

Self-efficacy of Art Undergraduates in Mobile-assisted English Learning

BI SHANSHAN

Guangxi Arts University, China

bishanshan@gxau.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

This research adopts the questionnaire survey method and selects 208 freshmen from the Guangxi Arts University as the research objects. The research studies the English self-efficacy and mobile learning situation of art college students and understands students' views on using mobile devices/platform to assist in their learning of the English language. Results found that all students have mobile phones which allow teachers and students to use them for English learning. Besides, most art college students have a low sense of English self-efficacy, including low self-confidence, low enthusiasm in English learning, and average level of solving English learning difficulties. In addition, more than half of the students agree with the use of mobile devices/platforms to assist in English learning. Only a small number of people oppose it. This finding lays a preliminary foundation for later empirical research on using mobile learning to cultivate the English self-efficacy of art students.

Keywords: mobile learning; art college students; English self-efficacy; preliminary foundation

INTRODUCTION

In 2017 and 2020, the “University English Teaching Guide” issued by the Ministry of Education of China stated that universities should make full use of information technology and actively create a diversified teaching and learning environment. Teachers are encouraged to build and use micro-classes and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course). Teachers use high-quality online educational resources to transform and expand teaching content to develop students' active learning, autonomous learning, and personalized learning. The teaching system should have the functions of human–computer interaction and human–human interaction. Such interactions reflect a future of ease of operation, mobility, and course monitoring in teaching. The recommendation of smart mobile devices in college English learning has become an inevitable trend in teaching.

In recent years, the development of mobile English learning platforms have emerged everywhere. For example, some colleges and universities adopt platforms such as WeLearn, Unipus, Xuexitong, and Ketangpai to assist English teaching; students use mobile platforms and apps to learn English independently such as Youdao Dictionary, BaiCiZhan, and Delta Reading. Given this educational and contemporary background, this study takes art college freshmen as the research objects to explore the English self-efficacy of art students and provides a preliminary basis for future empirical study on using mobile devices to intervene and improve students' English self-efficacy.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Psychologist Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as “...people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance.” All behavioural and psychological changes work by changing an individual's self-efficacy (Bandura, 2003). Self-efficacy has a good predictive effect on the acquisition of learning skills, and it is a key factor affecting individual learning effects (Liu, 2014, p. 75).

People with high self-efficacy tend to have positive emotions and experiences, whereas people with low self-efficacy are prone to feelings of failure.

The current research looks into English self-efficacy, and includes primary and middle school students, college students, and even English teachers. The research content is mainly to investigate students' self-efficacy, the influencing factors of students' self-efficacy, and the analysis of the relationship between self-efficacy and other learning factors (Qiu, 2017, p. 138). The research results are fruitful. For example, Wang (2014), Liu (2014), and Li (2016) found through empirical research that college students' self-efficacy affects their autonomous learning ability to a certain extent. Gu (2018) found that English writing strategies affect students' English self-efficacy. In addition, due to the rapid development of technology, scholars have combined mobile learning with English self-efficacy to explore the impact of mobile learning on English self-efficacy. Ling et al. (2016) conducted an empirical study and found that the WeChat platform has a positive effect on improving the English self-efficacy of northwest minority students. Gong and Wu (2016) verified the positive effect of mobile autonomous learning on English self-efficacy and English achievement. Qiu (2017) explored the influence of mobile learning-assisted classrooms on college students' English self-efficacy and found that this learning approach improve students' English self-efficacy. Besides, students achieve progress on English self-learning through two dimensions of planning and reflection. Zou and Xu (2019) explored the ways of adopting suitable mobile learning resources before, during, and after classes to promote the development of self-monitoring, adjustment ability, and self-efficacy. Zhang (2021) studied independent college students' self-efficacy in English learning in a mobile learning environment. The results revealed that students depend on teachers strongly in the new learning environment of mobile learning and they have low self-efficacy in English learning. She proposed strategies to cultivate students' self-efficacy in English learning to help them adapt to the mobile learning environment. However, most of the research objects of these studies are college students in comprehensive colleges, and there is not much research available on the English self-efficacy of art college students. No research has been conducted on using mobile learning to assist art students in English learning self-efficacy.

METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This research investigated 1) the situation of art college students who use mobile devices to learn English and 2) English learning self-efficacy; and also examined 3) art students' views on mobile-learning-assisted English learning and classrooms.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This study randomly selected 208 first-year students from the Guangxi Arts University (82 male and 126 female students with an average age of 18). These freshmen come from different majors, such as design, fine arts, music, plastic arts, and Chinese painting. Compared with students from other comprehensive universities, art students have a weak foundation in senior high school compulsory courses (Chinese, English, mathematics, history, physics). For art students, the priority was to have a good professional performance in the art college entrance exam so that they would be accepted into art colleges rather than obtaining good grades in compulsory courses. Therefore, in high school, they focused on the training and learning of professional courses, and not much time was devoted for compulsory courses. However, after entering colleges, they still need to register and pass the course College English, which is a challenge for them.

This study selects freshmen as the research object, first, because all students have not taken college English courses; hence, all students stand on the same starting point; second, freshmen are better classified into “experimental classes” and “control classes” to conduct empirical study in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted by adopting the questionnaire research method. The questionnaires were distributed in the college English class, and the respondents were required to complete the questionnaires in class. Hence, all the questionnaires are valid. The first part of the questionnaire obtained the demographic information of students, including gender, age, major, mobile device. The second part of the questionnaire delves on the content according to the self-efficacy scale compiled by Schwartz et al. Students’ answers to the items about English self-efficacy were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree). The third part of the questionnaire explores students’ views on learning and teaching with mobile learning assistance and collects students’ opinions through a fill-in-the-blank format.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

WAYS OF USING MOBILE DEVICES TO LEARN ENGLISH

All 208 students have mobile phones, of which 22 students also have tablet computers and laptops. Among the 208 students, 35 students do not use any mobile platform to assist their English learning at this stage, and the remaining 173 students use different English platforms or apps to assist in English learning, such as BaiCiZhan and Liu Lishuo. Among these 173 students, 56.65% of them ($n = 98$) study English for no more than 1 hour per week; 31.21% of the students ($n = 54$) study English for 1–3 hours per week; 12.14% of students ($n = 21$) study English for more than 3 hours a week. Even if all students have mobile devices, more than half of the students study English for less than an hour a week. In addition, 52.88% of students ($n = 110$) used mobile devices to receive online English class in high school, and the remaining 47.12% of students ($n = 98$) did not.

ENGLISH SELF-EFFICACY

The second part of the questionnaire reveals that the English self-efficacy of art college students is not high.

(1) STUDENTS SHOWED LOW SELF-CONFIDENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH.

In the questionnaire, when students were presented with the statement “I believe I can achieve good grades in English learning,” their responses are as follows:

TABLE 1. Analysis of question for “self-confidence in learning English”

	Number of students	Percentage
1 = Strongly agree	21	10.1%
2 = Agree	44	21.15%
3 = Neutral	109	52.4%
4 = Disagree	23	11.06%

5 = Strongly disagree	11	5.29%
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Table 1 shows that 31.25% of the students (n = 65) selected the “strongly agree” and “agree” options; they believed that they can achieve good results in English learning. Moreover, 52.4% of the students (n = 109) chose “neutral,” indicating that their confidence in learning English was average; the remaining 11.06% and 5.26% of students (n = 23; n = 11) chose “disagree” and “strongly disagree,” thinking that they could not improve learning English. Thus, only a small number of students are confident in learning English, and most students have an unconfident attitude toward learning.

(2) THE RESEARCH RESULTS ILLUSTRATE THAT STUDENTS WERE NOT VERY KEEN ON LEARNING ENGLISH.

Table 2 demonstrates students’ responses to the statement “as long as I can learn English knowledge, I am willing to put in more effort.”

TABLE 2. Analysis of question for “being willing to put more effort on learning English”

	Number of students	Percentage
1 = Strongly agree	13	6.25%
2 = Agree	62	29.81%
3 = Neutral	121	58.17%
4 = Disagree	36	17.31%
5 = Strongly disagree	18	8.65%

In this question, 36.06% of the students (n = 75) chose “strongly agree” and “agree,” indicating that they are willing to put in more effort to learn English. Moreover, 58.17% of the students (n = 121) chose “neutral,” and 17.31% and 8.65% of students (n = 36; n = 18) selected “disagree” and “strongly disagree,” indicating that these students were unwilling or would not put in more effort to learn English.

When students answered the question “I find it difficult to keep learning English,” their responses were:

TABLE 3. Analysis of question for “difficulty of keeping learning English”

	Number of students	Percentage
1 = Strongly agree	45	21.63%
2 = Agree	79	37.98%
3 = Average	71	34.13%
4 = Disagree	9	4.33%
5 = Strongly disagree	4	1.92%

Table 3 show 59.61% of the students (n = 124) “strongly agree” and “agree” with this statement and thought that sustaining learning English is difficult. Moreover, 34.13% of the students (n = 71) chose “neutral;” 4.33% and 1.92% of the students (n = 9; n = 4) chose “disagree” and “strongly disagree,” proving that only a small number of students thought they can keep learning English.

In summary, about 60% of students are unwilling to exert more efforts to learn English and believe that maintaining English learning is difficult. Students are also less motivated.

- (3) IN TERMS OF DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH LEARNING, STUDENTS HAVE TROUBLE IN ENGLISH PROBLEM-SOLVING AND ARE UNABLE TO SUIT THEIR METHODS TO THE SITUATION.

When presented with the item “I think I can overcome the difficulties encountered in English learning and improve my level of English,” students’ responses are as follows.

TABLE 4. Analysis of question for “ability of overcoming difficulties encountered in English learning”

	Number of students	Percentage
1 = Strongly agree	8	3.85%
2 = Agree	38	18.27%
3 = Average	108	51.92%
4 = Disagree	43	20.67%
5 = Strongly disagree	11	5.29%

The data in Table 4 show that only 22.12% of the students ($n = 46$) chose “strongly agree” and “agree,” and 51.92% of the students ($n = 108$) believed that they have an average ability to overcome difficulties; the remaining 20.67% and 5.29% of the students ($n = 43$; $n = 11$) thought they could not solve problems encountered in English learning.

When presented with the statement “When learning English, I know my weakness in the learning process and overcome them in a targeted manner,” most students were inclined to believe that they cannot identify the weakness and fail to overcome them.

TABLE 5. Analysis of question for “being aware of personal weakness in the process of English learning”

	Number of students	Percentage
1 = Strongly agree	10	4.81%
2 = Agree	52	25%
3 = Average	113	54.33%
4 = Disagree	27	12.98%
5 = Strongly disagree	6	2.88%

Table 5 data show that 4.81% and 25% of participants ($n = 10$; $n = 52$) were aware of their weaknesses in English learning and could solve English problems in a targeted manner, whereas 54.33% of students ($n = 113$) thought they have average level of solving English problems. They may not be able to solve their own weaknesses in a targeted manner; and 12.98% and 2.88% of students ($n = 27$; $n = 6$) chose “disagree” and “strongly disagree,” believing that they could not identify their weaknesses in English learning and eliminate them.

In summary, students’ self-efficacy in learning English is not high. Most students have low self-confidence, low enthusiasm, and poor general problem-solving ability. Moreover, a few students are seriously inadequate in self-confidence, enthusiasm, and ability to solve problems.

VIEWS ON MOBILE DEVICES/PLATFORMS ASSISTING ENGLISH LEARNING AND CLASSES

When collecting information on students’ opinions on mobile devices, platforms assisting English learning, and classes, students were first asked “Do you think English teachers use

English platforms and mobile devices to interact with students in teaching, which can improve students' interest in English learning and classroom participation?," students responded:

TABLE 6. Analysis of question for "students' opinions on mobile-assisted English learning"

	Number of students	Percentage
1 = Strongly agree	30	14.42%
2 = Agree	80	38.46%
3 = Average	88	42.31%
4 = Disagree	9	4.33%
5 = Strongly disagree	1	0.48%

The number of students who chose "strongly agree" and "agree" accounted for 14.42% and 38.46%, respectively ($n = 30$; $n = 80$). They believed that the use of English platforms and mobile devices could increase students' interest in learning and classroom participation. However, 42.31% of the students ($n = 88$) held a neutral attitude. The remaining 4.81% ($n = 10$) disagreed with this statement as shown in Table 6.

When students who agree with the views were further asked "Why do they think this method can increase students' interest in learning and classroom participation," their views are mainly summarized as follows: 1) this method is novel and can attract students' interest, thus developing their enthusiasm; 2) introverted students can express their opinions, which is conducive to teacher–student interaction and increase classroom participation; 3) this learning method is convenient and efficient.

When students who were neutral and disagreed with the views were asked "why do they think this method cannot improve students' interest in learning and classroom participation," their concerns mainly include 1) they have not tried this method before, dared not to try its effectiveness, and have a wait-and-see attitude; 2) students with poor English foundation have difficulty improving their grades by any method and require their own effort; 3) students are easily distracted by other information available online when using mobile devices.

In addition, when students were asked what learning forms they would like to use on mobile devices, their answers were summarized as follows: 1) reading; 2) audio; 3) videos; 4) teachers answering students' questions; 5) doing homework; 7) interactive learning.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research reveal three key findings. First, every college student has a mobile device, which provides necessary conditions for the future use of mobile platforms to assist in English learning. Second, more than half of the students approve of using mobile devices/platforms to assist English learning. They believe that such methods can increase interest, enthusiasm, and participation in English learning. Third, most students' English self-efficacy is not high; they have insufficient self-confidence and enthusiasm in learning English and think that their ability to solve English learning difficulties is average.

These results provide the following implications for future empirical studies. On the one hand, in the teaching process, teachers appropriately use mobile devices/platforms to increase students' learning interest and make them participate actively in English learning. However, teachers should not rely heavily on mobile devices and platforms; otherwise, students will be easily distracted in the process of mobile learning. On the other hand, the number of materials on the mobile platform and the difficulty of learning tasks need to be controlled. Teachers

provide different forms of learning materials online to enrich students' manner of English, but they should reduce the level of difficulty of those materials to improve students' confidence on English learning. Furthermore, teachers should always pay attention to students' learning dynamics, improve teacher–student interaction, and encourage and help students when they encounter English-learning difficulties.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bi Shanshan currently holds the position as one of the lecturers in General Education Department of Guangxi Arts University, China. She is mostly interested in studies involving Foreign Language Teaching and Intercultural Communication.