

# A Survey on Self-efficacy of English Majors: Exploring Its Correlation with Time Management and Strategy Use\*

Xiaoli Gan

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Arts and Science, Dazhou, Sichuan 635000, China

**Abstract**—The present study seeks to investigate the self-efficacy of English majors and its relationship with time management and strategy use during their English learning. The study reported in this paper was conducted to examine self-efficacy of students passing TEM-4 (Test for English Majors -- Band 4) and their self-regulating time management. The data were collected via student questionnaires & interviews. The findings of this case study revealed that there is a gender difference in English majors' self-efficacy. Meanwhile, a positive correlation between the self-efficacy of students passing TEM -4 & their strategy use as well as self-regulating time management was demonstrated. Implications of the findings to language teaching and learning are discussed.

**Index Terms**—self-efficacy, TEM-4, self-regulating time management, strategy use

## I. INTRODUCTION

The construct of learners' self-belief, in the recent years, has been a hot topic which has gained much attention in language acquisition. For almost two decades of research has revealed that learners' self-belief is one of the strong influential factors on their academic performance. Therefore, it has caused a new wave of attention to the study of learners' self-efficacy. Bandura assumed that "Of all beliefs, self-efficacy is the most influential one which plays a powerful role in determining the choices people make, the effort they will persevere in the face of challenge, and the degree of anxiety or confidence they will bring to the task at hand" (Bandura, 1984, p361). It is this perceived self-efficacy that can explain why language learners' behaviors differ greatly even if they get almost same knowledge and skills training. Considering the strong connection between self-efficacy and strategy use, numerous studies have found a positive relationship among strategy use, self-efficacy, and learners' achievement (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Green & Oxford, 1995; Rubin, 1975). According to the previous research, when students use more strategies, they intend to achieve more success which, in turn increases their self-efficacy beliefs, and previous achievement will result in higher sense of self-efficacy.

At present, China possesses the largest population of English learners. Though they have made great effort in studying English, there are still a bunch of difficulties for them, which can be explained by complex factors including environment factors and learner factors. Self-efficacy, a major component of social cognitive learning theory, is "people's judgments of their capacities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1984, p391). In other words, self-efficacy is closely related to learners' judgment on their own abilities to task performances in specific academic domains. Students' self-efficacy, as one of learners' psychological and non-intellectual factors, for example, has great influence on their English learning. For teachers and researchers, how to help students study more efficiently is a permanent issue for them.

As the researches on language learning indicated that the use of strategies had turned out to be key factors in EFL learning. Meanwhile, it may contribute to the other aspects involved in foreign language acquisition, such as gender, age, self-efficacy, etc. and one focus of research in the area is closely related with the investigation of the relationship between language learning strategies and these other aspects. All of the factors are considered to have an influence on the process of language acquisition. Self-efficacy, which can promote students' learning motivation, has attracted scholars' attentions in many fields. Therefore, it is necessary to research the self-efficacy of English majors to find out the reasons of affecting their self-efficacy and give some relative suggestions to improve their self-efficacy and promote their academic performances accordingly.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-efficacy, which was put forward by Albert Bandura in the 1980s, means one person conjectures and estimates whether he or she has ability to accomplish one thing or whether has confidence in achieving success during the process of solving problems. Albert Bandura thought "the self-efficacy was developed by four factors: immediate experience,

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vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. And the way it realized main body mechanism was with the intermediary process of choice, thought, motivation and emotion” (Bandura A. 1993, p125). The research by Zimmerman BJ, Martnez-pons M indicated that the self-efficacy of English learners had close relationship with students’ grade, and there was a positive correlation between the self-efficacy of English learners and their self-monitoring behaviors: organization, appraisal, programme, and regulation (Bandura A. 1997).

There were many scholars who studied self-efficacy of English learners. The research by Zhoudianjun indicated that meta-cognitive self-monitoring strategic training could improve English learners’ writing level and promote their self-efficacy of English writing remarkably. Especially, it was obvious to improve the English writing level of high-level and middle-level students (Schunk, D.H, 1991). The study by Panhualing and Chenzhijie manifested that the self-efficacy of English majors, who had different grades and majors, was not similar. However, there were no obvious differences between male and female and between learners from higher and lower educational background (Yufan, B.2004). The study by Qiuxiang (2008) showed that there was a significant correlation between the self-efficacy of English majors and their achievement motivation. The more self-efficacy English majors have, the higher achievement motivation they got. The higher achievement motivation English majors possessed, the less fear they would have during the process of solving problems of learning English. Besides, if English majors thought they had ability to accomplish one thing, they would like to pay more effort to make it.

The term language learning strategy has been discussed by a great number of researchers in EFL. Rubin (1987) define learning strategies as "... any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information." Richards and Platt (1992) describe learning strategies as "intentional behavior and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information." Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as techniques consciously used by learners to improve their progress in acquiring, storing, retaining, and using information in second or foreign language. Many studies have reported the positive relationship between self-efficacy and learning strategies. Others identified a significant strong positive correlation between high self-efficacy and improvement in their reading and comprehension skills (Naseri & Zaferanieh, 2012).

In general, the use of language learning strategies is consistently linked with language proficiency. It is proved that using language learning strategies has a positive impact on learners’ proficiency. Apparently, successful language learners arranged and combine their use of particular types of strategies in effective ways during language learning process (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Besides, as researches home and abroad have indicated, there are other factors that have big influence on the language learning strategies learners selected and used, such as gender difference, learners’ self-efficacy beliefs which was defined as ‘people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. Bandura (1984) indicates that students’ judgments of their capability to perform academic tasks, namely, their self-efficacy beliefs, predict their capability to accomplish such tasks.

TEM4, Test for English Majors Band-4, is an important means to evaluate English majors’ language proficiency in China once per year. Kinds of language skills and abilities, such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, as well as writing are involved in the test. At present, however, there are limited researches on the correlation between the self-efficacy of English majors passing TEM-4 and their self-regulating time management as well as strategy use. The time management is a worthy goal of many human activities. It concerns a variety of problems related to goals, assessment of available resources, control of management policies, scheduling of decisions (Macan T H., Shahani C., et al., 1990). Time management disposition is a kind of personality trait that reflects the way individuals use and control time.

English academic self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief to his or her ability to learn and use English. Many studies have proved that time management and self-efficacy is one of the important factors affecting academic performance and achievements. The relationships between time management of language learners and self-reported academic performance were explored by Macan T. H., Shahani C., Dipboye R. L., et al. Since 1980s, scholars began to seek the relationship between learners’ strategy use and L2 proficiency (Bialystok, 1981). Huang & Naerssen (1987) examined language learning strategy use of 60 graduates and found that strategy use is positively related with language proficiency. Although many studies have been conducted to investigate the learning self-efficacy, time management and strategy use, the findings from the existing researches are far from satisfaction. Based on the researches discussed above, gender, learners’ language learning strategies, language proficiency, time management and self-efficacy appear to be main significant factors related to language acquisition. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the self-efficacy of English majors and its relationship with time management and strategy use during their English learning.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Participants*

In this survey, two classes of junior students are chosen randomly from English department in a university in southern China. The number of respondents is 76. All of them have taken part in the TEM-4 the same year. Among the 76 students, there are 11 boys and 50 girls. However, 15 students did not fill in the blank of TEM-4. So there are only 61 effective questionnaires answered by students who will be regarded as the effective subjects. The brief information

of the subjects is as follows:

TABLE1  
THE BASIC INFORMATION OF THE REAL SUBJECTS

	Male	Female	Amount	Percentage
Class 3	3	27	30	49.10%
Class 5	8	23	31	50.90%
Amount	11	50	61	100%
Percentage	19.67%	80.33%	100%	

### B. Instruments

The questionnaire used in this survey is adapted from the questionnaire of Liuxi. It is divided into two main parts. The first part is the basic information of the subjects, including grade, major, gender and the score of TEM-4. The second part is the investigation of the self-efficacy of the English majors. And the second part consists of two. One is the investigation about the situation of their self-efficacy, the other is the investigation about the fact that how the English majors learn English and improve their skills in our school. The second part about their self-efficacy includes their confidence in listening, speaking, reading, writing and interpretation and passing the TEM-4. Besides, it involves their self-efficacy of mastering the learning strategies. As well as covers their goal setting, monitoring, self-regulation, the management of time, the usage of leaning tools, the cooperation between teachers and students, the situation between learning effort and physiological management and the strategic use of learning English and examination taking. And each one has five choice: 1 stands for “it hardly fit my condition”, 2 stands for “it does not often fit my condition”, 3 stands for “it sometimes fit my condition”, 4 stands for “it often fit my condition”, and 5 stands for “it totally fit my condition”.

## IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### A. The Gender Difference in the Self-efficacy of English Majors

In this part, 3 groups are set according to their score of TEM-4: high-score group, middle-score group and low-score group. The score over 70 is named high-score group, the score between 60 and 70 is middle group, and the score below 60 is low-score group. Altogether there are 5 English majors belonging to high-score group, including 3 boys and 2 two girls; there are 25 English majors belonging to the middle-score group, including 2 boys and 23 girls; 31 English majors belonging to the low-score group, including 6 boys and 25 girls.

TABLE2  
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDERS AND THE ENGLISH MAJORS' SELF-EFFICACY

SEEM	Male(n=11)			Female(n=50)		
	HSG (n=3)	MSG (n=2)	LSG (n=6)	HSG (n=2)	MSG (n=23)	LSG (n=25)
M	4.00	3.50	2.50	3.50	3.82	3.36
SD	1.73	2.12	1.37	0.71	1.07	1.08

SEEM= the self-efficacy of English majors; M= mean; HSG= high-score group; MSG= middle-score group; LSG= low-score group; SD= standard deviation

In sum, it reveals that female students reported higher levels of self-efficacy beliefs and that the majority belongs to the middle-score group and the low-score group whether they are boys or girls. Boys' self-efficacy of high-score group is higher than that of girls'. And boys' self-efficacy is lower than that of the girls in both the middle-score and low-score group. Besides, the standard deviation indicates that girl's self-efficacy is more stable than that of the boys'. This study, like the previous ones by other researchers, identified that gender is closely associated with English majors' self-efficacy.

### B. The Correlation between the Self-efficacy of Passing Tem-4 and Time Management

The result shows that when English majors in male and female have more ability to regulate the time to study English, they have more self-efficacy to pass the TEM-4. There exists a positive correlation between the self-efficacy of passing the TEM-4 and self-regulating time management in male and female. The low-score group's deviation of the self-efficacy of passing the TEM-4 is the most stable, and the middle-score group's deviation is the highest. And the low-score group's deviation of time management is the most stable, and the middle-score group's deviation is the highest.

TABLE3  
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SEP AND TM

	HSG(n=5)		MSG(n=25)		LSG(n=31)		correl	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
SEP	4.00	1.00	3.76	1.13	3.55	0.89	0.33	0.049
TM	3.60	0.89	3.36	1.15	2.90	0.87		

SEP= the self-efficacy of passing the TEM-4; TM= time management

In this survey, it reveals that 81.98 percent of English majors can often manage their time to study English well. The average of the ability of self-regulating time management is 3.14. English majors should set goals: short-term goals, middle-term goals, and long-term goals. It reveals, in this research, that 80.33 percent of English majors can frequently make use of strategies in TEM-4 practice.

### C. The Correlation between the Self-efficacy of Passing Tem-4 and the Strategic Use

It shows that there exists a positive correlation between the self-efficacy of passing TEM4 and the strategic use in male and female when English majors do exercise before examination. If they can have more ability to take advantage of strategies, they have more confidence in passing TEM4. And the high-score group's deviation of strategic use is the most stable, and the low-score group's deviation is the highest. In listening part, many of them will scan the questions before listening. When statistics and other important information are heard, they will write them down briefly. In reading part, they will take advantage of their knowledge and text context to guess these they can not understand well. In writing part, they will list an outline to make them have a clear thought before they write it on test paper. Besides, they will do exercise according to the time requirement of the TEM-4. Generally speaking, the proficient language learners tend to use strategies in the light of their specific learning tasks, context, or their needs respectively and individually. Meanwhile, these learners are more likely to be self-regulated, flexible or have higher learning autonomy in the use of strategies during their language learning process.

TABLE4  
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SEP AND SU

	HSG(n=5)		MSG(n=25)		LSG(n=31)		correl	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
SEP	4.00	1.00	3.76	1.13	3.55	0.89	0.40	0.03
SU	4.60	0.55	3.68	0.90	3.10	1.14		

SU= strategic use

## V. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of investigated data above, we know that English majors' self-efficacy has relationship with genders, self-regulating time management and strategic use in practice. That's to say, that genders, self-regulating time management and strategic use in practice are the reasons affecting the English majors' self-efficacy. The above results indicate that English majors do use a number of language learning strategies. The findings also showed a close relationship between the use of language learning strategies and gender, self-regulating time management and students' self-efficacy beliefs. Broadly speaking, in consideration of the research findings, developing English learners self-efficacy is inclined to have a favorable influence on their academic performance and achievements since a strong sense of self-efficacy has been found to be positively associated with self-regulating time management and strategy use in learners' academic performance. Teachers should teach students self-regulated learning strategies as well as concentrating on language learners' enrichment and good command of skills in order to improve their self-efficacy, learning autonomy and finally their language proficiency during foreign language learning. Strategy use has been identified as an effective way to enhance language learners' independent and autonomous learning. In general, the more strategies a learner applies, the more the learner feels self-efficacious. Hence, understanding the use of language learning strategy and investing how it relates with self-efficacy could make great contributions to the success of foreign language acquisition.

In this study, it's found that high self-efficacy scores and students' reading strategy use are closely related. There are four strategies identified here—cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, and testing as well. The findings indicated that students who employed a combination of the four strategies proved to have the highest self-efficacy scores as well. The results demonstrated a must for training English learners some strategies explicitly in order to enhance their self-efficacy and help them become more autonomous (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Yusuf, 2011; Zimmerman

et al., 2006). Wong (2005) examined the overall language self-efficacy of ELLs in Malaysia and how self-efficacy influenced their language learning strategy use. It was found that participants who had a higher level of self-efficacy also reported greater use of learning strategies. Strategies most often mentioned were cognitive (i.e., use of English listening, reading, and writing outside of classroom) and social (i.e., assistance from interlocutors). The study also found that participants with low self-efficacy used context to guess meanings they did not understand while those with high self-efficacy tried to find the meaning of misunderstood information by enlisting Journal of International

Student728 interlocutors or seeking print resources. The results of this study suggested that self-efficacy might be increased by training learning strategies to students, particularly the strategies that were most often mentioned by learners. Idrus and Sivapalan (2010) suggested that it was important for teachers to be aware of the self-efficacy level of their students, and teaching learning strategies can increase self-efficacy, and the negative attitude of learners with low self-efficacy should be addressed within the classroom to improve overall performance. But these studies were not able to offer effective solutions to improve language learners' motivation, autonomy, and self-directedness, and learners' self-efficacy and learning strategy have not yet been integratively examined in an ESL context (Shi Hong, 2018).

Since learners' self-efficacy could be influenced by their individual interest and different motivations, strengthening their motivation and developing their interest are beneficial to enhance language learners' self-efficacy. Therefore, it's considered favorable to design some significant events to stimulate learners to perform more actively while performing their learning tasks and involve them more positively in kinds of works. English teachers, on the other hand, play a significant part in developing learners' self-efficacy. Hence, in order to strengthen learners' self-efficacy, teachers should be encouraged to put emphasis on the incentive mechanism and supportive environment, as well as guiding them to problem solving, effective communication, and specific language skills, and cultivating learners' different abilities in their study and realistic practice .

It's commonly confirmed that effective use of language learning strategies can, definitely, facilitates learners' control of developing language skills as well as increasing their confidence in the learning process (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Ellis (1997) & Schunk (1995) illustrated that "strategy instructions promote learners' independent and autonomous learning." Since learners can benefit from strategy training or instruction and promote their self-efficacy and autonomous learning, hence they can be essential and critical to improve English majors' actual performance and achievement in English learning. For teachers, they should provide some useful strategy training for learners. Meanwhile, using strategy to influence self-efficacy can be achieved by making the language learning tasks appear easier, which in turn can make language learners feel more control in the learning process.

Since this study was conducted only in English majors, further researches need to be carried out in other study fields to compare the results. This study explored English majors' self-efficacy beliefs, self-regulated time management and strategy use in learning that affected their TEM-4 scores from students' perspective. It, however, investigated in only one Chinese university. More participants from more different majors and different countries can be explored in the future studies.

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**Xiaoli Gan** was born in Pengzhou, Sichuan province, China. She is currently an English associate professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Arts and Science, Sichuan, China. Her research fields include second language acquisition, applied linguistics and English language teaching methodology.