

**EFFECTS OF EFFORT PRAISE ON SELF-
EFFICACY, GROWTH MINDSET AND ENGLISH-
SPEAKING PROFICIENCY FOR A STUDENT
WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTY IN AN AFTER-
SCHOOL LANGUAGE ENRICHMENT CLASS**

WANG HAO

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

WANG HAO

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
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Master of Arts**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UDL	Universal Design for Learning

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Self-Efficacy and Growth Mindset scale for students
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**KESAN PUJIAN ATAS USAHA TERHADAP EFIKASI KENDIRI,
PERKEMBANGAN MINDA DAN KEBOLEHAN BERBAHASA INGGERIS
UNTUK MURID BERMASALAH PEMBELAJARAN DALAM KELAS
PENGAYAAN BAHASA SELEPAS WAKTU SEKOLAH**

ABSTRAK

Murid bermasalah pembelajaran dalam kajian ini merujuk kepada murid yang mempunyai tingkah laku gelisah, menggeliat, gelisah, duduk diam bermasalah dan melanggar peraturan di dalam kelas. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat bagaimana pujian usaha memberi kesan terhadap efikasi sendiri, minda, dan penguasaan berbahasa Inggeris seseorang murid bermasalah pembelajaran. Reka bentuk kajian kes tunggal kaedah campuran digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Soal selidik dan skala kajian telah digunakan untuk penyelidikan kuantitatif, manakala temu bual digunakan dalam penyelidikan kualitatif. Kajian ini terdiri daripada dua fasa. Fasa 1 menyiasat efikasi sendiri, minda dan keupayaan bahasa Inggeris kedua-dua murid tanpa masalah pembelajaran dan dengan kesukaran belajar untuk meneroka jurang yang mungkin. Fasa 2 menyiasat kesan penggunaan pujian usaha dalam program selepas sekolah Bahasa Inggeris ke atas efikasi sendiri, minda pertumbuhan dan kecekapan berbahasa Inggeris, menggunakan kedua-dua data kuantitatif dan kaedah kualitatif. Dalam kajian ini, seorang murid bermasalah pembelajaran berumur 10 tahun telah pun dipilih untuk kajian menggunakan persampelan bertujuan dan intervensi pujian usaha telah ditetapkan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tahap efikasi sendiri, pertumbuhan minda dan kebolehan bahasa Inggeris murid tanpa masalah pembelajaran adalah lebih tinggi berbanding murid bermasalah pembelajaran. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan penilaian usaha memainkan peranan penting untuk membantu murid bermasalah

pembelajaran meningkatkan efikasi sendiri, minda pertumbuhan dan kecekapan berbahasa Inggeris. Dapatan kajian ini menyokong penggunaan pujian usaha untuk meningkatkan tingkah laku dan prestasi murid bermasalah pembelajaran.

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ABSTRACT

The students with learning difficulties in this study refers to those students with the behaviour of fidgeting, squirming, restless, sitting still trouble and rules breaking in class. This study aimed to investigate how the effort praise effect the self-efficacy, growth mindset, and speaking English proficiency of a student with learning difficulty. A mixed-method, single-case study design was used for data collection. Research questionnaires and scales were adopted for quantitative research, while interviews were utilized in the qualitative research. The study consisted of two phases. Phase 1 investigated self-efficacy, growth mindset and English ability of both the students without learning difficulties and with learning difficulty to explore the possible gaps. Phase 2 investigated the effect of using effort praise in an English after-school program on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency, utilizing both quantitative data and qualitative methods. In this study, one 10-year-old student with learning difficulty has already been selected for the study using purposive sampling and effort praise intervention has been set. The findings showed the levels of self-efficacy, growth mind and English ability of students without learning difficulties are higher than those of students with learning difficulties. The findings also showed effort appraise plays an important role to help student with learning difficulty improve their self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency. Overall, the findings supported the use of effort praise to improve the behaviour and performance of

students with learning difficulties.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The latest survey of mental disorders in children and adolescents in China, published in October 2021 by Global Time, sheds light on a growing concern that has emerged from almost a decade of scientific research. This extensive study, involving over 730,000 children aged 6-16 years, has revealed alarming statistics: 17.5% of children in China are grappling with various mental and learning conditions, including diagnosed and undiagnosed learning difficulties. Among these struggling children, 6.4% are dealing with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, 3.6% with anxiety, and 2.0% with major depressive disorder. These findings highlight a pressing issue within the educational landscape, emphasizing the urgent need for objective interventions and support mechanisms to address the challenges faced by Chinese students who have learning difficulties in China.

Traditionally, The learning difficulty is similar with the idea of unexpected underachievement (Wood & Olson, 2001). To be specific, learning difficulty means that even though the students have sufficient opportunity to learn, they cannot listen, speak, read, write, or acquire specific skills or concepts well matching with their potential capability(Wood & Olson, 2001). Students with learning difficulties may include those who are featured with sitting behaviour problem, mild autism, mild retardation, depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and other learning difficulties. Many students with learning difficult may have behaviour problems, which are patterns of situationally appropriate behaviour that deflected substantially from appropriate behaviour to one's age and pronouncedly effect their learning course, personal adjustment or interpersonal relationships, or t of the students (Sasikala, 2023).

All students are unique. They are continued to learn and can be capable, resilient, self-assured and confident, including those students with learning difficulty (Early Years Matters, 2007). There are no two identical students with learning difficulties, But they share some common characteristics that they are experiencing as the result of learning difficulty, such as poor emotional regulations, negative emotions, lagging behind in academic performance, feelings of frustration and anger due to poor communication skills, having difficulties in making friends, playing and working quietly, attention and focusing problems, impulsive behaviour, hyperactivity, cognitive problems, low level of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Early Years Matters, 2007).

Students with learning difficulties often have low level of self-efficacy and think that their previous learning experiences influence their learning performance in the future. Helping students with learning difficulties to possess a growth mindset can assist them in multiple aspects, by raising their self-efficacy and their self-advocated ability for their own demands (Rhew, 2016). Students with learning difficulties often encounter setbacks with their self-efficacy and academic ability, (Yeung, 2001). It will become more evident when they are transferring to a higher grades in the school, in which they are encountering more pressure and may become more worried about the large number of homework they are expected to finish with higher requirement and expectation from their teachers and parents (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006). Those students possibly have the feeling that they are facing many restriction because of the academic challenges. A lower self-efficacy may influence their learning attitude and strategy in the school, as they probably possess a fixed mindset with which they think they are incapable to acquire new knowledge and skills (Dweck, 2006).

It is supposed that implementing a positive mindset intervention to the students

with learning difficulties will help them to increase their self-efficacy, growth mindset and academic performance. The reason is that many students with learning difficulties may encounter more than their counterparts and can have a fixed mindset, which will lead them to consider they are incapable to acquire beliefs that they have struggled with previously (Hojati & Abassi, 2013). One common hindrance is that students with learning difficulties may believe that they are incapable to handle certain tasks and thus it is possible that fostering a growth mindset will assist them to improve the self-efficacy and make more academical achievements.

Self-efficacy is defined as an person's concept in student's capability to necessary exhibit behaviours to produce certain learning performances (Bandura, 1977). Learning self-efficacy, the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills or the mastery of material are all interconnected and play vital roles in the educational process. Talent and previous practices impact students' primary concepts in regard to their learning abilities. When students who have already performed well in a specific field, They are more likely to believe that they have the ability to continue to learn; while students having suffering from difficulties maybe doubtful about their capability. Studying students with low, average, and high math ability, Collins (1982) figured out that students within each math abilities level shown low and high math self-efficacy. One remarkable observation is that regardless of their abilities, Students possess a lower tendency to rework the problems they could not solve, contribute to negative learning.

Students with learning difficulties often possess low level of self-efficacy. They are more probably to get suspensions, detentions, and poor scores. They also possibly have poor communication skills and may be rejected by their peers due to their poor control of executive function (Sasikala, 2023). It is common that they

frequently struggle to meet the expectations placed on them and manifested their struggle, first as externalized behavioural problems and later as internalized self-efficacy problems.

When confronted with the challenges of learning, students with learning difficulties often exhibit emotions such as negativity, anger, and aggression (Sasikala, 2023). These individuals may tend to act impulsively, struggling with executive functioning and the internal regulation of their behaviour. At home, maintaining focus, even during leisure activities like watching television, can be problematic for them (Sasikala, 2023). In the classroom, these students may frequently breach established norms by interrupting their teachers. This behaviour can lead parents and teachers to lose patience, become frustrated, and attempt to criticize or "correct" the students' conduct. Consequently, students facing learning difficulties may internalize these reactions, contributing to a heightened sense of frustration and a negative perception of self-efficacy.

Consequently, they experience diminished self-efficacy, believing that their current academic struggles will inevitably shape their future achievements. This is closely associated with the representation of a fixed mindset postulated by Dweck (2006). Fixed mindset is a belief that people take their fundamental qualities, including their aptitude or intelligence as simply fixed features. It cost them much time to document their aptitude or intelligence instead of developing them. A person with fixed mindset usually keeps away from challenges in his life, withdraws easily, and becomes threatened and intimidated by others' success (Dweck, 2006). The reason is that person with a fixed mindset fail to consider aptitude and intelligence as something can be improved. In contrast, people who possess a growth mindset believe aptitude and intelligence can be enhanced (Dweck, 2006).

Compared with the fixed mindset, Growth mindset means students believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work and brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.” (Dweck, 2015)

In this study, it is perceived that students’ growth mindset is influenced by their self-efficacy and more specifically, how they find the meanings in their own or others’ behaviour. From Dweck’s (2006) postulation, it is possible to imagine that when a student with learning difficulty has a fixed mindset, it will lead to an adverse influence on his learning, especially when he is learning a tough task, such as learning a foreign language. Dweck (2006) depict the students with a fixed mindset think that aptitude or intelligence is constant and unchangeable. A fixed mindset negatively implies that students consider they can do nothing to change their aptitude or intelligence (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). However, students with a growth mindset can grow from mistakes and think that aptitude or intelligence can develop by learning and perseverance. Student’s growth mindset is important because it can give insight into how students learn in the school. It shows that growth mindset is related to academic achievement, and a great deal of other emotional and social factors, making students more confident (Maata & Jarvela, 2013). Besides, student’s growth mindset can restrict or reinforce their capability to attempt new skills in their learning. A correlation is found between a student’s concept and growth mindset in their capability to alter individual characteristics in every aspects of their daily lives (Barnes & Fives, 2016). The academic achievement here means the extent to which a student has achieved either short or long term educational goals. Achievement may be measured through students’ grade point average, whereas for institutions, achievement may be measured through graduation rates.

Hence, developing a growth mindset among students with learning difficulties is crucial (Rhew, 2005). This initiative is crucial for students with learning difficulties because it may display weaker self-regulatory skills and conceal lower self-efficacy beliefs compared to their counterparts without learning difficulties. This is because low prospect are usually placed on students with learning difficulties. What's worse, students with learning difficulties confront constant setbacks in school and possibly start to make these struggles internalized as they cultivate a fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006). If a student somehow feels a sense of inferior or incapable because of the societal stereotypes regarding learned helplessness or disability, it will impose adverse influences on students' confidence and performance (Garwood 2019). These struggles may stem from internalizing a series of setbacks, frustrations, challenging social interactions, reinforcing the need to help them believe in themselves and see their potential by providing specific support and encouragement.

According to Muradoglu et al. (2022), the growth mindset in children can be assessed using two concepts, namely (1) instability and (2) malleability. The 'instability of ability' refers to the concepts that our abilities and skills are not fixed or static but can change over time due to different factors. In the context of a growth mindset, children who believe in 'instability of ability' perceive that their abilities and others' abilities can develop with continuous effort, practice and learning. This stands in contrast to a fixed mindset where they are prone to believe that their capabilities are inherent and cannot be improved. The 'malleability of ability' emphasizes the idea that abilities are flexible and can be moulded or shaped through deliberate effort and learning. Children who believe in "malleability of ability" view their skills as something that can be improved, reshaped, and expanded with continuous dedication and hard work. This contrasts with a fixed mindset where they may believe that their

capabilities are predetermined and cannot be varied significantly.

As one of the language skills which include listening, speaking, reading and writing, speaking is the expression tool by which student can exchange with each other's to receive information or to deliver their viewpoints, intensions, opinions and hopes. Additionally, in most of the situations, speaking skill is the most frequently used compared with other language skills in our daily life. Improving speaking skills is one of critical importance for EFL learners. In China, learning speaking English is becoming popular because of globalization. However, due to the lack of exposure, learning speaking English is very challenging for all learners, including those students with learning difficulties. Learning speaking English require attention to the vocabulary, intonation, and slang of conversing in English, which can be a big challenge for students with learning difficulties because of the lack of attention. Very often, these students will avoid in participating in learning and show negative behaviours, such as running away or lying down on the desk. English-speaking comprises of several sub-skills, including fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (English BINUS University, 2018).

Fluency is about how comfortable and confident students are in speaking English. It is also about showing a clear connection between each point that you are trying to make. This skill means that the listener can follow what you are saying and does not get lost. Vocabulary skill means that students can express his mind using appropriated words. Being a good speaker means constantly growing you're vocabulary. The more interesting words you know, the stronger your speaking skills. Grammar skill means students understand the language and put thoughts into sentences building connected sentences that flow together naturally and using appropriate tenses and verb forms to indicate time and place. Pronunciation skill include: word and

sentence stress, intonation, rhythm and the use of the individual sounds of a language. Therefore, many students in China face difficulties in mastering these skills, especially students with learning difficulties.

It is a powerful way to praise students when they are learning. Which fosters students' learning motivation, beliefs and behaviours. Studies have revealed that when students receive praises in their learning process such as "your ability has improved or you did this so well", they realize the significance of hard work and practice and they are probably to confront difficulties, and achieve more success finally compared with those who receive praise about their ability or result of learning such as "you are talent or you got a perfect score". One system of the influence of these varied praise methods on learning courses are through the effect on students' growth mindset. Students who received praise for their ability or learning result were more possibly to consider that capability was immutable and predetermined regarded as fixed mindset, whereas students receiving praise for their hard working in learning programme were prone to believe that they could develop their capabilities which regarded as a growth mindset. In turn, these two mindset type influence students' learning resilience and behaviours (Yeager & Dweck 2012). Moreover, study has presented that praise for learning outcome or intelligence negatively influence student' confidence while praise for hard working or learning process positively influences confidence (Muller & Dweck 1998).

Considering the significance of self-efficacy and having the right mindset in learning a difficult task such as learning speaking English in the context of China, in this study, it is postulated that a classroom instructional teaching strategy such as adopting 'effort praise' could provide a possible solution to encourage students with learning difficulties to participate more effectively in learning. Effort praise refers to the compliments that emphasizes the children's participation or endeavours. Examples

of effort praise are “You worked hard on that English homework – well done” and “You never gave up, even though it was challenging!” In this study, the effects of using effort praise to support students with learning difficulties in an after-school program in China were investigated. Specifically, we explored how effort praise influenced their self-efficacy, growth mindset, and English-speaking proficiency. Many students with learning difficulties struggle in mainstream educational settings that prioritize achievement without addressing individual differences and diverse needs. In big-size classes, teachers cannot spend more time with students with learning difficulties with classroom content or deal with discipline problems caused by these children (Huo, 2019). Alternatively, small-size class may be better for students with learning difficulties. As a result, many after-school programs are designed to offer small-class teaching and learning.

Creating classrooms emphasizing student efforts instead of their achievements are important to develop students’ growth mindset, both through teachers’ gestures and through the expression they use while giving feedback to the students (Brougham & Kashubeck, 2017). Using growth mindset teaching strategies is crucial for young students because they probably have a pre-conceived thought of what they can do from previous performance, and feedback received from their teachers and parents (Bedford, 2017). Bedford’s (2017) research figured out that possessing a growth mindset can positively influence student’s self-efficacy and their academic achievement.

These students often require tailored support and instructions, especially when they are learning a foreign language, such as English. Unfortunately, special educational services and supports are not universally mandated in Chinese public schools (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). This lack

of specialized assistance has widened the disparity between students with learning difficulties and their peers. By emphasizing the influences of effort praise on self-efficacy, growth mindset, and English-speaking proficiency on a case-study student with learning difficulty, this study aims to illuminate ways to better support these students within the Chinese educational context.

1.2 Background of Study

This study intends to figure out the effects of effort praise and self-efficacy, growth mindset, and English-speaking proficiency in a case-study student with learning difficulty in an after-school language enrichment class. For the background of study, it is significant to first comprehend the context of English study environment and after-school enrichment class in China, in which the research took place.

1.2.1 English Study in China

Obviously, English is the actual and even quasi-official first international language, as evidenced by the special importance government attaches to English language teaching. Chinese government issued the policy of a nine-year compulsory education in 1986, from primary school to junior secondary school (Chinese Government, 1998). Normally the students will take 5 to 6 years education courses in the primary school, while they need 3 to 4 years to finish the courses in junior secondary school. The local governments decided the final situation. The Chinese Ministry of Education requires that English course should be arranged in grade three and that primary school students have at least four English lessons per week During this nine-year period (Cheng 2002). In another policy paper, ‘Criteria for English Courses at the Compulsory Education Stage’, Chinese government divides English proficiency into nine levels. The second level is a graduation requirement for from

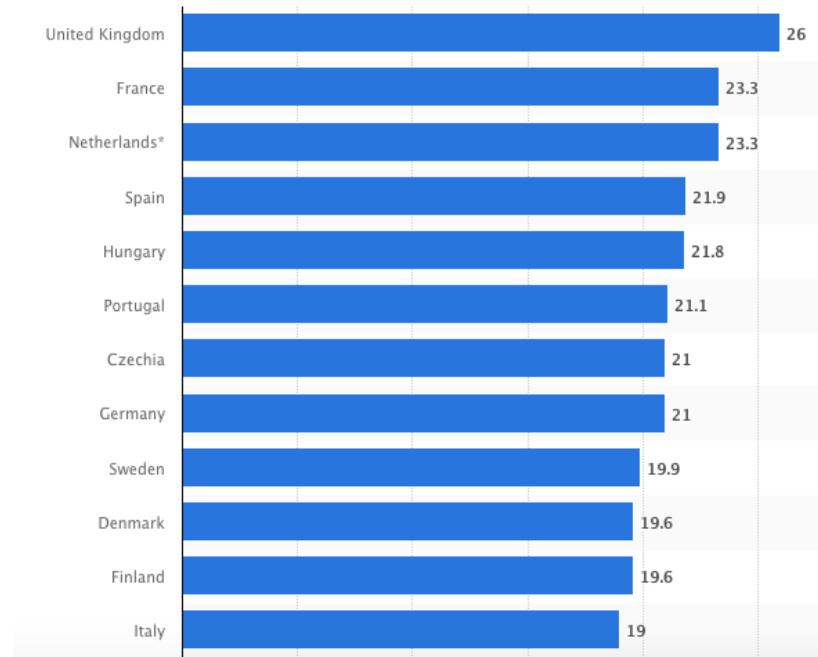
primary schools. Therefore, students in need of extra assistance in learning English would attend after-school language enrichment classes to improve their English proficiency, especially in the aspect of English-speaking.

1.2.2 Class Size in China

One major constraint in the education in China is the class size. Class size is measured by dividing the amount of students registered by the number of classes. In 2019, Most of schools in China for compulsory education kept expanding in size, but the class sizes remained same. The average class size for primary schools was 38 students, In primary schools, more than 10,000 large-sized classes with 56 or more students accounted for 3.9% of the total classes (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2018). In term of to the regulation of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the number of students in urban primary schools shall not exceed 45, but the actual number in public schools in China is often higher than 50, as projected in statistics above. For better illustration, the mean number of students in classes at each primary level class in the chosen European countries in the year of 2018 is illustrated in the following bar graph (Clark, 2020). Comparing with the Chinese class size, the European class size for primary students is just half the number. In China, normally each class lasts 45 minutes. Therefore, for English class, students have inadequate time to practice the Speaking English.

Figure 1.1

Class size in the European countries (Clark, 2020)



1.2.3 Advantages of After-school Enrichment class

For children of all ages, academics and learning is important to pathway for a successful future. As mentioned, it can be challenging for the teachers in school to teach according to everyone's learning styles, due to large class size (DREAM, 2020). No student is identical when it comes to how they learn, and it is difficult to find the best strategies that work for everyone, especially for students with learning difficulties in the mainstream schools (DREAM, 2020). Every student deserves to learn at his or her own pace. Therefore, it is beneficial for students with learning difficulties when they are given the opportunities to learn with additional supports to reduce the learning gaps with their peers (DREAM, 2020).

After-school intervention and enrichment class programs offer valuable support for students with learning difficulties. These programs, whether in small groups or one-on-one, cater to individual interests and learning capacities while incorporating enjoyable activities. They create a conducive learning environment and prioritize student-specific teaching methods. Smaller class sizes enable tutors to provide focused

attention, boosting the confidence of students with learning difficulties. Moreover, these programs help students develop essential skills like study habits, organization, and time management, which are beneficial for their future. Additionally, student-centered teaching methods with adaptable syllabi are common in after-school programs, allowing students to discover their optimal learning approaches.

Besides that, many after-school programs operate following the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring equal learning chances for each student. UDL principles shape inclusive curricula, resources, and assessments, catering to diverse learners, including those with learning difficulties (Katz, 2015). Specifically, UDL's principle of multiple means of expression emphasizes giving students assessment choices, enabling them to demonstrate their knowledge effectively while maintaining high academic standards. This approach aligns with positive reinforcement methods, fostering a learning-friendly environment that helps students to excel and engage confidently in their education.

One way to cultivate students' interest and motivation in learning involves positive reinforcement strategies, such as using effort praise. Effort praise plays a pivotal role in encouraging students with learning difficulties to persistently pursue their goals. By recognizing their efforts, these students can develop perseverance, dedication, and determination, enabling them to take risks, learn from mistakes, and overcome setbacks, even if they lag behind their peers. Effort praise aligns with the UDL framework, promoting an inclusive environment where every learner can thrive.

Through teachers' effective praising effects, students with learning difficulties could develop a growth mindset (Claro et al., 2016), a mindset which focusing on effort and perseverance, which would help them build confidence and take charge of

their own learning achievement. differentiated two types of praises, namely effort praise and ability praise. Effort praise refers to compliments that focus on the children's action, participation or endeavours (William, 2018). When we praise the students with "good helping" for helping clear up toys or "good singing" for singing a song, we are adopting effort praise. Even a simple "good job" is regarded as effort praise. On the other hand, ability praise refers to compliments that give a child fixed label (William, 2018). when we say, "big boy", "good girl" or "you're so smart", we are giving ability praise.

Previous mindset researchers found that effort praise from parents and teachers encouraged students more than ability praise (Dweck 2017). emphasizing the effort supports students with learning difficulties to understand learning methods they have used and how significant their efforts are, even though they make a mistakes. It helps them set up resilience and motivate them to fulfil their targets and not give up.

1.3 Problem Statement

As one of the language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing, speaking skill is the expression tool by which people can exchange with others to receive objective information or to express their opinions, viewpoints, purposes and hopes. Besides, people knowing a specific language are regarded as 'speakers' of the language. Additionally, As Rivers (1981) stated in most of situation, speaking skill is the most frequently used language skill which is used twice as much as reading and writing in our daily exchange. Learning speaking skills is crucial for EFL learners. Latest studies have taken oral communication as an critical element in forming of the student's developing language (Gass & Varionis, 1994).

Judging from the result of test performance in IELTS (2019), Chinese students

had better average score in the subtests of reading (score = 6.2) and writing (score = 5.5) compared to speaking (score = 5.4). It is also shown that the speaking score of Chinese students ranked the last place among the top 40 nations surveyed (IELTS, 2019). Hence, many after-school programs in China are focusing on improving English speaking skill. In general, The education system of China is not conducive to language learning, especially for speaking skills. Education requirements, standardized tests, classes in large sizes, , and It is difficult for teachers to concentrate on teaching students speaking English with limited class time. As a result, students have minimal opportunity to practice speaking English in schools.

In particular, students with learning difficulties are facing even more problems to acquire English language speaking in schools because of their attention problems, learning deficits, learning attitudes, and their mindsets. Very often, students with learning difficulties cannot concentrate in the classroom with the behaviours of walking around, sucking their finger and playing with toys. Some of them have pronunciation problem such as mispronouncing words such as “the” and “there”. Students with learning difficulties may also think the study is boring and they consider they have no ability to study English-speaking well.

They might have a fixed mindset and always have a negative attitude about learning English-speaking. In English-language classes, these challenges often manifest as frequent disruptions of classroom etiquette, with students with learning difficulties interrupting teachers, leading to a cycle of impatience, frustration, and corrective actions from parents and educators. Consequently, students with learning difficulties may internalize these reactions, resulting in a detrimental impact on their self-esteem and a pervasive sense of frustration.

However, despite the well-documented emotional challenges faced by students with learning difficulties, there is a noticeable disparity in the literature regarding the examination of mindset differences, specifically the distinction between fixed and growth mindsets, among students with learning difficulties and their counterparts. Therefore, It is urgent to address this disparity by investigating on how mindset orientations differ between these two groups of students.

Students with learning difficulties who acquire the English-speaking proficiency hard or perform poor in learning often require special care and instruction services (McCardlen et al., 2005). In China, special education services are yet to become commonplace. As a result, many students with learning difficulties, who require additional instruction in the academic learning of English language, are often enrolled by their parents in after-school English programs. These problems provide a rationale to look at whether using effort praise in an English after-school program to investigate how such a program could provide a case-study student with learning difficulty more encouragement and motivation in learning English-speaking, by helping the student enhance their self-efficacy and develop a growth mindset and confident in the process.

Pertaining to this, it is important to recognise that in Asian culture, we do not do a lot of praising. Little is known how effort praises could be used in teaching. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of effort praise on self-efficacy, growth mindset, and English-speaking proficiency scores among students with learning difficulties attending after-school language enrichment classes. By investigating the impact of effort praise, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into motivating and encouraging students with learning difficulties to enhance their English-speaking proficiency and confidence.

1.4 Aim

This study attempts to investigate the effects of effort praise on the changes of self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency in a case-study student with learning difficulty in an after-school language enrichment class.

1.5 Research Objectives

Phase 1: Before the effort praise intervention

1. To investigate the baseline scores of self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency of students without learning difficulties.
2. To investigate the baseline scores of self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency of a student with learning difficulty.
3. To find out the difference on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English ability between the student with learning difficulty and those without learning difficulty.

Phase 2: During and after the effort praise intervention

4. To examine the effect of effort praise on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency quantitatively.
5. To examine the effect of effort praise on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency qualitatively.

1.6 Research Questions

Phase 1: Before the effort praise intervention

1. What are the baseline scores of the self-efficacy, growth mindset and

English-ability of students without learning difficulties?

2. What are the baseline scores of the self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-ability of one student with learning difficulty?

3. What is the difference on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English ability between the student with learning difficulty and those without learning difficulty.

Phase 2: During and after the effort praise intervention

4. What is the effect of effort praise on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency, as shown quantitatively?

5. How does effort praise affect self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency, as shown qualitatively?

1.7 Significance of Study

Students with learning difficulties can exhibit features like a lower level of self-efficacy and a fixed mindset. Using the effort praise for students to change their thinking pattern will help them personally and academically. The major contribution of this study is to figure out a better approach to assist the students to improve their English speaking proficiency, especially for the students with learning difficulties. In addition, this study explores the use of effort praise in an Asian context and recommend the teachers and parents to use the effort praise to encourage the students instead of ability praise. Finally, this study explores the evidence that the effort praise can contribute to the advancement of growth mindset in a student with learning difficulty, characterized by learning difficulty.

1.8 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is limited in several aspects. Firstly, it is limited to a single case study involving a student enrolled in an after-school program, which hampers the generalizability of the results to all students in China. Secondly, the study exclusively focuses on a student with learning difficulty, preventing the findings from being generalized to other students facing similar challenges or exhibiting challenging behaviours. Additionally, the conclusions drawn are specific to a 10-year-old child, and thus, cannot be extended to younger or older students. Furthermore, since the student in the case study does not have cognitive problems, the findings cannot be generalized to students with cognitive impairments. These limitations define the scope of the study and its applicability to broader student populations.

1.9 Operational Definitions

1.9.1 Effort Praise

Effort praise refers to compliments that focus on children's actions, participation or endeavours (William 2018). In this study, effort praise refers to using specific praise words for recognition and encouragement behind a specific behaviour or improvement of student with learning difficulty, such as "Well done! Thanks for your effort and participation. You all sang a nice song." and "I can see the improvement you're making in concentration ."

1.9.2 English-speaking Proficiency

English-speaking proficiency is defined as the skills is one of the language skills including listening, speaking reading and writing. It is the expression tool by which people can exchange with others to obtain objective information or to express their opinions, viewpoints, purposes and hopes (Rivers 1981). In this study, English-

speaking proficiency refers to the skills that students have to transmit information verbally and, to some extent, that their expression can be understood by the listener. It is evaluated by four sub-skills, including fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

1.9.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a belief initiated by Albert Bandura, a Canadian-American psychologist, refers to an person's idea in their ability to carry out necessary action or behaviours to attain specific academic achievement. In this study, It refers to the student's belief that he has the ability to learn English-speaking well through his effort.

1.9.4 Mindset

Mindset refers to a series of thoughts and beliefs which constitute the disposition, habit, mental attitude or inclination that determines in advance an individual's understandings and reactions to various circumstances and situations. In this study, mindset refers to the collection of thoughts and beliefs that shape the student's habits through the use of two growth mindset measures - 'instability of ability' and 'malleability of ability' developed by Muradoglu et al. (2022). The concept of the "instability of ability" pertains to the notion that our abilities and skills are not inherently fixed or unchanging, but rather subject to fluctuation throughout time as a result of diverse causes. The concept of "malleability of ability" underscores the notion that abilities possess a certain degree of flexibility and may be altered or influenced by intentional exertion and educational endeavours.

1.9.5 Students with learning difficulties

Students with learning difficulties refers to those students who cannot listen, speak, read, write, or learn specific skills matching with their potential, even if they

have adequate chances to learn (Fletcher, 2001). In this study, students with learning difficulties refers to those who experienced repeated frustration and failures, poor social skills and lower levels of learning achievements. Specifically, in this study, the case study student is one with the condition of learning difficulty, manifested as fidgeting, squirming, restless behaviour, sitting still trouble and rules breaking in class.

1.9.6 After-school Language Enrichment Classes

After-school language enrichment classes refers to offer better learning environment and student-oriented teaching method which focus on the learning needs of student with services in small groups which are less than 12 students in one class or one-to-one. In this study, after-school language enrichment class refers to an institution which offers the English-speaking skill enrichment classservice for students aged from 3 to 12 years old in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

1.10 Conclusion

The introductory chapter of the study begins with a brief introduction on the study background, which includes the speaking learning environment for Chinese primary students with learning difficulties as well as how the advantage of after-school enrichment class helps the students with learning difficulties improve their performance. It is followed with the statement of the problem that described the reason why the Chinese students with learning difficulties are bad at the speaking English. After that, the research objectives and research questions were indicated, the significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definition of terms were mentioned at the end of this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Self-efficacy and growth mindsets are an hot topic recently in education field. Many studies have explored the effort praise that to develop the self-efficacy and a growth mindset in enhancing the social skill and academic performance in students' learning process and overall perceptions on their behaviours and capabilities changes. Nevertheless, previous studies on the application of enhancing the level of self-efficacy and growth mindset in students with learning difficulties is limited. This chapter contains a review of selected literature and research findings about improving the self-efficacy and a growth mindset by effort praise in students with learning difficulty.

2.2 Effort Praise

In terms of the teaching–feedback loop, It contains praise to the students when they work hard and perform correctly. Over the past years, the nature of the effort praise has been evaluated and seen to affect students' learning motivation and attribution for success. Psychological studies show that effort praise for a student's does not work similar to ability praise. Effort praise develops students' self-efficacy due to it deliver a strong signal of individual's capability when it is paired with success.

It has been found that different types of praise influence self-efficacy, growth mindset and performance. Students receiving praise for their aptitude or intelligence is prone to exhibit a fixed mindset and ascribe their success to their aptitude, whereas students receiving praise for their endeavours are prone to have a growth mindset and attribute their achievements to endeavours (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Students

perceiving aptitude and intelligence with a fixed mindset possibly feel less interest in challenging problems, whereas students with a growth mindset probably regard the challenge as a motivation resource. More studies support students praised for aptitude and intelligence have a falling performance (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Praise is normally applied to encourage students in learning (Brophy, 1981). It is has been found that effort praise best cultivate adaptive achievement responses among different types of praise. Students receiving effort praise tended to exhibit more positive and challenge seeking than those students receiving other kinds of praise. For instance, in many researches, Mueller and Dweck (1998) noticed that effort praise (i.e., “You must have worked hard to solve this problem.”) yielded more positive effect for students’ performance, persistence and task enjoyment than ability. (i.e., “You are a talent to solve this problem.”). Likewise, Kamins and Dweck (1999) noticed that faced with obstacles, students exhibit less helpless reactions on self-evaluation and persistence after effort praise than ability praise. The positive impacts of effort praise are most possibly because of the effort attribution mechanism. (Weiner, 1985). Effort praise motivates children to credit their learning outcomes to endeavour, which is regarded an internal and controllable factor. It reveals a signal to students that they are able to remedy a unsuccessful situation and take charge of their learning performance. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore the effects of effort praise on self-efficacy, growth mindset and English-speaking proficiency.

2.2.1 Ability Praise and Effort Praise

Ability praise that emphasizes students’ ability connects their feeling of self-worth the feedback they receive when it becomes positive, they experience good feeling about themselves. However, they embrace bad feeling when it becomes negative, This makes them sensitive after they are in struggle with an obstacle. When

making mistakes, they may think they are not good or clever, which leading to the feeling of helpless. They think nothing can be done to fix the situation and they frequently feel bad about themselves, have negative emotions, and want to give up the mission. They keep fixated on mistakes and often continue to perform badly.

On the contrary, effort praise that focus on students' effort or endeavour tends more to lead to resilient reactions after negative feedback or failure. Effort praise refers to the positive reinforcement given to someone for the amount of effort they put into a task, rather than for the inherent qualities or talent they display. This type of praise emphasizes hard work, perseverance, and the process of striving toward a goal, rather than just the end result or natural ability (Dweck, 2006). Students can still have positive emotions even after making mistakes for their value as an individual has not been questioned. It is unnecessary to feel bad about themselves, The reason is that the mistake was caused the endeavour or other factors they can take control of. They learn from the mistake that more endeavour may be needed, so they can just try to work harder next time. Or that a new method is needed, so they will try something different or seek help from a teacher to solve the problem if necessary. Usually these students are more willing to retry again and spend more effort. They often can recovery from setbacks and achieve better result next time.

Table 2.1

Difference expressions between the ability-praise and effort-praise

Instead of Saying (ability-praise)	Try Saying (effort-praise)
"You're so smart!"	"Great job showing your work on your homework. What a great improvement from yesterday!"