group interview. The verbatim scripts were transcribed and analysed by using content analysis. Three themes have been identified: 1. there were an increase in the sources of self-efficacy to the subjects in learning English, 2. an increase in self-efficacy in the subjects' English learning, and 3. a greater interest in learning English. Pre- and post- mean scores on the language self-efficacy scale were collected and showed that the mean score was increased by 1.2, 95% CI = 0.027 to 2.13. The subjects' language self-efficacy scores had increased significantly ($t = 3.57$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.02$). Collaborative learning programme might be an effective approach in enhancing students' interest in learning English and through the process students could become more self-efficacious in learning English.

Keywords: *self-efficacy, interest in learning English, low proficiency of English, collaborative learning*

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1. Introduction

Students of poor performance or ineffective learning are low in self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key element of social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory, founded on a framework of triadic reciprocity or reciprocal interactions, highlights the importance of the dynamic interplay between behavioral, environmental variables and personal factors [2]. Bandura [2], p.3] defines self-efficacy as the 'beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' and behavior 'is a product of both self-regulated and external sources of influence' [2], p.454]. With regard to the interaction between personal factors (self-efficacy) and behavior, individuals' beliefs in self-efficacy influence their capabilities and engagement in performing a task [4,20] and this will be reflected externally in the individuals' behavior. There are four primary sources of self-efficacy which include mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological states [1]. Self-efficacy is developed

through these four sources. The strongest sense of efficacy is developed through mastery experience which is when a learner builds confidence through experiencing first-hand the engagement in working out a task and albeit in repeated attempts its successful completion by mastering the skills/knowledge of the task. The second source for developing self-efficacy is via vicarious experience, which is the experience obtained by observing others. Encouragement and positive feedback come from social persuasion which builds and reinforces self-efficacy. Individuals develop high self-efficacy when they receive encouragement and compliments from seniors, people they respect, and peers. In addition, physiological and emotional states such as stress, illness may have negative impacts on self-efficacy too. A large body of evidence suggests that self-efficacy has positive effects on academic performance (e.g. [3,9,18,21]). Raising self-efficacy improves academic success and performance [28].

Interest is widely recognized as an important motivational factor that influences learning. Interest is an affect with both trait and state properties. At the trait level, Hidi and Renninger [12], p. 113] point out that an individual's interest refers to 'a person's relatively

enduring predisposition to re-engage particular content over time'. At the state level, it refers to situational interest. Situational interest is transitory. It is induced by the various aspects of the environment. According to Silvia, situational interest is a motivational state of curiosity [24]. It can turn into a stronger interest and develop into a trait [12,14].

Self-efficacy and interest in learning English are two important factors that influence undergraduate students' motivation in learning English. When students are given some tasks/topics and they work on them, interest may develop if they are drawn to the tasks/topics due to their personal interest in them. As the students engage in them over time, they develop expertise, knowledge and skills, their self-efficacy beliefs develop [19]. Once individuals develop a sense of efficacy in an activity, they will develop both interest and value for the activity [1]. It is important to note that although some studies have addressed that self-efficacy will be associated with interest ([1,3,14,19]), limited studies have investigated the relation between self-efficacy and interests in learning English [20,24].

Gokhale [[10], p. 22] points out that collaborative learning refers to 'an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small group toward a common goal'. Collaborative learning shifts the responsibility of learning to students who take up the role of self-directed learners. Students work in group and they actively exchange their ideas through use of small group activities with the goal of completing a specific task. Collaborative learning encourages students to develop higher-order thinking skills and enhance individual abilities to master knowledge. Many researchers have reported that students tend to learn more of what is being taught when it is compared with traditional classroom learning [5,7]. Collaborative learning gives students an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility of their own learning. Therefore, collaborative learning is good for the new generation as it contributes to developing social skills and leading towards development of positive attitude among students [27].

Moreover, collaborative learning helps improve students' self-efficacy because it provides both direct and vicarious experiences to all group members. Findings from empirical research suggested that collaborative learning and students' self-efficacy influenced their academic performance. According to Shoja et al., they stated that collaborative learning improved academic achievement in English lesson and self-efficacy [23]. Smith and colleagues [25] found that students increased their understanding of genetics concepts from discussion between students even when there was no 'expert student' in their discussion group. Students from this study also claimed that the discussion was more productive and they retained the information longer because they had gone through the discussion with better understanding [26].

This exploratory research aspires to use a collaborative learning programme that would focus on improving undergraduate students' learning in English and ultimately enhancing students' self-efficacy and interest. The goal of this study is to examine the effectiveness of such a collaborative learning programme in achieving these.

Undergraduate students participating in the study are required to collaborate with a number of parties and

through the collaborative process their own English learning is assessed with respect to their self-efficacy and their interest in learning. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

HA: Collaborative learning programme improves undergraduate students' self-efficacy and interest in learning English.

Research questions:

1. Will collaborative learning programme increase students' self-efficacy in learning English?
2. Will collaborative learning programme increase students' interest in learning English?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Five undergraduate students were recruited. All five students are low proficiency in English with at least one sub-score of level 2 in either reading, writing, listening and integrated skills or speaking in English language of Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. Referring to press release of Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment authority, candidates attaining level 2 in the HKDSE English Language Examination achieved an overall International English Language Testing System (IELTS) band score of 4.79 to 5.07. The level of user in IELTS of band score 4 and score 5 refer to limited user and modest user respectively [13].

2.2. Data Collection

Undergraduate students were recruited by convenience sampling through posting promotional poster in the campus. The initial subject of this cycle was a small group of five undergraduate students.

In this collaborative learning programme, the undergraduate students were assigned to provide English tutorial lessons to secondary school students in groups of three. Altogether fifteen secondary students were recruited. Each tutorial class was conducted in a group with two lessons a week on a biweekly basis with each lesson lasting for 90 minutes in a total of 12 lessons. The tutoring programme ran for two and a half months. Before starting the tutoring programme, English enhancement workshops were provided to the undergraduate students. Class observation and coaching of the undergraduate students were carried out by the English instructor.

A semi-structured focus group was conducted with the undergraduate students to understand their perceptions of self-efficacy and interest in learning English. In addition, language self-efficacy was measured pre- and post- the collaborative learning programme. Feedback questionnaires on the English tutorial classes from both the secondary school students and the English instructor were collected.

2.3. Instrument

A language self-efficacy scale was used to assess self-efficacy in English. The ten items in the scale were English learning tasks involving the use of the four basic skills namely reading, writing, speaking and listening and correct grammar. This scale was found to have high internal consistency (Alpha reliability coefficient = 0.89)

as well as test-retest (after 2 weeks) stability (Pearson $r = 0.93$, $p < 0.01$). Item-total-correlations computed for the pilot showed that all ten items correlated significantly ($p < 0.001$) with the total, with correlation values ranging from 0.48 to 0.83 [30].

2.4. Data Analysis

Paired t-test was used to test the pre- and post-programme differences in the language self-efficacy in learning. The significance was set at 0.05 level. The semi-structured interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese. All the transcribed verbatim was translated into English. The transcribed verbatim was coded using the NVivo8 software with content analysis method. Transcripts were scrutinized for emergent themes; and the relevant sections of the text were coded and grouped together according to those themes. The main themes were broken down into sub-themes. The main

themes and sub-themes based on the relationships between the coded and the text passages were developed using tree maps and cluster analysis in the NVivo 8.

3. Results and Discussion

In response to the first research question (i.e. will collaborative learning programme enhance student's self-efficacy in learning English?), a semi-structured interview and pre- and post- questionnaire surveys were conducted to explore the feasibility and the effect of the collaborative learning programme. The undergraduate students' perception over increased self-efficacy in learning English after participation of this collaborative learning programme was also investigated. The collected data covering self-efficacy are summarized in Table 1 to Table 2 below.

Table 1. Gained some sources of self-efficacy in learning English

Main theme and sub-themes	Description of Undergraduate students' thoughts / comments
Gained some sources of self-efficacy in learning English	
Limited mastery experiences	'I used to be scared of the English language, and I had bad grades' (S1) 'I used to confused with grammar and tenses, and I just stayed half-baked' (S2)
Impact of vicarious learning from instructor and other fellow students	'English workshops are helpful. Our instructor provided us with an insight into how a teacher should present her image. I could learn how to be confident, she showed it through obviously. Then I would try to imitate her when I teach'. (S1) 'English workshops are quite useful, because we had a chance to hear how the students are taught. Wrong methods then can be avoided'. (S2) 'I also think that it is good to gather a class (workshops) for that'. (S3)
Positive encouragement from instructor and parents	'Instructor would provide me with useful and practical suggestions. I am able to apply. So I tried that, and I could see better results'. (S1) 'The advice was very to-the-point, meaning she would formulate a suggestion according to your specific issue'. (S2) 'As now I would sometimes prepare for my classes, my mother would say: "wow, you are so self-disciplined?" and I would say: "Yes, I am a good girl now", and then I would read more books'. (S3)
Felt anxious	'But what was different was that I felt even more anxious after the sessions (transcriber's note: workshop sessions). That is because instructor appeared to me as a model English teacher, and I am far from that'. (S1) 'As we had to speak in English, I felt anxious at workshop but I think that's quite good, at least there's a chance for me to give it a try. During the workshop, slightly more relaxed'. (S2)

S= student.

Table 2. Increased in self-efficacy in learning English

Main theme and sub-themes	Description of Undergraduate students' thoughts / comments
Increased self-efficacy in learning English	
Felt more confident in English	'Raising my confidence in my English language skills'. 'We tried to use English as much as possible. I felt confident at her classes. I spoke very fluently. I felt good about myself'. 'I used to think English was very difficult; my English grades weren't very good. But to look back now and clarify certain false concepts, I think it's actually not that hard. Why couldn't learn better before? Yes, that's the feeling'. (S1) 'Increased in confidence.I think I can handle it'. (S2) 'And now I would learn English once again, and would think that they're getting easier. I would treat that as relearning English.' 'Everyone became more confident and contented. I think that's quite good.'(S3)
Improvement in English	'Improve my familiarity with certain English words. Improvement in reading and writing because I have to read a lot of books....watch and select clips of movies...that is good for my listening...' 'In terms of writing, I have taught them a lot of grammar, so I have become more aware of grammatical mistakes myself, which is an improvement'. (S1) 'I know more vocabularies now....I would provide them with articles to read from time to time, it helps with wording and structuring of articles'. (S2) 'I have revisited these materials; I would think "oh, maybe I can try to use that, maybe when I try to teach them how to make a sentence richer while composing sentence structures, to make the longer and more detailed. That is actually useful for me too". 'Improvement in writing...'(S3) 'Improvement in speaking'. (S4) 'I don't know if it's because of this programme or not, my English skills improved'. 'I would read about tenses learnt in Form 2, which I found very difficult, and find that they are actually quite easy'. (S5)

S=student

3.1. Gained Some Sources of Self-efficacy in Learning English

In Table 2, the undergraduate students perceived an increase in sources of self-efficacy in learning after finishing the collaborative learning programme. About the mastery experiences, a majority of the undergraduate students had previous experiences in teaching though the nature of their previous teaching experience was different. Four of them had teaching experiences in one-to-one tutoring; the remaining one had experience in teaching primary school students and teaching martial arts. All of them had successful previous performance and did not have any bad experience in prior teaching. However, most of them thought that their English was not good enough.

All of the undergraduate students claimed that the English enhancement workshop was 'very useful', 'helpful' and 'it is good to gather a class like this'. This in turn helped them to equip some basic teaching skills and enabled them to see the instructor as the role model of a teacher. From the verbatim transcripts, it was noted that they agreed that the instructor was a good role model. Apart from modeling the instructor, the undergraduate students thought that the workshop allowed them to learn from one another through observation and highlights on common mistakes.

The undergraduate students received positive encouragement from the workshop instructor and the parents. One undergraduate student recalled that she was praised by her parent during the preparation of the teaching materials. Her parent described her as self-disciplined to read English materials. And it was one of the motivations that made her read more books. Throughout the English enhancement workshop and the class observation, the undergraduate students generally felt that the instructor provided them with helpful and practical opinions. After adopting the instructor's suggestions, they thought that their classes were more successful and had better results.

As the workshops were run in English, all of the undergraduate students needed to use English in discussions and to demonstrate teaching. Two undergraduate students felt anxious before and during the workshops. One undergraduate student thought that the workshops were quite good to give her a chance to speak in English. During the workshop, she felt more relaxed. About delivering the tutorial class to secondary school students, one undergraduate student felt anxious when she spoke to students in English. Finally, this student claimed that she felt less anxious when she faced students after joining this collaborative learning programme.

3.2. Gained Self-efficacy in Learning English

Students' judgments about their capabilities in English were important in showing the enhancement of students' self-efficacy. A majority of the undergraduate students felt more confident in English after joining this collaborative learning programme. Some students claimed that they found English was actually not that hard after they revised the fundamentals. One also mentioned that she gained confidence and felt capable of handling English teaching to secondary school students after joining this collaborative learning programme.

When improvement in English was discussed, all of the undergraduate students indicated improvement through preparation of teaching materials and delivery of tutorial classes. This finding is consistent with a significant increase in the mean scores on the language self-efficacy scale. The pre- and post- mean scores on the language self-efficacy scale are presented in Table 3 below. The mean increase in language self-efficacy score is 1.2, 95% CI = 0.027 to 2.13. The students had significantly increased in their language self-efficacy scores ($t = 3.57$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.02$)

Table 3. Paired t test of pre- and post-mean scores on the language self-efficacy scale

Language self-efficacy	Mean	N	Std. Deviation (SD)	t	df	p
Pre mean score	5.94	5	1.06	-3.57	4	0.023
Post mean score	7.14	5	1.06			

The undergraduate students expressed their views about improvement in the different aspects of their English. The majority believed that they had improvement in writing and reading as they needed to prepare the teaching materials. They indicated that their English foundation such as the use of grammar, sentence structures had improved through the preparation of teaching materials. They had to read a lot of books which enriched their vocabularies and sentence structures. One undergraduate student observed that she had a lot of English grammar lessons with her students and she now could avoid the common grammatical mistakes. Some students mentioned that because they had to select appropriate level of video clips for teaching to stimulate the learning interest of the class their own English listening skills had improved. One student felt that she had improved in speaking. However, two undergraduate students commented that there was no improvement in speaking.

The results support that there are positive correlations between sources of self-efficacy and self-efficacy [5,29]. The undergraduate students attributed the gaining confidence in learning' and 'capable of handling teaching English to secondary schools' to the main themes/causes that contributed to the enhancement of their self-efficacy in learning English. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in predicting human performance in many areas [3]. The enhancement of self-efficacy could have been due to the increase in some sources of self-efficacy to the undergraduate students. Although not all undergraduate students had prior experience in tutoring a class and all thought that their English was not good, they gained mastery experience throughout the process of joining this collaborative learning programme. Some students thought that their work on English fundamentals made them discover that English was actually not that hard. This change came from their initial mastery experiences in the preparation of teaching materials and then followed by additional mastery experiences through delivering them in tutorials. Bandura [1] stated that vicarious experience is important when student had limited mastery experiences. The undergraduate students perceived vicarious persuasion from their workshop instructor and fellow students. The workshop instructor provided those vicarious English teaching influences through demonstration lessons as well as verbal persuasion when the workshop instructor taught them. With this kind of

ongoing support, the undergraduate students felt themselves capable of achieving mastery experiences in teaching English. This would in turn ideally lead to continued English teaching whereby the undergraduate students are likely to persist in their English learning even if faced with obstacles [1]. According to Britner and Pajares [6], social persuasions serve as an enhancement to mastery experiences. Students who are told by significant others that they have the ability to master new or difficult science tasks are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges and mobilize the effort needed for efficacy-building successes. Therefore, appropriate and realistic encouragement to students from significant others are important. In this study, the undergraduate students perceived positive encouragement from both the workshop instructor and the parents. They generally felt that the instructor had provided them with helpful and practical opinions. They experienced more success after adopting the instructor’s suggestions.

The current finding also agrees to the previous study that teachers’ self-efficacy and ability had effects on learners’ English language self-efficacy [8]. Gorsuch [11] also stated that classroom climate and the interaction

between peer students and teachers affected learners’ self-efficacy. Interestingly, this study found that one undergraduate student was motivated to read more books after being praised by her parent, the significant other, during her preparation of teaching materials. As regards the relationship between the physiological states and the academic self-efficacy, some researchers have found that physiological states predict mathematics self-efficacy [16,17], and some reported that it did not [15]. In this collaborative learning programme, two undergraduate students felt anxiety in speaking English during the workshops and one of them felt anxious when she was speaking to students in English. Although both of them claimed that they felt less anxious after joining this collaborative learning programme, it is important to address student’s fear and anxiety in the next cycle of the study.

3.3. Gained interest in learning English

Table 4 below summarises the data that covered the undergraduate students’ interest in learning English.

Table 4. Gained interest in learning English

Main theme and sub-themes	Description of Undergraduate students’ thoughts / comments
Gained interest in learning English	‘I do gain more interest in English...I will take the initiative to gather information from libraries and watch movies in English, and listen to English songs. Now I like English more than ever’. (S1) ‘I have more interest after delivering the classes’. (S2) ‘Increase in interest for me as well’. (S3) ‘Enhanced, because they reacted to my ways of teaching...that makes me work harder and become more interested’. (S4) ‘Umm, yes to a certain extent’. (S5)

S= student.

The data in Table 4 cover the second research question i.e. ‘will the collaborative learning programme enhance student’s interest in learning English?’. The undergraduate students expressed that they had gained their interest in learning English since joining the collaborative learning programme. The result of the present study is consistent with various results on self-efficacy and academic achievement. Zimmerman [31] showed that self-efficacy is significantly related with academic interest and motivation, as well as growth of cognitive competencies.

3.4. Feedback from the Secondary School Students

The fifteen secondary school students joining the English tutorial classes were of 14 to 19 years old with 53% male (n=8) and 47% female (n=7). Out of them, three were studying Secondary two, and six each were studying Secondary three and four respectively. Their duration of schooling in Hong Kong is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Duration of schooling of the secondary school students in Hong Kong

Duration	Percentage and Number of students (n)
Less than 1 year	13% (n=2)
1 year	27% (n=4)
2 years	7% (n=1)
3 years	20% (n=3)
More than 5 years	33% (n=5)

All of the students (n=15) had completed and returned the survey questionnaires and reported enhancement in various English skills. 47% (n=7) thought that they had improved in oral and pronunciation; 20% (n=3) believed that they had improved in both reading & writing and vocabularies; and 33% (n=5) reported that they had enhancement in grammar. Most students (73%, n=11) rated increase in interest in learning English. One rated that the interest was same as usual and two had no increase in interest in learning English.

In terms of the overall satisfaction of the tutorial classes, most (67%, n=10) of the students rated the overall satisfaction as 80%; two (13%) rated it as 60% and 95% respectively; and the remaining three (20%) rated the overall satisfaction as 100%.

When asked whether they had any suggestions on room for improvement in the tutorial classes, 40% (n=6) of the students responded that they had no suggestions. Most of them (53%, n=8) requested to increase the number of lessons, to enrich the content in grammar and oral skills, and to use a variety of teaching methods. One of them thought that it would be better to recruit professional teacher to teach tutorial classes. Most of the students (87%, n=13) reported that they would like to join these tutorial classes again because they wanted to improve their English. Two of them rated that they would not join future tutorial classes because they were busy in their school study.

3.5. Report from the English Instructor

The English instructor wrote the report midway through the collaborative learning programme. A total of three

sessions of English enhancement workshops were run for the undergraduate students at the beginning phase of the tutorial classes which was followed by an on-site class observation by the workshop instructor. The workshop instructor opined that the objective of improving the undergraduate students' English standard through a proactive and engaging teaching experience proved to have worked for 80% of the undergraduate students. She also commented that those who benefited most from this collaborative learning programme were the ones who ventured out to embrace the teaching experience, spent time and effort to plan and was able to gain rapport with their fellow undergraduate students; those who benefited less tended to have personal confidence issues with one's own English language proficiency, failed to spot students' response and not able to respond in a timely manner, and not having a full picture of how to plan lesson effectively. About the teaching methodology of the undergraduate students, the workshop instructor commented that the undergraduate students gained some inspirations and practical tips in such area.

Based on the positive response from the three parties viz. the undergraduate students, the secondary school students and the workshop instructors, the collaborative learning programme using English as the subject had helped the undergraduate students' English learning in a positive way.

3.6. Limitations

Whilst the findings are positive, there are limitations to this study. First is the method of convenience sampling. Students who volunteered to participate, from on university, might have the openness and motivation to learn than other students. A second limitation is that whilst the study comprised a qualitative core component with a quantitative strategy. The sample size was nevertheless small for the quantitative part.

4. Conclusion

Self-efficacy and interest are two important factors that may influence undergraduate students' learning English. This study investigated the relationships between the self-efficacy and interest of learning English after participation of collaborative learning programme. The followings are the major findings of the present study. The self-efficacy of learning English of undergraduate students positively and significantly correlates with joining the collaborative learning programme. This study has important pedagogic implications. Firstly, this collaborative learning programme assists students to increase their self-efficacy and interest in learning English. It is necessary for realize that they should try to sustain their interest in learning English and become more self-efficacious in learning English. If they are sustain their interest in learning English, become more self-efficacy, attribute the failures to less effort and increase their achievement finally. Secondly, teachers can enhance the level of students' self-efficacy and interest through collaborative learning programme. Increasing sources of self-efficacy may enhance students' self-efficacy. Positive feedback and encouragement from teachers can enhance students' self-efficacy. Students should be provided with opportunities to observe peers

students do tasks successfully; these opportunities help students to foster positive beliefs about themselves.

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