

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' SELF EFFICACY AND THEIR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT**

**Rahil Mahyuddin, Habibah Elias, Loh Sau Cheong, Muhd Fauzi Muhamad,  
Nooreen Noordin and Maria Chong Abdullah**

Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia  
43400 UPM, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

**Abstract:** Many studies have been carried out on this concept of self efficacy in the academic settings. For example, Schunk (1995) stated that students when engaged in activities are affected by personal (e.g., goal setting, information processing) and situational influences (rewards, feedbacks). These provide students an idea on how well they learn. Self efficacy was enhanced when students perceived they performed well. On the other hand, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (1996), reported that parents' academic aspirations for their children, influence the children's academic achievement directly or indirectly by influencing their self efficacy. Based on the theoretical explanation on self efficacy and findings of past studies, it is therefore the aim of this study to find out the relationship between students' self efficacy and their English language achievement. In Malaysia, English is a second language but since 2003, English is the medium of instruction for mathematics and science subjects for year one, form one and form six students. Based on this scenario, it is therefore pertinent to find out whether performance in the English language is largely determined by their perceived English language efficacy. A descriptive-correlational study was conducted on 1,146 students from eight secondary schools in the Petaling district, Selangor. The instruments used to measure self efficacy were the Self Efficacy Scale developed by Bandura (1995) and the Self Efficacy Scale developed by Kim and Park (1997). The findings showed that 51 percent of students had high self efficacy while 48 percent showed low self efficacy. Correlational analysis showed positive correlations between several dimensions of self efficacy that is, academic achievement efficacy ( $r = 0.48, p = 0.001$ ); other expectancy beliefs ( $r = 0.34, p = 0.005$ ); and self assertiveness ( $r = 0.41, p = 0.005$ ) with academic performance in English language. In conclusion, achievement in English language will improve when students have high self efficacy in the language. The implications are discussed in relation to teaching and learning within the school settings.

**Abstrak:** Beberapa kajian telah dijalankan dalam bidang akademik tentang konsep efikasi sendiri. Contohnya, Schunk (1995) menyatakan bahawa pelajar yang terlibat dalam aktiviti sering dipengaruhi oleh faktor peribadi (penentuan matlamat, pemprosesan maklumat) dan situasi (ganjaran, maklum balas). Perkara ini memberi idea kepada pelajar tentang sebaik mana mereka telah belajar. Efikasi sendiri akan meningkat apabila pelajar beranggapan mereka telah melakukan yang terbaik. Sebaliknya, Bandura, Babaranelli, Caprara dan Pastorelli (1996) melaporkan bahawa aspirasi akademik ibu bapa untuk anak-anak mempengaruhi secara langsung atau tidak langsung pencapaian akademik mereka melalui pengaruh ibu bapa ke atas efikasi sendiri anak-anak. Berdasarkan penerangan teori tentang efikasi sendiri dan dapatan kajian lepas, maka tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk melihat perhubungan antara efikasi sendiri pelajar dengan pencapaian

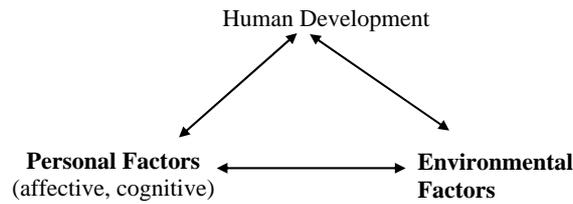
mereka dalam bahasa Inggeris. Di Malaysia, bahasa Inggeris merupakan bahasa kedua tetapi sejak 2003, bahasa Inggeris ialah bahasa pengantar bagi mata pelajaran matematik dan sains untuk murid tahun satu, tingkatan satu dan tingkatan enam rendah. Senario ini membuatkan kajian ini relevan untuk melihat sama ada prestasi dalam bahasa Inggeris ditentukan oleh persepsi pelajar tentang efikasi mereka dalam bahasa Inggeris.

Reka bentuk kajian ini ialah deskriptif korelasi dan dijalankan ke atas 1,146 pelajar daripada lapan buah sekolah menengah di daerah Petaling, Selangor. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk mengukur efikasi sendiri ialah Skala Efikasi Kendiri oleh Bandura (1995), dan Kim dan Park (1997). Dapatan menunjukkan 51 peratus pelajar mempunyai efikasi sendiri yang tinggi manakala 48 peratus mempunyai efikasi sendiri yang rendah. Analisis korelasi menunjukkan perhubungan positif antara beberapa dimensi efikasi sendiri, iaitu efikasi pencapaian akademik ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); kepercayaan jangkaan yang lain ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) dan ketegasan sendiri ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) dengan prestasi dalam bahasa Inggeris. Kesimpulannya, pencapaian dalam bahasa Inggeris akan meningkat sekiranya pelajar mempunyai efikasi sendiri yang tinggi dalam bahasa tersebut. Implikasinya dibincangkan dari segi pengajaran dan pembelajaran dalam bilik darjah.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Self efficacy refers to the beliefs about one's capabilities to learn or perform behaviours at designated levels (Bandura, 1986, 1997), and is said to have a measure of control over individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. In other words, the beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and outcome of their efforts influence in great ways how they will behave. Therefore, it is not surprising that many research show that self efficacy influences academic achievement motivation, learning and academic achievement (Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1995).

Self efficacy is explained in the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986, 1997) which stated that human achievement depends on interactions between one's behaviours, personal factors and environmental conditions (Fig. 1). The behaviour of individual depends largely on early experiences at home. The home environment that stimulates curiosity will help build self efficacy just as displaying more of that curiosity, and exploring activities would invite active and positive reciprocity. This stimulation enhances the cognitive and affective structures of the individual which include his ability to sympathise, learn from others, plan alternative strategies and regulate his own behaviour and engage in self reflection (self efficacy).



**Figure 1.** Bandura's concept of triadic reciprocity behaviour

Such self-system provides an individual the capacity to alter his environment and influences his subsequent performance. Therefore, the beliefs he has of himself is the key element in exercising control and personal efficacy. This affects behaviour in two ways; either he engages in tasks he feels competent and confident or avoidance of those that he feels contrary. Self efficacy helps to determine how much effort, perseverance and resilience being put on a task. In other words, the higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence and resilience. Efficacy beliefs also trigger emotional reactions. For example, individuals with low self efficacy believe that a task is tough and hence build stress, depression and a narrow vision on how to solve problems. On the other hand, those with high efficacy would be more relax in solving difficult tasks. Therefore, these influences are strong determinants of the individual's level of achievement.

Many studies have been carried out on this concept of self efficacy in the academic settings. Researchers have reported that mathematics self efficacy is a good predictor of mathematics interest and choice of mathematics-related courses (Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1993; Pajares & Miller, 1994). In other studies on science and engineering college students (Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1984), it was reported that high self efficacy seemed to influence academic persistence necessary to maintain high academic achievement. Pintrich and Groot (1990) reported that academic self efficacy is correlated with academic performances in examinations and quizzes, and Schunk (1984) found that mathematics self efficacy influenced mathematics performance directly (beta = 0.46).

In a related research, Schunk (1995) stated that when students are engaged in activities, they are affected by personal (e.g., goal setting, information processing) and situational influences (e.g., rewards, feedbacks). These provide students with idea of how well they have learned. Self efficacy was enhanced when students perceived they performed well. On the other hand, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) reported that parents' academic aspirations for their children, influenced the children's academic achievement directly or indirectly by influencing their self efficacy.

Based on the theoretical explanations on self efficacy and findings by previous studies, it is therefore the aim of this study to find out the relationship between students' self efficacy and their English language achievement. In Malaysia, English is a second language but since 2003, English is the medium of instruction for mathematics and science subjects for year one, form one and form six students. Based on this scenario, it is therefore pertinent to find out whether performance in the English language is largely determined by their perceived English language efficacy. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the level of self efficacy among students in the English language.
2. To find out the differences between male and female students in English language self efficacy.
3. To find out the differences between students from urban and rural schools in English language self efficacy.
4. To find out the differences between the ethnic groups in English language self efficacy.
5. To determine the relationship between self efficacy and English language achievement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the academic subject investigated for self efficacy was the English language. The respondents consisted of 1,146 form four students chosen from eight secondary schools in the Petaling district in Selangor. Subjects were chosen using the stratified random sampling technique. There were 646 (56.4%) male respondents and 499 (43.1%) female respondents. In terms of ethnic groups, there were 491 (43.6%) Malays, 374 (32.9%) Chinese, 248 (21.8%) Indians and 25 (2.2%) others. Among the respondents, 419 (36.6%) were from urban schools and 727 (63.4%) were from rural schools. The research design was descriptive correlational. The instruments used to measure self efficacy were the Self Efficacy Scale by Bandura (1995), and Kim and Park (1997). The dimensions within the Bandura's Self Efficacy Scales included academic achievement, self regulated learning, extra curricula activities, meeting others' expectations, self assertiveness and motivation self regulation. The scales by Kim and Park included social harmony and efficacy dimensions. The scales were pilot-tested in a secondary school in Selangor. Thirty form four students were involved. The items from the eight parts (A–H) of the questionnaire were analysed. Three items (items 16, 22 and 40) from the original 50 items in Part B were deleted while five items (items 11, 34, 36, 54 and 55) from Part B were rephrased. In addition, three items (items 2, 4 and 8) were deleted from Part G. The Cronbach Alpha for the self efficacy instrument was 0.9587.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section will highlight the findings of the study. The first objective seeks to find out the level of self efficacy of students in the English language. The findings showed that 51.1 percent of the students have high self efficacy and 48.9 percent were of low self efficacy in the English language. The students with low self efficacy can be considered substantial and this is perhaps due to students being in the second last year of secondary school and their confidence in themselves (self efficacy) tend to decline as they advance through school because of less teacher attention (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Form four is the year sandwiched between two important public examinations, hence teacher concentration on these students is less. Besides in this study, 43.6 percent of the students are Malays who believed that English was difficult for them to master. They did not understand the language and hence not motivated to learn (Noran, Habibah, & Rahil, 1993). This is in line with Bandura's theory that states those with low self efficacy believe that a task is tough and hence have a narrow vision on how to tackle the English language. The key element here is the belief they have in themselves.

With regard to objective 2 and 3, the t-test was utilized. Table 1 showed that girls have higher self efficacy ( $t = -2.7$ ;  $X = 35.5$ ;  $SD = 4.5$ ;  $p = 0.006$ ) in the English language compared to boys and urban school children have higher self efficacy ( $t = -3.9$ ;  $X = 36.4$ ;  $SD = 4.6$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) compared to those in the rural areas. This finding on the gender differences is similar to many previous studies done on the relationship between gender and self efficacy. Results have shown that girls are found to exhibit higher self efficacy in areas related to language (Pajares, 1996). In the study by Pajares, it was stated that students were asked to provide confidence judgments on their academic skills and the girls reported they judged themselves to be better writers than the boys. This boosted their self efficacy. Generally, language is associated with feminine orientation and most students view that writing is the domain of girls (Eccles, 1987). In this study, it was found that girls have higher self regulated learning, which is one of the self efficacy dimensions ( $t = -3.7$ ;  $X = 2.38$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) as compared to boys. Noran et al. (1993) reported in a study on the psychological factors in English language learning that girls have higher positive attitude towards the language and a liking for it. However, Bandura's theory does not endow gender or gender beliefs with any genetic properties (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

**Table 1.** T-test showing differences between genders and school locations

Variables	n	Mean	SD	t value	df	P (two-tailed)
Girls	499	35.5	4.5	-2.7	842	0.006
Boys	646					
Urban school children	419	36.4	4.6	-3.9	842	0.000
Rural school children	727					

In the Malaysian setting, rural school children normally have lower self efficacy in the English language as compared to their counterparts in the city. This could be due to the environment which was described as having poor facilities for English teaching. There was also hardly any effort by school management to motivate their students to be proficient in the language (Noran et al., 1993). Parents in the rural areas were also to be blamed for this state of affairs. Respondents in this particular study reported that their parents did not speak English and hence did not give the children encouragement nor motivation as to the usefulness of learning the language. Peer groups who did not like English also affected these respondents' attitude towards English (Noran et al., 1993). This situation is in line with the theory that stated the home background is important especially in stimulating curiosity which helps build self efficacy and eventually instills confidence and competency. As seen in the school children in the rural areas, these background factors are sorely lacking.

The fourth objective of this study was to find out the differences between the ethnic groups in English language self efficacy.

From Tables 2 and 3 (post hoc Scheffe), it can be seen that there are significant differences between the ethnic groups in terms of self efficacy. On the other hand, results from Table 4 show that the Indians have higher means in all dimensions of self efficacy than the Malays or Chinese, and the Malays have higher means in all dimensions than the Chinese.

**Table 2.** ANOVA analysis of differences between ethnic groups in English language self efficacy

Dimensions	F	Sig.
Others' expectation	41.346	0.000
Academic achievement	26.155	0.000
Self regulated learning	38.393	0.000
Motivation self regulation	30.240	0.000
Extra curriculum activity	34.438	0.000
Self assertiveness	5.620	0.001

**Table 3.** Post hoc test (Scheffe)

Dimensions	Ethnic groups	Ethnic groups	Mean difference	Sig.
Others' expectation	Malays	Chinese	0.40087*	0.000
		Indians	-0.44456*	0.000
	Chinese	Malays	-0.40087*	0.000
		Indians	-0.84543*	0.000
	Indians	Malays	0.44456*	0.000
		Chinese	0.84543*	0.000
Academic achievement	Malays	Chinese	0.20014*	0.019
		Indians	-0.62898*	0.000
	Chinese	Malays	-0.20014*	0.025
		Indians	-0.62898*	0.019
	Indians	Malays	0.42884*	0.000
		Chinese	0.62898*	0.000
Self regulated learning	Malays	Chinese	0.47723*	0.000
		Indians	-0.29590*	0.001
	Chinese	Malays	-0.47723*	0.000
		Indians	-0.77312*	0.000
	Indians	Malays	0.29590*	0.001
		Chinese	0.77312*	0.000
Motivation self regulation	Malays	Chinese	0.46170*	0.000
		Indians	-0.16622	0.144
	Chinese	Malays	-0.46170*	0.000
		Indians	-0.62792*	0.000
	Indians	Malays	0.16622	0.144
		Chinese	0.62792*	0.000
Extra curriculum activity	Malays	Chinese	0.44592*	0.000
		Indians	-0.40319*	0.000
	Chinese	Malays	-0.44592*	0.000
		Indians	0.84912*	0.000
	Indians	Malays	0.40319*	0.000
		Chinese	0.84912*	0.000
Self assertiveness	Malays	Chinese	0.18459	0.154
		Indians	-0.09866	0.762
	Chinese	Malays	-0.18459	0.154
		Indians	-0.28325*	0.034
	Indians	Malays	0.09866	0.762
		Chinese	0.28325*	0.034

\* significant at 0.05 level

**Table 4.** Differences between ethnic groups in English language self efficacy

Dimensions	Malays		Chinese		Indians	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Others' expectation	4.66	0.94	4.26	0.96	5.10	0.95
Academic achievement	4.59	0.83	4.39	1.01	5.02	0.84
Self regulated learning	4.39	0.87	3.92	0.90	4.69	0.98
Motivation self regulation	4.55	0.87	4.09	0.93	4.72	0.90
Extra curriculum activity	3.96	1.07	3.52	1.12	4.37	0.96
Self assertiveness	4.53	1.19	4.34	1.05	4.63	1.20

The fact that Indian students have higher self efficacy compared to other ethnic groups is because 44.8 percent of the Indian students in the sample were from urban areas and 42 percent of the Malay students were also from urban areas as compared to the Chinese students. As stated earlier, the urban school children have higher self efficacy than their counterparts in the rural areas.

Correlational analysis shows that there are significant positive correlations between several dimensions of self efficacy and academic achievement in the English language. The dimensions include academic achievement efficacy ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), other expectancy beliefs ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) and self assertiveness ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). The perceptions that they have of their academic competence (academic self efficacy) has a positive effect on their English language achievement. This finding supported the study done by Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) that stated academic self efficacy influenced achievement directly ( $\beta = 0.21$ ) as well as indirectly raising students' grades ( $\beta = 0.36$ ). This means that when there is academic self efficacy or self perceptions of competence, the students succeed in their English language performance. As Bandura (1986) had stated the stronger the self efficacy, the more likely the students select challenging tasks, persist at them and perform them successfully. The positive correlation between other expectancy beliefs and English language performance simply strengthen the fact when students perceive they have competence in their knowledge, beliefs and feelings about their capabilities plus their expectation of success (Boekaerts, 1991) they will show improvement in the performance of the English language. Self assertiveness is associated with high self efficacy. Therefore when there is high self efficacy, it influences the academic persistence and this is necessary to maintain high academic achievement (Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1984, 1986). This explains the positive correlation between self assertiveness and English language achievement in this study. In summary, again as had been said earlier, the key element is the beliefs the students have of themselves and this will lead to confidence and competence in doing the task.

## **CONCLUSION**

Research has indicated that self efficacy correlates with achievement outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1995). Students with high self efficacy often display greater performance comparatively to those with low efficacy. Self efficacy is also equated with self competence, hence significant authorities such as parents and teachers who exert great influences should play their role efficiently in enhancing this self competence and eventually self efficacy for it has great bearings in achievement, be it in the English language or any other subjects.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The study has resulted on several suggestions as follows:

1. If self efficacy can be ascertained in determining good performance and the relationship can be reciprocal, then educational efforts, teacher practices and teaching strategies should be aimed at enhancing self efficacy to increase competence.
2. Teachers should provide students with challenging tasks and meaningful activities to increase motivation and their efforts should be supported and encouraged to help ensure self confidence and eventually self efficacy.
3. One of the dimensions of self efficacy is self regulatory processes which should be utilized in making decisions automatic and be exercised unconsciously. Teachers should endeavor to instill in the students this self regulatory process so that it will become habits. Once it becomes habits of thinking, these beliefs in personal competence will serve them throughout their lives.
4. Students learn from peers by observing them. Teachers should take this as a platform to select peers for classroom models. Students can actively engage themselves by observing their peers making errors, coping behaviour and verbalize emotive statements reflecting low confidence and achievement (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). In this way, low achieving students can view themselves as comparable in learning ability as their models and hence achieve self efficacy and greater achievement.
5. Teachers should pay attention not only on actual competence of students but also their perceptions of competence for these perceptions may accurately predict students' motivation and future success (Hackett, 1995).

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