

# A Survey of the Researches on Academic Self-efficacy in English Language Learning of the Past Decade in China

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**Abstract:-** This paper is a survey of papers published in China in the past decade (2010-2019) on academic self-efficacy in English language learning. First of all, this paper reviews the research on academic self-efficacy in English language learning in China from the perspectives of research trends, research contents and research methods. Then, this paper discusses the current issues pertaining to academic self-efficacy in English language learning research from five aspects, points out the achievements and existing problems of relevant research in China, and finally gives corresponding suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:-** Self-efficacy, Academic, English, China, The Past Decade

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-efficacy is put forward by Bandura in his paper Comprehensive Theory of Self-efficacy on Behavior Change in 1977. It refers to the belief that students have the ability to successfully complete a task, and it is the embodiment of individual self-confidence. Academic self-efficacy is an important manifestation of self-efficacy within the scope of learning tasks. It refers to the self-confidence and self-assessment of students' ability to successfully complete learning tasks, and their own feelings about learning activities and the achievement of learning activities. Academic self-efficacy can enable students to have better academic mood, eliminate bad academic mood, enhance students' confidence in success and improve learning efficiency.

In recent years, the research on academic self-efficacy in China has gradually increased, and some achievements have been made, including in the field of English language study. Based on the statistical analysis of the major foreign language journals published in the database, namely China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) in the past decade, this paper summarizes and analyzes the research trends, objects, methods and contents to provide reference for further research.

## II. METHODS AND STANDARDS OF STATISTICAL CLASSIFICATION

The literature review of this study is from the database CNKI. With the key words of "academic self-efficacy" and "English" being used as retrieval, 84 papers were obtained, including 7 in 2010, 4 in 2011, 6 in 2012, 8 in 2013, 5 in 2014, 8 in 2015,

15 in 2016, 5 in 2017, 9 in 2018 and 3 in 2019. It can be seen from this that from 2011 to 2016, the number of published articles has been increasing year by year, and reached the peak in 2016; in 2017, the number of published articles declined significantly, but it increased in 2018, which is second only to 2016; in 2019, the number is small, because some articles had not yet been included CNKI.

Therefore, in general, the research is still growing. However, the preliminary survey shows that although the number of articles is large, most of them are mainly at introductory level, thus lacking of empirical investigation. The statistics and classification of the article are mainly carried out according to the following standards: firstly, the articles published are classified according to the time of publication and different journals in order to find out the general trend of self-efficacy research in China; secondly, the articles published are classified according to their research objects, namely, English majors, non-English majors and "mixed groups", so that the research object tendency of these studies can be found; thirdly, the articles published are classified according to the research method, so as to get a glimpse of different methods used in the research of academic self-efficacy. In this paper, research methods are divided into two categories: empirical Research based on data survey and speculative research

By analyzing the statistical results of the above data, the characteristics of the academic self-efficacy in English language learning research in China are as follows:

From the perspective of research trends, the research on academic self-efficacy in China is on the rise as indicated by the number of articles published every year. In the past decade, the research on academic self-efficacy in English language learning in the first five years increased slowly in China. During this period, 35% of the articles were published. In the last five years, the research on academic self-efficacy in English language learning increased rapidly in China and reached a peak in 2016. The papers published in this period accounted for 65% of the total. It can be seen that academic self-efficacy has attracted more and more attention of scholars in China.

From the perspective of the research object, the research of academic self-efficacy in China focuses on non-English

majors. In the past decade, most researches were conducted on the academic self-efficacy of non-English majors, accounting for 60% of the total. However, there were a few researches on English majors and mixed groups, each accounting for 20% of the total.

From the perspective of research methods, the research of academic self-efficacy in China is mainly empirical research, supplemented by speculative research. In the past decade, empirical research was the main research method of academic self-efficacy in China, accounting for 89% of the total, while speculative research only accounted for 11% of the total.

### III. RESEARCH STATUS OF ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

According to the different perspectives of the research, this paper divides the related research results into the following five categories: the level of academic self-efficacy in English language learning; academic self-efficacy and academic achievement in English language learning; academic self-efficacy and learning strategies in English language learning; academic self-efficacy and learner autonomy in English language learning; the cultivation of academic self-efficacy in English language learning.

#### 3.1 *The Level of Academic Self-efficacy in English language learning*

This kind of research can be divided into two categories according to the subjects concerned: one is to investigate the level of overall academic self-efficacy in English language learning; the other is to investigate the academic self-efficacy of specific English subjects. Li (2016) found that the students' self-efficacy was of intermediate level, and there was a significant difference between the students of different grades, but there was no significant difference between the students of different gender and places of origin, and put forward some suggestions to improve the students' self-efficacy. The overall academic self-efficacy in English language learning of Non-English majors in local colleges and universities is also of intermediate level (Wang & Huang, 2014)

On the contrary, some researchers (Han, 2016; Zou, 2018) found that the overall self-efficacy of local college students was at a low level, and they found that this was due to students having weak English language foundation, low awareness of learning autonomy, and high dependence on the teachers.

In terms of specific English subjects, some researchers have found that (Wu, 2016), the academic self-efficacy of English writing of vocational college students is of intermediate level.

#### 3.2 *Academic Self-efficacy and Academic Achievement in English language learning*

The research on the relationship between academic self-efficacy in English language learning and English language learning can be roughly divided into two categories: one is the relationship between academic self-efficacy and overall

English performance, and the other is the relationship between academic self-efficacy and individual English skills. For the relationship between academic self-efficacy and overall English achievement, the results are inconsistent. A number of studies (Li, 2014; Tong, 2015; Wang, 2016; Han, 2016; Ye, 2016; Zhou, 2019) have found that there is a significant positive correlation between academic self-efficacy and English academic performance. However, there are also studies (Wu & Zhang, 2009; Xiong, 2016; Li, 2018) with the opposite conclusion. Wu & Zhang (2009) found that although there is no significant correlation between academic self-efficacy and English academic achievement; the path analysis shows that academic self-efficacy has an indirect impact on academic achievement. Academic self-efficacy has no significant correlation with English academic achievement, but it may indirectly affect English academic achievement, in which learner autonomy ability plays a mediating role.

In terms of the relationship between academic self-efficacy in English language learning and individual skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing are all involved, and the research conclusion is roughly the same, that is, there is a significant positive correlation between them. Some researchers (Yang, 2013) found that academic self-efficacy is positively related to students' oral and writing skills. Li & Liu (2013) found that there is a significant positive correlation between academic self-efficacy in foreign language writing and final writing scores. In addition, other researchers point out that academic self-efficacy plays a mediating role between English language learning emotional input and academic achievement (Zhou, 2019).

#### 3.3 *Academic Self-efficacy and Learner Autonomy in English language learning*

Most studies (Wu & Zhang, 2009; Li, 2016; Wu, 2019) show that academic self-efficacy is closely related to learner autonomy, and there is a positive correlation between them. The improvement of academic self-efficacy has a great impact on the improvement of students' learner autonomy; in addition, academic self-efficacy will also be strengthened with the improvement of students' learner autonomy.

However, for the relationship between academic self-efficacy and learner autonomy, a few studies have come to different or even opposite conclusions. The research of Xu and Kou (2015) shows that academic self-efficacy has no predictive power on learner autonomy. The author's explanation for this result is that academic self-efficacy may have a high correlation with other factors, that is, academic self-efficacy may have an indirect impact on learner autonomy through other factors. The reasons for these different results need further study and discussion.

#### 3.4 *Academic Self-efficacy and Learning Strategies in English language learning*

Some researchers (Wu & Zhang, 2009; Wang & Song, 2015; Qiu, 2017; Li, 2017) found that there is a significant positive

correlation between academic self-efficacy and learning strategies. Wang and Song (2015) pointed out that junior high school students' academic self-efficacy in English language learning is positively correlated with their learning strategies, and that academic self-efficacy can indirectly affect their English academic achievements by influencing their learning strategies.

### 3.5. *The Cultivation of Academic Self-efficacy in English language learning*

Academic self-efficacy is not a static personality characteristic, but a developmental index. It is a subjective self-judgment made by various sources of academic self-efficacy information in the process of people's interaction with the environment. Because of the dynamic and developing characteristics of academic self-efficacy in English language learning, people can monitor and cultivate academic self-efficacy, which has an optimistic guiding significance for English language teaching.

Academic self-efficacy is closely related to English language learning, so how to improve it effectively has become one of the focuses of many education researchers. In relevant studies, the researchers give different suggestions on how to improve the academic self-efficacy of English language learning: in their studies, some researchers point out that students should be guided to choose correct and reasonable goals (Tan, 2013; Li, 2018); some researchers recommend that students' success experience should be enhanced (Li, 2018); in addition, some researchers point out that traditional evaluation methods should be changed (Teng, 2016; Cai, 2017); in addition, there are also researchers that suggest students be guided to make reasonable success or failure attribution (Ding, 2016).

## IV. THE MEASUREMENT OF ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY

In the measurement of academic self-efficacy, there are some widely used questionnaires abroad, but in China, studies in this field started rather late, the number of questionnaires is relatively small. At present, the widely used questionnaires are mainly the following two:

One is the first self-designed academic self-efficacy questionnaires in China was constructed by Bian Yufang in 2003. The questionnaire was compiled strictly in accordance with the psychometric standard. It was considered that academic self-efficacy consisted of two dimensions: basic ability and control. In this questionnaire, there are 63 items together with demographic information and 7-point Likert scale was adopted. The questionnaire has good reliability and validity. The internal consistency coefficient of the basic competence dimension is 0.94, the control dimension is 0.79, and the total questionnaire is 0.80.

The second is Liang Yusong and Zhou Zongkui's academic self-efficacy questionnaire (2000), which includes two dimensions which are learning behavior self-efficacy and

learning ability self-efficacy. There are 22 questions in total, which meet the measurement standard.

There are not many such questionnaires in China, and there is no unified standard, which limits the promotion of the questionnaire, and it cannot be widely applied. Moreover, the division of the questionnaire dimensions is relatively simple, and it cannot comprehensively measure the reflection of students' academic self-efficacy in all aspects. In addition, the influencing factors of individual academic self-efficacy cannot be fully measured (Liang & Chen, 2018).

## V. EXISTING PROBLEMS AND RESEARCH PROSPECTS

In China, at present, there are limited researches on academic self-efficacy, most of which focus on non-English majors and middle school students, and a few on English majors and primary school students. The research methods are mainly experimental, but most of the studies are general study, lack of in-depth exploration of the inner mechanism of academic self-efficacy and the factors affecting it based on the educational system in China, for example, how to combine the research with the existing English education situation in China, to put forward systemic and practical suggestion to improve the academic self-efficacy. In terms of research content, most of the researches focus on certain subjects, especially Mathematics, English, Physics, History and Geography. There is no doubt that the study of academic self-efficacy in China still needs further study.

First of all, more attention should be paid to the follow-up research of academic self-efficacy. Many studies are conducted from a cross-section, and the measured academic self-efficacy is lack of dynamic. Lu (2009) found that the level of academic self-efficacy is different in different time. In the future, longitudinal research should be strengthened to reveal the development stages of individual academic self-efficacy or group academic self-efficacy and the regularity of its development and change.

Secondly, the field research of academic self-efficacy needs to be further explored. In China, most of the existing studies are measurement experiment design. Although this kind of research can have a strict control of variables, it doesn't take many factors in the reality into consideration, and as a result, it lacks the power of practical application. In addition, most of the subjects were college students. Although they met the homogeneity requirements of the subjects, they lacked the complexity of people in the situation (Li, Li & Wu, 2018). In view of this, in the future study of academic self-efficacy, more consideration should be given to the field or situational experimental design to respect the domain particularity and population difference of academic self-efficacy.

Finally, the practical leading role of academic self-efficacy research needs to be enhanced. On the one hand, it validates and enriches the research conclusions, on the other hand, it makes the existing research achievements play their due educational value, especially the role of promoting behavior

performance.

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