



English language learners' self-efficacy profiles and relationship with self-regulated learning strategies



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ABSTRACT

This study used latent profile analysis (LPA) to examine different patterns of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' self-efficacy beliefs for learning English. The Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy was completed by undergraduate students in Korea. The LPA results revealed three groups representing low, medium, and high self-efficacy profiles. The high and medium self-efficacy profiles represent students who spent more years of studying English and are disproportionately female compared to the low self-efficacy profile. The low self-efficacy profile was significantly different from the medium and high self-efficacy profiles with respect to its self-regulated learning strategies and language interpretation strategies. The ESL learners' self-efficacy profiles identified in this study can be used to tailor instructions appropriately.

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1. Introduction

Korea has been continuously ranked as one of the top countries that send students to study in U.S. universities (Institute of International Education, 2014), but there is a mismatch between what is taught in Korea and what is actually used in the United States with respect to English language skills (Kim, 2004; Seth, 2002). In Korea, most students learn English through a grammar-translation method, which focuses more on the grammar and syntax than on the communicative competence, and the instruction is examination-oriented (Kim, 2004). In the United States, however, students need to use all their English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing to communicate in both social and academic settings. Many Korean students who scored high on standardized English language tests often struggle with listening and speaking when studying in U.S. universities. Standardized test scores alone do not reflect a student's English language skills accurately. There is a need for a more comprehensive approach in serving English language learners.

In recent years, a large number of studies have been performed on the role of non-cognitive skills such as self-efficacy and self-regulation in various academic settings. Research has shown that self-efficacy and self-regulation play an important role in student learning and academic achievement (Pajares & Graham, 1999; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988). However, research on self-efficacy and self-regulation in the context of second/foreign language acquisition is still limited. Understanding

Korean students' self-efficacy beliefs and their use of self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies while learning English will help researchers and educators in U.S. institutions better serve international students not only from Asian countries who share a similar emphasis on standardized examinations, but also from other countries. This understanding will also contribute to the field by confirming the relationships between the variables of self-efficacy and SRL strategies.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to identify subgroups of students who had similar profiles for their self-efficacy beliefs for learning English; and (b) to examine the relationship between the self-efficacy beliefs of these students and their use of SRL strategies. We will present this study with a review of literature on self-efficacy beliefs, SRL strategies, relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and SRL strategies, and measurement issues with self-efficacy before reporting our study design and results.

2. Literature review

2.1. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's judgment of his/her capabilities to complete a specific task with the skills he/she possesses (Bandura, 1997) and is usually described as being task and context specific (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Highly efficacious students usually meet challenges and are more persistent while lowly efficacious students are more likely to avoid difficult tasks (Stevens, Olivarez, Lan, & Tallent-Runnels, 2004). Previous studies indicated that self-efficacy is predictive of students' academic achievement (Pajares & Graham, 1999; Shih & Alexander, 2000). A path analysis revealed that self-

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efficacy mediated the relationships between homework quality and academic grade point average (GPA) of high school girls (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). The study also found that perceived responsibility is highly correlated with self-efficacy beliefs and is also mediating the path between homework quality and academic GPA. A recent study with college students noted the mediating role of self-regulation for the relationship between self-efficacy and academic GPA (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Efficacious students tended to take challenging tasks and to pursue mastery as well as performance goals whereas the less efficacious ones were associated with the beliefs of innate intelligence.

Students with high levels of self-efficacy beliefs take more responsibility of their own learning process and view themselves as proactive learners (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). Working with Botswana students, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) noted that an increase in self-efficacy beliefs was associated with an increase in the use of language learning strategies and an increase in their English proficiency. These same positive relationships were found with Norwegian undergraduate students (Diseth, 2011). With a nationally representative sample of Singapore secondary students studying English language, Liem, Lau, and Nie (2008) noted that self-efficacy had direct positive effects on the performance-approach goal but negative effects on the performance-avoidance goal. These authors also noted an indirect effect of self-efficacy beliefs on the English language test scores. Thus, enhancing English language learners' self-efficacy beliefs is crucial to their language learning process and needs to be included in classroom teaching approaches (Wang, Schwab, Fenn, & Chang, 2013). This claim is supported by a study with college students who were provided instructions to promote self-efficacy beliefs. After the instruction, these students were observed to be more optimistic toward writing tasks, more persistent with difficult writing tasks, more committed to achieving challenging goals, and more likely to work harder to avoid failure (Lee, 2002).

2.2. Self-regulated learning strategies

Self-regulation consists of three phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-regulated students constantly set goals, apply strategies to achieve the goals, and self-evaluate the performance for further improvements or a more challenging task. Self-regulated students also implement multiple motivational strategies, including getting physically and mentally ready for an assignment, collecting relevant information, integrating various theories, monitoring comprehension, and assessing his/her own progress to achieve the goal (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006). A series of studies conducted by Zimmerman and his colleagues found consistent positive relationship between the use of SRL strategies and student performance on standardized tests (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986, 1988).

In the field of language acquisition, four categories of SRL strategies were reported to be helpful in improving student English writing skills: (a) self-evaluation; (b) organizing and transforming; (c) seeking information; and (d) seeking social assistance (Lee, 2002). As for seeking social assistance, Mackey, Kanganas, and Oliver (2007) explained that students were more likely to perform better when they received positive feedback that they could use. The impact of positive and constructive feedback on the students' achievement and performance in the classroom was also discussed in a study with adult English language learners in New Zealand (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). With these adult language learners, only the combination of explicit written feedback and student-teacher conferences was found to be helpful to improve the students' English writing proficiency. This finding reinforced the importance of feedback from instructors on the development of students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement (Oettingen, 1995). Researchers in language learning strategies also found a positive link between the use of strategies and student language learning outcomes (Chen, 2011; Chien, 2012; Zhang, Gu, & Hu, 2008). For example, students who used the SRL strategy of goal-setting and planning were

mostly higher achievers in language learning (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Roca de Larios, Manchon, Murphy, & Marin, 2008).

2.3. Relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and SRL strategies

Self-efficacy plays an important role in the process of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000). Students' self-efficacy beliefs influence the choices they make and the effort they put in their performance (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006). This argument was supported by empirical studies which showed a positive link between self-efficacy beliefs and the use of SRL strategies (Diseth, 2011; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Yusuf, 2011; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Previous studies also indicated that students with low self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to quit when they met difficulties and were more likely to procrastinate when working on assignments (Schunk, 1990). Self-efficacy was found to have direct positive effects on the performance-approach goal but negative effects on the performance-avoidance goal (Liem et al., 2008).

In a study of the English writing process of Malaysian college engineer-major students, Lee (2002) noted that students responded more positively to negative feedback after the implementation of SRL strategies, which is a sign of improved self-efficacy beliefs to write a better essay. A similar study was conducted with elementary school students in Singapore where the SRL strategies of planning, revising, self-evaluating, and seeking social assistance were found significantly related to the English language proficiency for students of all levels of English proficiency (Bai, Hu, & Gu, 2014). Bai and his colleagues also noted differences in the use of SRL strategies as well as English writing strategies. For example, students in the low English proficiency group were found to use more SRL strategies such as seeking social assistance and emotional control. However, students in the high English proficiency group were found to use more revising, self-evaluating, and information-seeking strategies (Bai et al., 2014). In a similar study with elementary school students, a stronger sense of reading-related self-efficacy was reported in the treatment groups where students were taught reading strategies with a great emphasis on goal setting and self-evaluation processes (Schunemann, Sporer, & Brunstein, 2013).

Significant relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and language learning strategies were found in elementary, secondary, and college students (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). Both self-efficacy and learning strategies served as mediators between high school grade point average and final examination grades for college students in a Norwegian university (Diseth, 2011). In another study with college students, self-efficacy beliefs and SRL strategies were noted to be significantly related to each other with self-efficacy having a direct effect on academic performance and SRL strategies having a moderating effect on this relationship (Yusuf, 2011).

2.4. Measurement issues with self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is critical when students are self-evaluating the tasks and setting their academic goals in the forethought phase; however, the measurement of self-efficacy has been a challenging task due to the misinterpretation and confusion with similar tasks such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, and locus of control. Bandura (1997) claimed that self-efficacy and locus of control are different constructs and that locus of control is not empirically related to either self-efficacy or behavior. Another issue with the measurement of self-efficacy is item wording. Bandura (1986) suggested the use of "can" instead of "will" or "confident" to indicate a person's subjective convictions to successfully learn or complete a specific task given the skills he/she processes instead of intention.

In response to the need for valid and reliable tools to assess ESL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and to follow the recommendations of Bandura (1986), Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE) was developed with 32 items (Wang, Schwab, Fenn, & Chang, 2013). Each item asks students to make judgments about their capabilities to

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