

Original Article

# A Survey of Self-Efficacy in English Learning of Junior Middle School Students in Rural Areas

Xiang Meixian<sup>1</sup>, Wu Chunrong<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, Sichuan Province, China.

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**Abstract** - To understand the current situation of rural junior middle school students' self-efficacy in English learning and explore the different roles of different information sources of self-efficacy in students' English learning, a questionnaire survey is conducted on junior middle school students from a rural middle school in D city, S Province, China. The results show that: 1. the overall level of self-efficacy in English learning of rural junior middle school students is lower than average; 2. academic record is the strongest self-information source of self-efficacy in English learning; 3. English teachers, classmates, and parents all have a significant positive correlation with their Self-efficacy in English learning, and classmates have the most significant correlation. According to the influence of different information sources on students' self-efficacy in English learning, this paper puts forward relevant suggestions from students, teachers, classmates, and parents.

**Keywords** - Rural junior high school students, English learning, Self-efficacy.

## 1. Introduction

Albert Bandura, an American psychologist, believes that people's judgment of their ability plays a leading role in the self-regulation system and thus puts forward self-efficacy, which refers to the belief, judgment, or subjective self-feeling that an individual has to complete an activity before taking action (Bandura, translated by Lin Ying et al., 2001). After the concept was put forward, many basic and empirical studies were used to prove the positive role of self-efficacy in psychology and other fields (Zhou Wenxia & Guo Guiping, 2006). In education, self-efficacy is also widely used in education and teaching because it promotes the improvement of students' autonomous learning abilities (Guo Benyu & Jiang Feiyue, 2008). As a kind of subjective self-judgment, self-efficacy is based on certain knowledge or information, which Bandura called self-efficacy information (Gao Shenchun, 2000). It mainly includes four sources: personal achievement, surrogate experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological state (Bandura, translated by Lin Ying et al., 2001).

From the perspective of psychology and pedagogy, self-efficacy is of great significance to junior high school students, especially rural junior high school students. Improving students' sense of self-efficacy can enhance their self-confidence and make them full of expectations for their own learning life, stimulate and maintain learning motivation, and improve their autonomous learning ability. For English subjects which need persistent motivation and confidence, the role of self-efficacy should not be ignored. However, different performance information has a different importance to

English learning. Zhang Jing conducted a questionnaire survey among senior high school students and found that academic self-efficacy is significantly positively correlated with English academic records (Zhang Jing, 2011). Ni Hanging, MA Jianhong put forward five Principles for Cultivating Students' Sense of English Self-efficacy, including example demonstration (Ni Hangying & MA Jianhong, 2007). You S, Dang M, and Lim S analyzed different subjects and pointed out that when students positively perceive teachers' motivational behaviors, students' sense of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation will increase, ultimately improving students' reading, English, and math scores (You S, Dang M, Lim S A, 2016). From the perspective of pedagogy, Wang X, Liu Y, Ying B, et al. suggested that educational activities should be carried out by cultivating students' learning adaptability, reducing students' foreign language anxiety, and improving students' sense of self-efficacy in English learning (Wang X, Liu Y L, Ying B, et al., 2021). It is not hard to see that four different information sources of effectiveness, namely, personal achievement, substitute experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological state, positively promote middle school students' English learning

According to the National Education Development in 2020 released by the Ministry of Education, the number of junior middle school students in China is 16.321 million, including 6.453 million urban junior middle school students and 9.868 million rural junior middle school students. The proportion of rural students is larger, but the quality of education in rural areas is far inferior to that in cities. Enhancing the learning ability of rural middle school students



and revitalizing rural education is the theme of the time. Therefore, to understand the current situation of self-efficacy in English learning of junior middle school students in rural areas, to explore the different roles of different information sources of self-efficacy in students' English learning, and to know how to use these different information sources to promote the achievement of students' learning goals should become the focus of attention of middle school English teachers and relevant researchers. According to the four kinds of self-efficacy information of Bandura, the study designed the questionnaire regarding the Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire of Ran Yusong and Zhou Zongkui and the Social Support Rating Scale of Xiao Shuiyuan. This paper aims to understand the latest situation through data analysis and puts forward targeted suggestions on four kinds of efficacy information to improve the self-efficacy of rural middle school students in English learning and thus improve the independent learning ability of rural middle school students and the quality of rural English education.

**2. Research Methods**

**2.1. Research Objects**

The research objects are junior middle school students in a rural middle school in D City, S Province, China. To ensure the data can be referenced and comparative and avoid deliberately degrading or elevating the level of English in rural areas, the study selected two classes in the second grade of the junior middle school whose overall English record was at the medium level. The study involved 126 students. 112 questionnaires were collected, 12 invalid ones were deleted, and 100 were analyzed.

**2.2. Research Tools**

Questionnaire on Self-Efficacy of Middle School Students in English Learning

There are 30 questions in this questionnaire, 1-5 are single choice questions, and the purpose is to understand the basic information related to students. 6-30 questions on the scale are on a 5-level Likert scale. Each item has 5 choices from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," The score is 5 points, 4 points, 3 points, 2 points, and 1 point in the sequence. The higher the score, the higher the students' self-efficacy in English learning and the greater the influence of others on students' self-efficacy in English learning.

The subjects of the scale refer to the Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire of Ran Yusong and Zhou Zongkui, the Social Support Rating Scale of Xiao Shuiyuan, and the relevant theories of Bandura's self-efficacy, which can be divided into the following five dimensions:

Dimension 1: Students' self-efficacy in English learning (questions 6-10), Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.914.

Dimension 2: The influence of students on self-efficacy (questions 11-15), Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.737.

Dimension 3: The influence of English teachers on

self-efficacy (questions 16-20), Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.756.

Dimension 4: The influence of classmates on self-efficacy (questions 21-25), Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.871.

Dimension 5: The influence of parents and family members on self-efficacy (questions 26-30), Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.829.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the total amount table is 0.945.

**2.3. Data Processing**

IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used for frequency analysis, classification summary, and correlation analysis of the collected questionnaire results.

**3. Research Results**

**3.1. Basic Information**

Among the respondents, female students occupy a large proportion, and their English scores are 90-60. Moreover, rural junior middle school students prefer the English learning method taught by teachers, and most of their English teachers and parents are democratic, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Results of Frequency Analysis (n=100)**

Name	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Gender	man	47	47.00
	woman	53	53.00
2. English at ordinary times (120 divided into full marks)	120-90 Points	19	19.00
	90-60 Points	37	37.00
	60-30 Points	32	32.00
	30-0 Points	12	12.00
3. Favorite English learning style	Teacher teaching	66	66.00
	Student cooperation	27	27.00
	Independent learning	7	7.00
4. English teacher's teaching style	Authoritarian	30	30.00
	Laissez-faire	8	8.00
	Democratic	62	62.00
5. Parenting style	Authoritarian	27	27.00
	Laissez-faire	23	23.00
	Democratic	50	50.00

**3.2. Statistical Description**

There are no outliers in the data, which can be directly described and analyzed for the average value, as shown in Table 2. The questionnaire adopted a 5-level Likert scale, with 5 points for "strongly agree" and 1 point for "strongly disagree," ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The higher the score, the higher the self-efficacy.

Taking the theoretical mean value of 3 as the reference value, the average score of self-efficacy in English learning of rural junior high school students is below 3, at a slightly lower level, and the degree of self-efficacy is as follows: academic record > learning content > learning ability > learning task > learning state. This is consistent with the theoretical inference of Bandura and related researchers that academic record is the strongest and most obvious information source of learning self-efficacy. Therefore, the academic record is taken as the quantitative self-efficacy index in the follow-up analysis, and correlation analysis is conducted with other dimensions.

**Table 2. Results of basic indicators (n=100)**

Student	Average value	Standard deviation	Median
6. You think learning English is easy.	2.38	1.162	2.000
7. Do you think you can understand English books and what the English teacher says well?	2.56	1.028	3.000
8. You believe you can solve the difficulties in English learning and complete the task given by the English teacher.	2.50	1.077	2.000
9. You think you can do well in the English test.	2.62	1.003	3.000
10. You like to choose challenging English learning tasks.	2.47	1.087	2.000

**3.3. Results of Correlation Analysis of Self-Efficacy of English Academic Record and Student Internal Factors**

There is a significant positive correlation between rural middle school students' self-efficacy in English learning and performance progress, analysis errors, and effort attribution, as shown in Table 3. It shows that rural middle school students have a correct way of attribution at present, and the progress of grades will significantly enhance students' confidence. However, rural middle school students lack rational thinking about The English test and can not calmly analyze their mistakes.

**3.4. Results of Correlation Analysis of the Self-Efficacy of English Academic Records and English Teachers**

Rural middle school students are eager to get help and care from teachers in study and life, as shown in Table 4,

which indirectly explains why rural middle school students prefer the teacher-lectured English learning mode, as shown in Table 1. English teachers' encouragement and trust also strongly correlate with students' self-efficacy in English learning, which is consistent with Robert Rosenthal Effect.

**Table 3. Results of correlation analysis**

Internal factors of students	Pearson coefficient of correlation
11. When you progress in your English study or do well in an English exam, you will be very confident.	.544**
12. When you make no progress in your English study or do worse on your English test, you will doubt your learning ability.	.240*
13. Your self-confidence is easily affected by a study task or exam difficulty.	.254*
14. You can calmly analyze your mistakes in an English test, whether your score is good or bad.	.543**
15. You think you can achieve your ideal English score because of your efforts.	.611**
* * At level 0.01 (two-tailed), the correlation was significant. *At level 0.05 (two-tailed), the correlation was significant.	

**Table 4. Results of correlation analysis**

English teacher	Pearson coefficient of correlation
16. In learning English, you will turn to the English teacher for help when you encounter difficulties.	.538**
17. The difficulty of the English teacher will affect your confidence in learning English.	.186
18. The encouragement and trust of an English teacher will improve your confidence in learning English.	.494**
19. You want English teachers to take the initiative to care for, help, and support you in your study and life.	.499**
20. Your English teacher often gives you care and helps to improve your study confidence.	.361**

**3.5. Results of Correlation Analysis of the Self-Efficacy of English Academic Records and the Classmates**

In rural middle schools, students' English learning peer influence is very great, even more than the influence of teachers, as shown in Table 5. They are more inclined to turn to their classmates for help when in trouble. Compared with

teachers and parents, peers are more likely to care for, help, and support them in their studies and life.

**Table 5. Results of correlation analysis**

Classmates	Pearson coefficient of correlation
21. In learning English, you will turn to your classmates for help when you encounter difficulties.	.739**
22. Your confidence in learning English will be boosted by progress in class or by doing well in exams.	.569**
23. The speech acts of classmates (such as encouragement and criticism) will greatly affect your confidence in learning English.	.359**
24. I hope students will take the initiative to care for, help, and support me in my study and life.	.522**
25. My classmates often give me care and help improve my study confidence.	.610**

### 3.6. Results of Correlation Analysis of Self-Efficacy of English Academic Record and Parents and Family

Rural middle school students are willing to share their progress and achievements with their parents and family, indicating that they are eager for recognition, which corresponds with the typical psychological characteristics of rural left-behind students, as shown in Table 6. At the same time, it is not hard to see that talking about difficulties with parents and family correlates significantly with self-efficacy. This shows that when rural middle school students encounter setbacks, they need parents to listen patiently and guide them actively.

**Table 6. Results of correlation analysis**

Parents and family	Pearson coefficient of correlation
26. In learning English, when you make progress or get good grades, you will tell your parents or family members.	.514**
27. In learning English, when you have difficulties or your grades fall, you will talk to your parents or family members.	.451**
28. Your parents or family members (such as encouragement and criticism) can greatly affect your confidence in learning English.	.199*
29. My parents or family members often give me care and help make me confident in my English study.	.506**
30. You expect your parents or family members to take the initiative to care for, help and support you in your study and life.	.394**

## 4. Suggestions

Based on the analysis of the survey results, the study puts forward relevant suggestions from students, teachers, classmates, and parents in combination with relevant knowledge of pedagogy and psychology, hoping to help rural middle school students improve their sense of self-efficacy in English learning and enhance their independent learning ability. At the same time, it also provides a useful supplement to the research on middle school students' self-efficacy in English learning.

### 4.1. Students: Learn to Attribute and Treat Exams Correctly

#### 4.1.1. Correct Attribution

According to attribution theory, if students can correctly attribute test results, their learning motivation will be improved, and learning enthusiasm will also be enhanced to persist in learning. On the contrary, if students do not have correct attribution, it will reduce learning motivation and produce negative effects (Han Rensheng, 2004). Therefore, English teachers in rural middle schools need to guide students to form correct attributions for English test results, attributing successful results to internal and stable reasons such as ability and failing results to external and unstable reasons such as luck, to improve their learning motivation, enhance their self-confidence, and eliminate the rural middle school students' inferiority in the process of learning English.

#### 4.1.2. Treat Exam Correctly

Taking grades as the only problem is our country's stubborn malady of education. Students suffer from pressure from schools, teachers, and parents and lack rational thinking about exams. After the exam, most students focus more on the exam results, and it is difficult to analyze their problems in the exam calmly. Most rural middle school students are left-behind children who often report good rather than bad news when contacting their parents. Because they are eager for recognition and afraid of criticism. Although the Double Reduction Policy proposes to improve the way of examination and the way of presentation of results, reduce the examination pressure, improve the examination method, and resolutely overcome the tendency to rely on scores, it is far from enough to rely on the support of the policy for students to view the examination correctly. Only through the active guidance of school, teachers, and parents can students form a scientific concept of an examination. In this process, teachers, as long-term companions and instructors of students' learning process, have more opportunities and responsibilities to guide students to view exams correctly, teach students to analyze test results calmly, and form a correct view of learning.

### 4.2. Teachers: Carry Out Caring Education and Scaffolding Teaching

#### 4.2.1. Show Love and Express Expectations

In his book *The Birth of A Citizen*, Suhomlinsky compared youth to flowers, emphasizing that the beauty of flowers depends on long-term, careful care of growth

(Suhomlinsky, translated by Bi Shuzhi et al., 2015). Compared with urban students, rural students have limited resources and care. Therefore, teachers play an important role as parents' agents and psychological workers in their studies and life (Bao Xinmin, Bai Dongqing, Wang Xiaoqian, 2015). In learning English, rural middle school students are more likely to have psychological problems such as frustration, anxiety, and self-abasement. They need English teachers to provide the timely help. At the same time, the data are consistent with the Pygmalion effect (as shown in Table 4). Teachers' high expectations for students can act as an educational self-fulfilling prophecy, promoting the development of students' intellectual abilities (Rosenthal R., Jacobson L., translated by Tang Xiaojie, Cui Yunrong, 1998). English teachers in rural middle schools should be aware of teachers' expectations, express reasonable expectations to students, and stimulate students' learning motivation.

#### *4.2.2. Reduce Dependence and Enhance Autonomy*

In 2014, the Ministry of Education developed and distributed opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Moral Education, which identified six core qualities of students. Among them, the dimension of independent development includes learning to learn and healthy life, emphasizing that students should effectively manage their learning and life and recognize and discover their value. This study shows that rural middle school students are more inclined to the way of learning taught by teachers, indicating that rural middle school students lack the consciousness of autonomous learning and have a psychological dependence on teachers. Rural middle school English teachers must pay attention to this point, actively change the traditional teaching mode, and take the initiative to try teaching methods conducive to cultivating autonomous learning ability. For example, Teachers can adopt the scaffolding teaching method, set up scaffolding for students, guide students into problem situations, let students explore independently and gradually reduce help, organize students to cooperate in learning, and evaluate the effect. English teachers in rural middle schools should teach students to learn independently and cultivate their independent learning spirit of being happy and good at learning, diligent in reflection, and active in inquiry.

#### **4.3. Classmates: Enhance Peer Care and Cooperative Learning**

##### *4.3.1. Guide to Positive Peer Influence*

Studies have demonstrated that adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer influence because of the shared physiological changes, personal expectations, and social needs in groups (Whitney A. Brechwald, Mitchell J. Prinstein., 2011). It can also be seen from this study that peer influence is particularly important, and its correlation with self-efficacy in English learning exceeds that of teacher influence. When encountering difficulties and troubles in

English learning, based on the authority of teachers and parents, rural middle school students, especially those living in school, are more willing to talk to their peers. Peer speech and emotion greatly influence rural middle school students' English learning. Students will follow their peers and study hard if they receive positive energy. However, if the students are guided by their peers' negative words and emotions, it can easily produce bad results. Therefore, English teachers in rural middle schools should communicate with students more, enhance the friendship between students so that students can form a sense of mutual help, and establish a good class atmosphere through their peers' successful alternative experience and verbal persuasion.

##### *4.3.2. Carry Out Benign Cooperative Learning*

After completing the questionnaire, the author conducted interviews with individual students and found that students with good grades had increased psychological pressure due to too much competition in class and were unwilling to communicate with their classmates. Students with poor grades become more and more difficult to understand due to the difficult content and lack of help, and then they lose motivation to learn English. English teachers in rural middle schools should actively absorb the excellent teaching experience of urban middle schools and adopt cooperative learning to break the silence in class. On the one hand, it can promote discussion and communication between students, and on the other hand, it can also provide help for students with learning difficulties. Moreover, in English learning, cooperative learning can also promote the accuracy of learners' mastery of foreign languages and improve their interest in learning (Liu Xue, 2014). However, in cooperative learning, there are also some practical problems, such as independent students being unwilling to communicate, active students becoming the leading role in class, and introverted students' passive coping. Rural middle school teachers should not imitate blindly when carrying out cooperative teaching but must make full preparations according to the situation of students. Although the new teaching forms will pressure teachers, English teachers in rural middle schools can promote students' development only by constantly learning good experiences and methods.

#### **4.4. Parents: Understand Success Education and Frustration Education**

##### *4.4.1. Understand Success Education Correctly*

Successful education here does not refer to a successful educational experience. Still, it refers to students' successful experiences, such as improving academic records, teacher praise, etc. In the education of rural middle school students, due to the lack of correct educational concepts, parents often take material rewards for their children's progress in learning, especially their progress in academic records, such as cash rewards and the purchase of mobile phones. These rewards seem to meet the needs of children, but it is easy to lead to students copying homework, cheating on exams, and other

bad behaviors to get rewards. According to the Needs Theory of Maslow's Hierarchy, although parents satisfy students' physiological and safety needs, students are more eager to have a happy family, to be valued by others, and to be full of confidence (Ye Haosheng, Guo Benyu, Peng Yunshi, Yang Shaogang, 1998). Their needs to love, belong, and respect are ignored. Rural middle school teachers should first guide students correctly, educate them to put forward reasonable reward mechanisms for their progress and success in learning, and give full recognition to their success. Secondly, communicate with parents actively, provide scientific advice, and stimulate and maintain students' learning motivation while meeting students' spiritual needs.

#### 4.4.2. Learn Rational Frustration Education

Frustration education here refers to the proper education for the frustrations experienced by students, such as the decline of academic records, teachers' criticism, and so on. Because of the low level of education, the parents of rural middle school students for the student's learning problems, especially the decline in academic record, give students verbal insults, physical punishment, reduce spending, or ignore the behavior. They can not timely understand the crux of the problem and lack correct education concepts. According to the survey, 15 percent of students are reluctant or very reluctant to tell their parents about their successes, but 32 percent are reluctant or very reluctant to tell about their setbacks. The child is reluctant to talk to the parent, and the parent does not understand or care about the cause of the child's frustration. Over time, the parent-child relationship

will become rigid, easily produce family conflicts, and even cause teenagers' bad behaviors such as weariness, puppy love, and smoking. Therefore, rural middle school teachers should try their best to know the family situation of students and guide parents to conduct appropriate frustration education for children. In consideration of rural parents' working and economic difficulties, rural middle schools and teachers can hold free family education lectures or online parent meetings to provide scientific guidance to rural parents, promote the effective implementation of the Family Education Promotion Law, and the comprehensive and healthy growth of rural middle school students.

## 5. Conclusion

The results show that the overall level of self-efficacy in rural English learning is lower than average. English learning performance is the strongest self-information source of self-efficacy in English learning. English teachers, classmates, and parents all have a significant positive correlation with their self-efficacy in English learning, and classmates have the most significant correlation. Therefore, rural middle school English teachers should attach importance to improving rural middle school students' English learning self-efficacy, think about the effective strategies for cultivating students' English learning self-efficacy, and stimulate and maintain the internal motivation to learn English to enhance students' English learning self-confidence. In this way, students can learn independently and achieve overall development.

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