

A Study of English Self-Efficacy among Art Majors Students

Shuhong Li, Xiaoling Zhou

College of Foreign Studies, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China

Email: lishuhong98@163.com

How to cite this paper: Li, S. H., & Zhou, X. L. (2022). A Study of English Self-Efficacy among Art Majors Students. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 10, 283-293. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2022.1011020>

Received: September 24, 2022

Accepted: October 18, 2022

Published: October 21, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

While self-efficacy has been investigated actively within the field of education, there is a current dearth of research on the English self-efficacy of art major students in the Chinese context. The present investigation aimed to explore the overall situation of English learning self-efficacy, the differences of art students by type of college and gender in English self-efficacy. The study was conducted by using mix-method with 211 participants. The research found that art students' English learning self-efficacy is generally at the middle level, with the highest sense of behavior processing and the lowest sense of behavioral competence judgment. There was no significant difference in the type of college, but there was a significant difference in gender. This study thus provides empirical evidence that a more thorough consideration of strategies for improving English self-efficacy in art major students is needed.

Keywords

Art Major, English, Self-Efficacy

1. Introduction

Chinese official documents *The Guide to Teaching English in Universities* (Guidance Committee on College Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education Institutions of the Ministry of Education, 2020) points out that universities are encouraged to offer English for Specific purposes (ESP) courses with professional characteristics based on needs analysis. However, as a special group in higher education institutions, the English learning situation of college students majoring in art has received limited attention. Therefore, in the context of the "new liberal arts", it is meaningful to investigate the current situation of art majors' English self-efficacy in order to improve teaching effectiveness.

This paper is organized as follows. First, literature review is presented. Then,

research design is introduced. Third, data analysis is presented. Later, analysis of the current situation of English learning self-efficacy among art major students is displayed. Finally, measures to enhance English self-efficacy among art majors are introduced.

2. Literature Review

English self-efficacy refers to learners' perceptions of their ability to master the learning skills required for knowledge of the English language subject (Zhang & Zhang, 2018), which can be further divided into sense of goal confidence, sense of behavioral competence judgment, and sense of behavioral processing judgment (Li et al., 2006). Self-efficacy can be affected by performance accomplishment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, emotional arousal, the experience of repeated failure (Bandura, 1977), attributions (Wang et al., 2007), efficacy judgment (Bandura, 1986) and metacognitive strategies (Zhang, 2004).

The degree of self-efficacy affects learners' learning performance. The higher the self-efficacy, the better the students' English learning performance (Deng & Huang, 2013). While self-efficacy has been investigated actively within the field of education, involving students from science major (Betz & Hackett, 1983), liberal arts major (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011) and sports major (Hu & Ye, 2017), there is a current dearth of research on the English self-efficacy of art major students in the Chinese context. This study was designed with the hope to shed light on paying attention to cultivating art major students' English self-efficacy. Based on this, the following research questions were designed:

- 1) What is the overall situation of English learning self-efficacy among art major students?
- 2) Is there any difference in English self-efficacy between art college and non-art college?
- 3) Are there any differences in English learning self-efficacy among art major students in terms of gender?

3. Research Design

The research design of the study was presented as follows, including research method, questionnaire and research subject.

3.1. Research Method

Quantitative studies aim to collect and generalize numerical data or interpret particular phenomena across groups (Muijs, 2010), with a broad range of exploration. For the purpose of obtaining in-depth data and factual information, the study adopts a mixed-methods, with more focus on quantitative study by collecting questionnaires than on qualitative research by conducting interviews.

3.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes two parts. The first part was demographic variables,

including students' gender and university. The second part was an English learning self-efficacy scale adapted from Li (2006), with a test alpha coefficient of 0.8367 (>0.8) for high reliability. The scale contains three major dimensions, namely, *sense of goal confidence*, *sense of behavioral competence judgment*, and *sense of behavioral processing judgment*. There are 17 items in total, using a five-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the stronger the students' English learning self-efficacy, and vice versa.

3.3. Research Subject

First, a stratified random sampling method was used to conduct a questionnaire survey on college art major students. Considering the differences of school type and gender are involved in this study, combined with the fact that art colleges and male art students account for a relatively small proportion, the distribution of questionnaires to art colleges and non-art colleges, and male and female students was typically stratified to prevent skewed data distribution. The sample came from six colleges in China, two of which were art colleges and four of which were non-art colleges. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed and 250 were recollected, of which 211 were valid.

Second, based on the questionnaires, four students were stratified and selected for interviews, including one male and one female student from each of the art colleges and one male and one female student from each of the non-art colleges.

4. Data Analysis

The following part presents the data of the study based on the respondents' feedback.

4.1. Overall Situation of English Learning Self-Efficacy

The purpose of the section is to answer research question one "what is the overall situation of English learning self-efficacy among art major students?" The results of the descriptive statistics of English learning self-efficacy and its sub-dimensions of the 211 participants are shown in Table 1.

From the above table, it is clear that the overall *English learning self-efficacy* of art majors is at a moderate level ($M = 2.91$, $2.5 \leq M \leq 3.4$). In terms of the three sub-dimensions of self-efficacy, the mean ranges from 2.86 to 2.96, with

Table 1. Overall situation of English learning self-efficacy.

Dimensions	M	SD
Sense of Goal Confidence	2.92	0.92
Sense of Behavioral Competence Judgment	2.86	0.84
Sense of Behavioral Processing Judgment	2.96	0.77
English Learning Self-efficacy	2.91	0.79

the highest *sense of behavioral processing judgment* ($M = 2.96$) and the lowest *sense of behavioral competence judgment* ($M = 2.86$).

4.2. Differences in Self-Efficacy of Art Students by Type of College

Research question two “is there any difference in English self-efficacy between art college and non-art college?” will be answered below. The participants were divided into two groups, art college and non-art college. Independent sample t-test was conducted on the samples in terms of self-efficacy and its three sub-dimensions, the statistical results are shown in **Table 2**.

As shown in **Table 2**, overall, the difference in self-efficacy between art students in art colleges and non-art colleges did not reach a significant level ($p > 0.05$), and the differences were close to small effect ($d = 0.17$, close to 0.2) (Cohen, 1988). Art students from art colleges scored higher than those from non-art colleges. For each sub-dimension, there was no significant difference between art students from art colleges and non-art colleges on the *sense of goal confidence*, *sense of behavioral competence judgment* and *sense of behavioral processing judgment*. However, art students from art colleges scored higher on these three sub-dimensions, and the difference was close to the small effect ($d = 0.18$, $d = 0.24$, close to 0.20) for all sub-dimensions except *sense of behavioral processing judgment* ($d = 0.05$).

4.3. Gender Differences in Self-Efficacy of Art Students

In the following, research question three “are there any differences in English learning self-efficacy among art major students in terms of gender?” will be answered. The study participants were divided into two groups of male and female. Independent sample t-test was conducted in terms of English learning self-efficacy and its three sub-dimensions. The results are shown in **Table 3**.

As shown in **Table 3**, in general, the differences in *English learning self-efficacy* between male and female students reached significant levels ($p < 0.05$), with the difference slightly greater than the small effect ($d = 0.3$, higher than 0.2) (Cohen, 1988). That is, there were significant differences in *English learning self-efficacy* between male and female students with small effect. Compared with female

Table 2. Differences in self-efficacy of art students by type of college.

	Art College		Non-art College		t	d (Effect Size)
	M	SD	M	SD		
English Learning Self-efficacy	3.02	0.77	2.89	0.79	0.946	0.17
Sense of Goal Confidence	3.05	0.91	2.89	0.92	0.994	0.18
Sense of Behavioral Competence Judgment	3.03	0.81	2.83	0.84	1.35	0.24
Sense of Behavioral Processing Judgment	2.99	0.74	2.95	0.77	0.30	0.05

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

Table 3. Gender differences in self-efficacy of art students.

	Male		Female		t	d (Effect Size)
	M	SD	M	SD		
English Learning Self-efficacy	3.07	0.92	2.82	0.69	2.037*	0.30
Sense of Goal Confidence	3.09	1.05	2.82	0.82	1.907	0.28
Sense of Behavioral Competence Judgment	3.05	0.95	2.76	0.74	2.344*	0.35
Sense of Behavioral Processing Judgment	3.07	0.91	2.89	0.66	1.52	0.23

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

students, male students' self-efficacy scored higher in each sub-dimension. In detail, there were higher levels of *sense of goal confidence*, *sense of behavioral competence judgment* and *sense of behavioral processing judgment* among male students than among female students, where the differences in *sense of goal confidence* and *sense of behavioral processing judgment* between male and female students did not reach a significant level ($p > 0.05$) but close to small effect ($d = 0.28$, $d = 0.23$, close to 0.2) (Cohen, 1988). The differences in *sense of behavioral competence judgment* reached a significant level ($p < 0.05$) and greater than the small effect ($d = 0.35$, higher than 0.2) (Cohen, 1988).

5. Analysis of the Current Situation of English Learning Self-Efficacy among Art Major Students

According to the data, the analysis of the situation of English learning self-efficacy among art major students are presented below.

5.1. Analysis of the Overall Situation

In general, the English learning self-efficacy of art majors' college students is at a moderate level ($M = 2.91$), which are somewhat similar to the study of Deng et al. (2013). In detail, among the three aspects of self-efficacy, students have the highest *sense of behavioral processing judgment* ($M = 2.96$) and the weakest sense of *behavioral competence judgment* ($M = 2.86$).

Possible reasons for it are as follows: first, various objective and subjective reasons caused the moderate English self-efficacy of art major students. On the one hand, the experience of repeated failure at the beginning of the stage might be more likely to reduce learners' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Since they need to spend a lot of time studying art major courses in high school, the many problems that art students encounter at the beginning of the stage weaken English self-efficacy when they have limited time to learn English. On the other hand, motivation is related to self-efficacy. Chinese non-English college students learn English not mainly for intrinsic motivation (e.g., passion for English) but more for extrinsic motivation (e.g., exams and job hunting) (Wang et al., 2007). Besides, English is not a major subject. Consequently, some students do not realize the importance of learning English for employment. For example, in the inter-

view, a student mentioned, “if I could clearly realize that learning English is useful for my job in class, I might be more motivated to learn English”.

Second, metacognitive strategies were positively correlated with self-efficacy (Zhang, 2004). Benefiting from teachers’ training in metacognitive strategies, students’ *sense of behavioral processing judgments* was relatively high. Successful attribution was positively correlated with self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2007), however, the lack of attribution training for students by teachers made students’ sense of behavioral competence judgments relatively weak.

5.2. Analysis of the Differences in Self-Efficacy of Art Students on the Types of Colleges

The data also show that there is no significant difference between art students in art colleges and non-art colleges in *self-efficacy*, *sense of goal confidence*, *sense of behavioral competence judgment* and *sense of behavioral processing judgment* ($p > 0.05$), but students in art colleges have higher mean values in each dimension than students in non-art college ($M: 3.02 > 2.89, 3.05 > 2.89, 3.03 > 2.83, 2.99 > 2.95$).

Through interviews and information on the official website of the target colleges, the author found that in terms of teachers’ academic qualifications, the level of teachers in art colleges and non-art colleges is roughly the same. Besides, there is not much difference between their English proficiency and teaching qualification. These may be the reasons for no significant differences in students’ self-efficacy.

However, the reasons why art students in art colleges have higher means in each dimension may be as follows. In terms of curriculum, on the one hand, art colleges offer courses such as *English for the Arts*, *English for Tourism*, and *English News for Arts and Entertainment*, these ESP-featured courses help to improve students’ English language skills, which is one of the main purposes of university English education (Peng, 2020), and also help to improve students’ motivation. Students also held, “these courses make me more motivated. The most important factor is the communication environment. Speaking and applying makes us motivated.” “I am very interested in *English News for Arts and Entertainment*. Because we have a relatively weak passion. Luckily, this course can improve our motivation to learn English”.

On the other hand, arts colleges prefer using ESA pedagogy (i.e., engage, learn, and motivate) in the classroom, which provides more active activities for students to participate in, which is more likely to awaken students’ emotions and provide them with successful experiences in learning English, e.g., during the lead-in stage of the course, students confirmed that “the teacher would play English comedies and we were instantly attracted by the lessons.”

It is worth noting that, from the perspective of teacher development, although the aforementioned part discusses that English teachers in art colleges and universities and non-art colleges have roughly similar academic qualifications, most teachers in art colleges have more artistic skills (such as being good at piano,

painting or art appreciation) and are involved in research projects that combine the characteristics of art majors with English teaching, which provides a solid professional foundation and theoretical guarantee for improving art students' self-efficacy in English learning in art colleges.

5.3. Analysis of Gender Differences in Art Students' Self-Efficacy

Overall, there is a significant difference in the self-efficacy of art students in English learning in terms of gender ($p < 0.05$). Besides, the overall self-efficacy of male students is higher than that of female students ($3.07 > 2.82$). Although this result is contrary to the findings of scholar Zhang & Yu (2010), it is consistent with the results of Gurler (2015). In detail, male students have higher *sense of goal confidence* and *behavioral processing judgment* than female students ($3.09 > 2.82$, $3.07 > 2.89$), and significantly higher sense of *behavioral competence judgment* than female students ($3.05 > 2.76$, $p < .05$). The following part tries to explain the reasons from the perspective of attribution as well as efficacy judgment.

Attributions of ability to succeed, attributions of effort to succeed (internal attributions) and self-efficacy are positively correlated (Wang et al., 2007). In the interview, a boy mentioned that "although I am not very satisfied with my English performance, I still believe in my ability to learn English." This shows that male students are more inclined to conduct internal attribution, i.e., they attribute their success to their own abilities and efforts, which enhances their self-efficacy. In addition, another male student also confirmed, "Although I am poor in English, I am generally satisfied because the English I have mastered is almost enough for me". This kind of mindset actually has a beneficial effect on English learning. Bandura (1986) argues that it is best to judge one's own efficacy slightly beyond one's actual ability. In fact, moderate overestimation can actually motivate learners to persevere during difficult times.

6. Measures to Enhance Self-Efficacy in English Learning among Art Majors

In order to break through the dilemma of the current situation of English learning self-efficacy among art majors, improve the self-efficacy of English learning, achieve development based on students' individual differences, and realize teaching innovation, the following path can be followed.

6.1. Adjusting the English Curriculum and Providing Students with More Successful Experiences

First, improvement of the curriculum of English for the Arts is needed to form an English curriculum system with the characteristics of art disciplines, i.e. building courses such as *English for the Arts*, *English Drama Appreciation*, *English Film Appreciation*, etc. Adjusting the educational system with students' needs, aligning the development of abilities with students' reality, steadily promoting the development of students' ability to use English, and promoting their self-efficacy by making them more interested in the courses.

Second, providing students with more successful experiences. Although it is difficult for students to avoid hitting a wall in the early stages of English learning, the negative effects of occasional failure may be reduced after strong expectations of efficacy are formed through repeated success (Bandura, 1977). In this regard, on the one hand, teachers are encouraged to adopt appropriate teaching models to give students more opportunities to engage in learning activities. In the pre-class phase, teachers are encouraged to analyze the needs of art majors students, integrate art elements into each phase of the class, and provide a large number and variety of English activities in the in-class and after-class phases to make students' learning useful. On the other hand, teachers are encouraged to develop their own artistic skills in general. This will not only generate more conversation with students, arise their emotions, but also create opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of professional knowledge in English, and gaining more experience in presenting themselves successfully, thus increasing their sense of self-efficacy.

6.2. Motivate Art Students to Learn English and Focus on Attribution Training

First, students should be motivated both internally and externally. Thus, on the one hand, teachers are encouraged to take cultural background as the starting points of internal motivation, and cover the differences between Chinese and Western art cultures in the classroom, such as comparing Chinese and Western art genres, the evolution of Chinese and Western music styles and the aesthetic evolution of Chinese and Western costumes. On the other hand, external motivation can be stimulated by appropriately including English tests in students' overall ability assessment criteria and guiding students to make early career planning, so that students associate English learning with their own development. Thus, students' self-efficacy can be enhanced by promoting their internal and external motivation.

Second, emphasis should be placed on students' attribution training, with more attention paid to female art students in particular. Students should be guided to attribute success to internal, stable and controllable factors, such as their own efforts. Besides, attribute failure to external, unstable and uncontrollable factors, such as the difficulty of the test. For female students with low self-efficacy, teachers are encouraged to implement more "verbal persuasion". For example, students could be guided to make a learning log or learning profile to visualize their learning behaviors, supplemented by verbal persuasion to make them aware of their progress. Consequently, it may help them to build self-confidence and improve their self-efficacy.

6.3. Adopt Project-Based Teaching Mode to Enhance Students' Sense of Achievement in English Learning

The project-based teaching model consists of five steps: defining project mission,

developing project plan, organizing project implementation, checking and evaluation, summarizing and presenting project. Project-based teaching with the characteristics of “project-based, teacher-led and student-centered” contributes to enhancing students’ sense of achievement and self-efficacy.

Teachers are encouraged to give more ESP features to projects, such as organizing students to direct an English play, deliver an English speech on the theme of “my favorite composer”, simulate an English dance, or simulate being an English tour guide in a gallery. So as to give students the valuable opportunity to “learn by doing”. It is important to note that inviting professionals (e.g., other teachers or administrators) during “project presentation” stage will catch the students’ attention and improve sense of accomplishment. In addition, posting students’ work on Internet platforms during the “project evaluation” session can increase students’ motivation and sense of accomplishment, so as to enhance their self-efficacy by providing feedback from various sources (e.g., other peers, parents, or other experts).

6.4. Strengthen the Construction of Research Platforms and Implement Inter-School Cooperation

First, strengthen the construction of scientific research platforms, set up more scientific research projects that combine the characteristics of art majors with English teaching, and explore teaching methods, teaching models and education systems that are in line with the characteristics of art students. Enable scientific research to escort practice, allow theory to guide the classroom, and steadily promote the enhancement of students’ self-efficacy.

Second, implement inter-school cooperation. Art colleges and non-art colleges have unique characteristics, so if cooperation between colleges can be implemented in the field of research, ideas and cohesion will be gathered. Both types of colleges are encouraged to work together to develop English for the Arts teaching materials, share online resources, and explore teaching models of ESP. In terms of textbook design, art elements can be incorporated into all sections of the textbook, such as covering art words, selecting art-related texts, and designing art-related exercises. In terms of constructing online resources, non-art colleges are encouraged to learn more from the teaching styles and methods of teachers in art colleges. In terms of exploring the ESP model, art colleges are encouraged to learn from the graded teaching model of non-art colleges, i.e., teaching students according to their proficiency and taking care of their individual differences. Through the cooperation of colleges, students can improve their self-efficacy and develop their personal English ability.

7. Conclusion

Through the study of the current situation of English self-efficacy among art college students, it is found that art students’ self-efficacy is generally at an intermediate level, with the highest *sense of behavioral processing judgment* and the lowest *sense of behavioral competence judgment*. There is no significant dif-

ference in self-efficacy in terms of college type, but there is a significant difference in terms of gender. Based on this current situation, the English Curriculum is encouraged to be adjusted and more successful experiences are needed to be provided, students should be motivated and attribution training is encouraged to be conducted, project-based teaching mode is needed to enhance students' sense of achievement, and the construction of research platforms and implementation of inter-school cooperation are encouraged to be strengthened.

The current research only provides an overview of English self-efficacy under limited samples. Further research with a larger sample is needed to explore relationships between self-efficacy with more emotional or psychological variables. Despite the above limitations, the value of the research can not be ignored. It is hoped that the result of this study will shed some light on the English teaching with art majors.

Fund

The paper was supported by Innovation Project of Guangxi Graduate Education (XYCSR2022028).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. *Psychological Review*, 84, 191. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Betz, N. E., & Hackett, G. (1983). The Relationship of Mathematics Self-Efficacy Expectations to the Selection of Science-Based College Majors. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 23, 329-345. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(83\)90046-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(83)90046-5)
- Brady-Amoon, P., & Fuertes, J. N. (2011). Self-Efficacy, Self-Rated Abilities, Adjustment, and Academic Performance. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 89, 431-438. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2011.tb02840.x>
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Social Sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Deng, X., & Huang, Y. (2013). Analysis of the Current Situation of English Learning Self-Efficacy among College Students in Western China. *Journal of Central University for Nationalities: Philosophy and Social Science Edition*, 5, 163-166.
- Guidance Committee on College Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education Institutions of the Ministry of Education (2020). *Guide to Teaching English in Universities* (2020 ed.). Higher Education Press.
- Gurler, I. (2015). Correlation between Self-Confidence and Speaking Skill of English Language Teaching and English Language and Literature Preparatory Students. *Current Research in Social Sciences*, 1, 14-19.
- Hu, R., & Ye, Y. (2017). Do Entrepreneurial Alertness and Self-Efficacy Predict Chinese

- Sports Major Students' Entrepreneurial Intention? *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 45, 1187-1196. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.6356>
- Li, L., Chen, Z., & Jiang, Y. (2006). *Strategies-Style-Attributions-Learning to Learn English*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Muijs, D. (2010). *Doing Quantitative Research in Education with SPSS* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849203241>
- Peng, L. (2020). English Language Teaching in China: An Interview with Shouren Wang. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 2, 146-153.
- Wang, T., Yang, J., Wang, Y., & Zhang, H. (2007). A Study on the Factors Affecting College Students' Self-Efficacy in English Learning. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 3, 41-47.
- Zhang, Q. (2004). A Study on the Relationship between Self-Efficacy and English Learning Strategy Use. *English Education in China*, 2.
- Zhang, S., & Yu, W. (2010). An Investigation and Analysis of College Freshmen's Self efficacy in English Learning. *Educational Research and Experiment*, 5, 93-96.
- Zhang, Y., & Zhang, H. (2008). The Relationship between Junior High School Students' English Self-Efficacy and Perceived Teacher Expectations, and English Achievement. *Psychological Science*, 31, 230-233.