The Influential Factors of Reading Self-efficacy: Towards a Better Model of Learning Chinese Poetry and Prose

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance among junior middle school students. A total of 210 students from a junior middle school were surveyed using the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale. The results showed the general situation of reading self-efficacy in learning Chinese ancient poetry and prose was found to be good and the factor of motivation and goal and the factor of evaluation were found to be positively associated with reading self-efficacy. The results highlight the important role of motivation and evaluation in academic achievement. A better model of teaching Chinese poetry and prose was suggested with more emphasis on raising students' interest and motivation, and with diverse evaluation engagement and design. A systematic evaluation mechanism, stratified teaching with real-time guidance, and professional instruction with technology aid are worth putting into practice.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Academic performance, Junior middle school students, Chinese poetry and prose

1. INTRODUCTION

In the three years of junior middle school, the lessons of ancient poetry and prose selected in the textbooks have accounted for a larger proportion, 51.7% of the total texts, with the implementation of uniform usage of textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education since September 2017 [1]. Ancient poetry plays an irreplaceable role in cultivating students' understanding and inheritance of traditional culture [2]. Several studies have pointed out the problems of current teaching models, including students' lack of motivation and interest [3], rote memorization [4], insufficient ability to transfer and apply knowledge [5], and students' low self-efficacy in test-taking [6].

Self-efficacy was coined by Bandura [7], which referred to people's subjective judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to attain designated types of performance. Previous studies proposed that in the process of language learning, self-efficacy makes learners more cognitive, behavioral, and motivated, indicating that self-efficacy, along with skills and knowledge, plays an important role in determining learners' learning achievement. Hundreds of existing studies have examined the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance in various subjects and fields. Among them, self-efficacy, and reading metacognitive strategies are positively correlated with English reading performance [8]. Past research had reported that language learning self-efficacy was significantly positively correlated with students' academic performance [9]. Self-efficacy affects students' efforts in learning, their attitude towards challenging tasks, their persistence in learning, and the use of learning strategies and metacognitive strategies, and thus affect their academic performance [10].

At present, the research object of reading self-efficacy in China is mainly focused on college students, while ignoring the group of junior middle school students. Previous research has examined the relationship between reading self-efficacy and academic performance [11], mainly focused on English reading and English grades. However, the relationship between reading self-efficacy and academic performance in Chinese poetry and prose has not been thoroughly researched and there is a need to provide clarity on this issue. Meanwhile, Chinese ancient poetry and prose reading occupy an important part of the High school entrance examination.

With the implementation of the "Double Reduction Policy" (guidelines to ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education), teachers are faced with a large capacity of textbooks and more limited teaching time, and they rarely pay attention to students' self-efficacy.

This study aims to explore the current situation of junior middle school students' self-efficacy in ancient poetry and prose reading, and deeply analyses the impact of ancient poetry reading self-efficacy on academic performance. It was hypothesized that self-efficacy influenced by the factors of motivation and goal, the experience of behavioral success or failure and alternative experience, physical and emotional state, self-attribution, and evaluation would enhance students' academic performance in Chinese ancient poetry and prose reading by acting as a mediating role. On the one hand, this study can enrich the research results on self-efficacy. On the other hand, this study explores a better teaching model with thorough consideration of students' self-efficacy, learning motivation, and learning strategies.

2. METHODS

2.1. Participants

In spring 2022, an urban public junior high school in Beijing, China was selected as the study site. The participants in the study were 221 junior middle school students (average age 14) from a public school located in Changping District, Beijing. The academic performance of this school is above average among junior middle schools in Changping District, but below average among all junior middle schools in Beijing. The participants involved 114 males and 107 females.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected using a questionnaire in paper version because students were not allowed to use cell phones on campus. All the data collected in this study was performed with the consent of the teachers and students. The questionnaire was distributed at the very beginning of a new semester when the students started to learn a new chapter of Chinese ancient poetry and prose. After obtaining the consent of the teacher, the author briefly explained the purpose of the study and simple precautions to the students. This survey questionnaire is not anonymous. Students do need to fill in real names when filling in the questionnaire. It took a total of 10 minutes to distribute and complete the questionnaire. The

author distributed and recovered a total of 221 questionnaires, and the valid questionnaires after inspection were 210. The efficiency of the questionnaire reached 95.02%.

The questionnaire was a version of those used by Liang Qiaohong, the survey of learning self-efficacy level of senior high school students and its influencing factors [12], modified to suit the special circumstances of the Chinese ancient poetry and prose in the current study.

The questionnaire comprised 46 items divided into three sections. The first section collected the participants' background information including name, grade, and age. All other 44 items were presented as statements and rated by the participants on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha results for the questionnaire was 0.801, which, indicated good (>0.8) internal consistency reliability for each scale.

For the sake of investigating the specific situation of students' Chinese ancient poetry and prose reading self-efficacy, 18 items in the second section can be categorized into 3 dimensions: sense of competence of general task, sense of competence of specific task, and sense of control about environment, emotion, and spirits. The investigation of influential factors included 26 items of 5 dimensions: motivation and goal, experience of behavioural success or failure and alternative experience, physical and emotional state, self-attribution, and evaluations.

3. RESULTS

Data were analyzed by SPSS 21.0. In the data screening process, an independent sample t-test was examined, which indicates there was no significant difference between male and female samples.

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

As shown in Table 1, the average level of participants' Chinese ancient poetry and prose reading self-efficacy is 3.37. And its three dimensions are 3.36 for sense of competence of general task, 3.18 for sense of competence of specific task, and 3.51 for sense of control about environment, emotion, and spirits.

As shown in Table 1, the average score of the factor of motivation and goal is 3.51, the factor of experience of behavioural success or failure and alternative experience is 2.93, the factor of physical and emotional state is 3.27, the factor of self-attribution is 2.75, and the factor of evaluation is 4.15.

Table 1. Means, and standard deviations of the research variables (N=210)

	Mean	SD
1. Self-efficacy of Chinese poetry and prose reading	3.37	0.41
2. sense of competence of general task	3.36	0.59
3. sense of competence of specific task	3.18	0.56
4. sense of control about environment, emotion, and spirits	3.51	0.50
5. motivation and goal	3.51	0.57
6.experience of behavioral success or failure and alternative experience	2.93	0.60
7. physical and emotional state	3.27	0.60
8. self-attribution	2.75	0.53
9. evaluation	4.15	0.70

Table 2. Correlation of the research variables (N=210)

	Reading self-efficacy	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor4	Factor 5
Reading self-efficacy	1					
Factor1	0.43**	1				
Factor 2	0.17*	0.30**	1			
Factor 3	0.30**	0.46**	0.48**	1		
Factor4	0.11	0.30**	0.61**	0.23**	1	
Factor 5	0.41**	0.40**	0.15	0.29**	0.16*	1

Note：*P＜0.05 **P＜0.01, ***P＜0.001, Same below.

Factor 1= motivation and goal, Factor 1= experience of behavioural success or failure and alternative experience, Factor 3= physical and emotional state, Factor4= self-attribution, Factor 5= evaluation.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to provide initial information about the relationships between the variables. As shown in Table 2, the factor of motivation and goal and the academic reading performance of Chinese ancient poetry and prose was significantly and positively correlated.

3.2. Regression analysis

Table 3. Regression analysis of reading self-efficacy on five dimensions

	B	SE	t	β
Factor 1	0.21	0.06	3.44	0.30**
Factor 2	0.03	0.07	0.42	0.04
Factor 3	0.05	0.06	0.82	0.07
Factor 4	-0.05	0.07	-0.70	-0.07
Factor 5	0.16	0.05	3.39	0.27**
R^2				0.23
F				10.09

A linear regression analysis was conducted using the standard scores of five influential dimensions (motivation and goal, experience of behavioral success or failure and alternative experience, physical and emotional state, self-attribution, and evaluation) as independent variables, and the score of reading self-efficacy as dependent variable.

As Table 3 indicates, the factor of motivation and goal had a significantly positive influence on students' reading self-efficacy of Chinese ancient poetry and prose (b =0.21, p < .05). The factor of the evaluation was a

positive predictor of students' reading self-efficacy (b =0.16, p < .05). However, the other three factors were not significant predictors of students' reading self-efficacy. Together, the five variables accounted for approximately 23% of the variance in the participants' reading self-efficacy (F=10.09, p<0.001).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Major findings

The results showed that the general situation of self-efficacy was good, and the score of sense of control about environment, emotion, and spirits was the highest. It reflects that students have confidence in dealing with challenging tasks of Chinese ancient poetry and prose. The sense of competence in specific tasks is lower than in the other two dimensions, which indicates teachers are supposed to make students better prepared for new complicated tasks in daily exercise in order to decrease students' anxiety and worries in test-taking.

Among the five influential factors, the factor of evaluation stood out significantly, which indicated that teachers are supposed to pay great attention to evaluation. A systematic evaluation mechanism involves multiple evaluators such as teachers, peers, and self, scientific evaluation standards, and diverse evaluation methods should be established [13]. It also suggested that teachers should formulate evaluation tasks according to teaching objectives, clarify evaluation standards, implement evaluation requirements, and carry out diversified evaluation models. In order to improve students' self-efficacy, some teachers tried stratified teaching by conducting a cycle of self-assessment, observation, reflection, goal-setting, and practice. A previous study carried out stratified teaching to explore the effect of stratification in reading class and the results show that the efficiency of group cooperation under the stratification in the class is significantly improved with proper guidance and evaluation [14].

The factor of motivation and goal was a positive predictor of students' reading self-efficacy in Chinese ancient poetry and prose. Promoting immersive learning by creating realistic contexts is a meaningful trail of arousing students' interest [15]. Ancient Chinese poetry and prose and modern Chinese were different in expression that students are always frustrated in understanding without cultural background explanation [16]. Recording mini-lessons in advance and using flipped classroom strategy is an efficient method to enhance students' interest [17]. Making full use of technical methods to ease comprehensive difficulties is also worth putting into practice.

4.2. Limitations

In this study, there are some limitations that could be improved by further research. First, the study of reading self-efficacy relied on the students' self-reports, which may have been subjective and biased by the students. Furthermore, this study used a very small convenience sample which limits the generalizability and reliability of the study. The students who participated in the study may not be representative of all students in China. Future research could include a larger sample size for a more comprehensive investigation and analysis. Follow-up studies should use a variety of measures, such as behavioral observations and interviews, to obtain more accurate data on reading self-efficacy.

4.3. Limitations

Researchers have found that teachers should change the traditional teaching model, which focused on rote memorization of notional words, functional words, sentence patterns, and translation [18]. Having a better understanding of students' reading self-efficacy helps teachers to know students' psychological state and pay more attention to the body of students. This study inspires teachers to think highly of evaluation in teaching Chinese ancient poetry and prose.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the general situation of junior middle school students' ancient poetry and prose reading self-efficacy and examined what factors influenced students' reading self-efficacy. Students' reading self-efficacy for a specific task, especially in solving unfamiliar question types or knowledge points, was lower than the other two dimensions, which indicated that teachers should emphasize improving students' comprehensive competence. It was found that the factor of motivation and goal, and the factor of evaluation positively affect students' reading self-efficacy in Chinese ancient poetry and prose. Based on these findings, it was suggested that evaluation was meaningful in building up students' interest and confidence.

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