SELF-EFFICACY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AMONG FORM FOUR STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Self-efficacy is one of the factors that will influence one’s performance and achievement, especially in the academic setting. In language learning, a person’s self-efficacy will determine his or her motivation and attitude towards the language. That is to say, a student with high self-efficacy will perceive a language task as a challenge that will enhance his or her skill and ability. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify students’ level of self-efficacy in learning English based on their ethnicity. The findings showed that students’ level of self-efficacy in learning English was moderated and there were significant differences in terms of students’ self-efficacy with regards to ethnicity.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, performance, achievement, motivation, language learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals of formal education in Malaysia is to equip students holistically in order to succeed in the 21st century as this new era will present a lot of challenges and opportunities to them (Ministry of Education, 2012). According to the Minister of Education in the latest Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, “in order to compete with the best in the world, our education system must develop young Malaysians who are knowledgeable, think critically and creatively, and have high self-beliefs (p.3). That is to say, in order to succeed, Malaysian students need to be intellectual, possess adequate thinking skills and at the same time, have high self-confidence and self-motivation. Hairuzila and Rohani (2011), in their paper, claimed that students need to have a sense of accomplishment, or known as self-efficacy in order to achieve their goals in life.

Albert Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy was developed as part of a larger theory, the Social Learning Theory (Ashford and LeCroy, 2010). In this theory, self-efficacy refers to “a judgment of one’s ability to organize and execute given types of performances” (Bandura, 1997: 21). In other words, the belief that individuals hold about their ability to accomplish certain tasks will influence their performance on those tasks. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in predicting human performance and thus, helping them to succeed in the tasks given to them. A person with strong self-efficacy will be motivated and is likely to perform better in the task given. Conversely, a person with low self-efficacy is more likely to become frustrated when they encounter difficult challenges or tasks as they perceive those tasks or challenges as something that should be avoided rather than mastered (Hairuziladrus and RohaniSalleh, 2011: 62).

According to Parilah, Wan Hamiah, Rosseni, Aminuddin and Khalid (2002), Malaysian students display poor effort in learning English at schools and one of the factors identified is the lack of self-efficacy among them. That is the reason why many studies have been carried out regarding self-efficacy among students in Malaysia where some studies focused on the relationship between self-efficacy and students’ academic achievement. Chan and Abdullah (2004) identified self-efficacy as one of the elements that could shape a writer’s behaviour to write effectively. In another study conducted in Malaysia, Wong (2005) found that high self-efficacy pre-service teachers adopted more language learning strategies compared to those with low self-efficacy level.

Moreover, RahilMahyuddin et. al (2006) have conducted a study on 1,146 students’ self-efficacy in several secondary schools in Selangor and claimed that the students’ performance in learning English is largely determined by their perceived English language efficacy. In other words, the belief that they will succeed in learning English will help the students to be proficient in learning the language. The concept of self-efficacy is further explained by Hairuzila and Rohani (2011) who claimed that the students with higher level of self-efficacy are able to speak English better compared to those with low self-efficacy. This is due to the fact that their self-efficacy has an impact on their level of motivation and this influences their speaking ability.

As being mentioned earlier that self-efficacy is one of the factors that influence students’ performance in learning English, it is important for all parties especially the policy makers and educators to look further into this area. Thus, this study will identify students’ level of self-efficacy in order to help them to learn English better. Specifically, the focus will be on the level of self-efficacy of Form Four students in Kuala Lumpur based on their ethnicity. Based on the findings collected from the previous studies on self-efficacy, it is the aim of this study to look into self-efficacy of ESL students in the secondary schools in Malaysia.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:
1. to identify the level of self-efficacy of students in learning English, in general.
2. to identify the differences in terms of the level of self-efficacy between students of different ethnic groups.

Based on the objectives of the study, the following questions are raised:
1. What is the level of self-efficacy of students in learning English, in general?
2. Is there any difference in terms of the level of self-efficacy between students of different ethnic groups?

The following hypotheses are generated in this study:
1. There is a significant difference in terms of the level of self-efficacy between students of different ethnic groups.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a significant component of The Social Cognitive Theory which was developed by Bandura in 1977. In his theory, Bandura claimed that human beings possess the ability “to affect and shape their environment rather than passively react to it, in order to successfully execute certain tasks” (Schunk, 2003: 67). Based on this theory therefore, the term ‘self-efficacy’ can be defined as “a cognitive domain that represents individual beliefs about their capability to act and successfully produce outcomes at certain levels” (Bandura, 1999: 2). A person’s belief in his or her capabilities to do something will to a great extent affect their performance in the task given. That is to say, a person who believes that he or she can perform well in a task assigned, will be able to perform better and achieve their target.

Bandura (1977) stated four sources from which one can develop their self-efficacy. The first source, mastery experience is explained based on the concept that past experiences plays a vital role in developing one’s self-efficacy. In other words, a person who has successfully performed in the previous tasks, tend to have higher self-efficacy and is able to perform better (Carmichael and Taylor, 2005). The second source, according to Lane (2004) is vicarious experience. In this sense, when an individual observe his or her friends successfully perform a task, he or she will have the tendency to develop positive beliefs on the capabilities to perform a task and hence, this will enhance the person’s self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can also be influenced by social persuasion where according to him, encouragement and positive feedback from others can affect one’s self-efficacy. Lastly, self-efficacy is also determined by one’s physiological and emotional states where the circumstances such as fatigue and anxiety may affect a person’s self-efficacy. In this case, Schunk (2003) justified that those who have low anxiety during a task performance will not feel burdened or threatened with the task and therefore, they will strengthen their self-efficacy and complete the task effectively.

While a large numbers of researchers have investigated on the role of self-efficacy in the area of teaching and learning, there are still inadequate numbers of them that have focused on the concept of self-efficacy in foreign language learning context (Carmichael and Taylor, 2005). However, there have been a growing numbers of researches in self-efficacy within the area of second language learning in the last ten years where most of them focus on the relationship between self-efficacy and the performance in language learning, as stated by Lane and Kyprianou (2004). Based on these researches, it was indicated that self-efficacy in the second language learning context influences students’ level of motivation and thus, help them to perform better in their second language learning performance.

Hence, this paper attempts to explore the concept of self-efficacy among secondary four students in two selected schools in Kuala Lumpur in order to identify students’ current level of self-efficacy in learning English as their second language. Based on the explanation above, five research papers on the same topic have been selected as the guidelines for this paper. The details of those papers are discussed below and the findings for those studies will be elaborated in the next section of this paper.

2.2 Findings and Discussions from Previous Studies

This section will focus on the findings of the related studies on self-efficacy. RuhilMahyuddin.et.al (2002) in their study on the relationship between self-efficacy and students’ achievement in learning English, claimed that female students have higher self-efficacy level compared to male students and there are also significant differences on the self-efficacy level between the ethnic groups where the Indian students have higher self-efficacy level compared to the other ethnic groups. In order to meet the objective of the research that is to find out the relationship between self-efficacy and students’ achievement in English, the correlational analysis between these two variables were done and it was proven that there are significant positive correlations between these two. That is to say, students’ beliefs about their competence and capabilities in learning English will somehow influence their performance in the language.

In the context of English writing skills, Parilah, Rosseni, Wan Hamiah, Aminuddin and Khalid (2002) have conducted a study involving 120 students of Form 5 and Form 3. Based on the writing task and questionnaire answered by the respondents, the researchers claimed that there is a large significant positive correlation between students’ self-efficacy and their English writing performance. Hence, the study indicated that students who evaluated themselves as having high self-efficacy...
would indeed write well as they were able to negotiate rules and mechanics while maintaining their focus in the writing task given. On the other hand, students who believed themselves to be poor writers would also perform accordingly.

HairuziAldrus and RohaniSalleh (2007) have examined the self-efficacy of Malaysian ESL students of a private university in terms of their ability to speak English. Based on the data collected, the researchers claimed that, in general, the students had high self-efficacy beliefs in their ability to speak English in all three dimensions tested; ability, aspiration and activity perception and this supported the notion that self-efficacy do influence students’ oral performance. The findings obtained had led the researchers to suggest on two pedagogical implications in order to improve the students’ speaking skill. The suggestions were to highlight the communication strategies in teaching and to form mixed ethnic and gender groups in a speaking or oral activity.

Lim Khong Chin (2011) also contributed his part in the concept of self-efficacy in teaching and learning area. His study attempted to identify the influence of attitude, self-efficacy and motivation on leisure time physical activity participation among students at the local public universities where the results indicated that there were positive correlations between leisure attitude, motivation and self-efficacy with leisure time physical activity participation among the undergraduates. At the same time, motivation and self-efficacy were identified as the best predictors to leisure time physical activity participation. In addition to that, he has suggested that the university management should plan and organize programmes or activities to develop positive attitude among students, increase their self-efficacy and motivation level in order to encourage their participation in the leisure time physical activity.

Meanwhile, Nariman Jahan and Rahimpour (2010) revealed the importance of learners’ self-efficacy in predicting their achievement in language learning. In the line of previous research, the results of their study indicated that learners’ self-efficacy is significantly related to their performance in learning English. However, Anyadubalu (2010) in a study involving 318 students in Thailand found no significant relationship between students’ self-efficacy and their English language performance. He also claimed that the results of his study were possible and should be expected as the participants were young in age (12 years old) and the cultural factor appears to be the barrier that discouraged students to make their own decision while answering the questionnaire.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a survey method in order to examine the level of self-efficacy among students in English language learning. The sample chosen in this study are 100 Form Four students from 2 secondary schools; SekolahMenengahKebangsaan Cochrane Perkasa and SekolahMenengahKebangsaan Bandar Sri Damansara in Kuala Lumpur. The researcher uses the purposive sampling technique where 100 copies of questionnaire booklets were distributed randomly to Form 4 students. From the data obtained, it has been identified that among all 100 respondents, 31 students are male, whereas 69 students are female. Based on their ethnic groups, 58 of them are Malays, 20 are Chinese and 22 of them are Indians.

Those proportions of students are almost accurate to both of the schools’ ethnicity proportion which are 60% Malays, 20% Chinese and 20% Indians. The researcher decided to choose Form Four students as the respondents for this study because Form Four is the year sandwiched between two important public examinations; PT3 (formerly PMR) and SPM and Form Four students also can be considered as matured as they have undergone at least 9 years of schooling, previously.

Self-Efficacy Scale is the questionnaire that is used to gather the data and information for this study. It is adapted from three sources; Survey of Attitude and Self-Efficacy towards English Language Learning by Zheng, Young, Brewer and Wagner (2009), Self-Efficacy Scale by Bandura et al (1999) and Questionnaire for Measuring Self-Efficacy in Youths by Muris (2001). The questions from these two sources were selected because the language used in simple and that the students will be able to comprehend the questions.

The questionnaire was divided into two dimensions; the first dimension is the background information of the respondent, the second one is the self-efficacy on learning English. There are twenty questions in the questionnaire and all of the questions are close-ended whereby the respondents are required to pick the answers that are most relevant to them.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The findings and analysis primarily consist of several sections that include demographic data, the students’ level of self-efficacy in learning English, and the level of self-efficacy between different ethnic groups.

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1 shows demographic data of respondents. All of respondents are 16 years old. 31.0 percent of respondents are male students (31 students) and 69.0 percent of respondents are female students (69 students). Divided according to ethnicity, the highest number of respondents are Malay (58 students) followed by Indian (22 students) and Chinese (20 students).
From ten items, only one item (no. 8) “Feel that learning English is fun” is at high level, while nine other items are at moderate level. The item describing “student feel that learning English is fun” obtained the highest score mean (mean = 3.12 and standard deviation = 0.879). It is supported by student agreements who agree (40 percent) and strongly agree (39 percent). It indicates that 79 percent of students feel that learning English is fun. The item asking whether the student always get high marks for English subjects in the examination or tests obtained the lowest score mean (mean = 2.44 and standard deviation = 0.833). This is also indicated by 36 percent of the students who have chosen agree and 10 percent of the students chosen strongly agree for this item. It shows that only 46 percent of respondents always get high marks for English subjects in the examination or tests.

Table 1 Demographic data of respondents (N = 100)

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4.2 The Students’ Level of Self-efficacy in Learning English

The level of students’ self-efficacy in learning English is analyzed by mean and standard deviation. Students’ self-efficacy is categorized into three levels; high, moderate and low. Low level is shown by mean interval of 1.00 to 2.00. Meanwhile mean interval of 2.01 to 3.00 shows moderate level of self-efficacy and mean interval of 3.01 to 4.00 shows high level of self-efficacy.

There are ten items in the questionnaire that measured students’ self-efficacy in learning English. From ten items, only one item (no. 8) “Feel that learning English is fun” is at high level, while nine items are at moderate level. Item describing “student feel that learning English is fun” obtained the highest score mean (mean = 3.12 and standard deviation = 0.879). It is supported by student agreements who agree (40 percent) and strongly agree (39 percent). It indicates that 79 percent of students feel that learning English is fun. The item asking whether the student always get high marks for English subjects in the examination or tests obtained the lowest score mean (mean = 2.44 and standard deviation = 0.833). This is also indicated by 36 percent of the students who have chosen agree and 10 percent of the students chosen strongly agree for this item. It shows that only 46 percent of respondents always get high marks for English subjects in the examination or tests.

Table 2: One way ANOVA of self-efficacy between ethnic groups in learning English

Based on the score mean obtained., Malay students shows higher self-efficacy in learning English (mean = 2.77 and standard deviation = 0.487) than Indian students (mean = 2.66 and standard deviation = 0.657) and Chinese students (mean = 2.56 and standard deviation = 0.558). However, p-value indicates that the difference in self-efficacy between ethnic groups in learning English is not significant (p-value = 0.289, p>0.05). Thus, null hypothesis that states there is no significant difference in self-
efficacy between ethnic groups in learning English is accepted.

CONCLUSION

This study will contribute to the understanding of students’ self-efficacy. As mentioned earlier, it is important for educators and teachers to identify their students’ self-efficacy and their perceptions of English so that they can plan and design suitable activities in order to help students to learn English. Below are several suggestions based on the findings gathered for this study:

1. Teachers and educators should plan and conduct activities that are aimed at enhancing students’ self-efficacy and motivation to learn English.
2. According to Bandura (1997), an individual can gain self-efficacy through social persuasion. In this case, teachers can provide more positive feedback and rewards to students once they have completed the task assigned, in order to boost their self-efficacy and motivation.
3. Teachers and educators should provide students with challenging tasks and encourage them on the task in order to ensure their self-confidence and self-efficacy.
4. Self-efficacy can also be gained through vicarious experience (Bandura, 1997). In this sense, teachers can use the role-modeling and peer support as one of the strategies to enhance students’ self-efficacy.

There are few limitations found in this study. First, this study focuses on the level of self-efficacy of the students in few selected secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the findings of the study are not intended to be generalised to other educational institutions in other states in Malaysia as the result may be different. Although there are numerous studies on self-efficacy among students in Malaysia, most of them only focuses on the tertiary level of education. Thus, there is a lack of reference for this study. Lastly, the suggestions used in this study may not be suitable to be applied on other subjects or field of teaching as this study focuses only on English per se.

This study will benefit educators and teachers in the area of teaching English as second language. Self-efficacy is one of the factors that can determine one’s achievement and performance in the task given. In this sense, self-efficacy will directly and indirectly influence students’ motivation and confidence in learning English. The findings obtained from this study should be able to provide useful information for further research on the topic ‘Self-efficacy’.

REFERENCES

