

# The Influence of Learning Motivation and Self-Efficacy on the English Academic Achievement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners.

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## Abstract:

At present, experts and scholars in the field of educational psychology are continually enriching empirical research on how students' learning motivation and self-efficacy impact their English academic performance, which has long been recognized as an important topic. This article will adopt the method of literature review to conduct a comprehensive summary and analysis of the latest relevant empirical research in recent years. This article aims to find the relationship among EFL learners' learning motivation, self-efficacy, and English proficiency. The results indicate that the learning motivation and self-efficacy of EFL learners are significantly positively correlated with English academic performance. Additionally, differences in personality traits, perseverance, gender, and other aspects may have an impact on the relationship between EFL learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and English academic performance. This article finds the limitations in the existing empirical research, including the scarcity of longitudinal experimental studies, the single research sample, the lack of cross-cultural research, and the possible subjective responses in the self-report questionnaire. Based on these limitations, this article puts forward some constructive suggestions for further research by future researchers for reference.

**Keywords:** Learning motivation; Self-efficacy; English academic achievement; EFL learners.

## 1. Introduction

The students' learning interest, confidence, and study time often directly affect their academic performance.

Therefore, the influence of learning motivation and self-efficacy on students' academic performance cannot be ignored. This is also a focus issue that teachers and parents frequently focus on. Nowadays, with the

continuous advancement of globalization, the recognition and influence of English as an internationally recognized communication language are constantly increasing. In recent years, increased emphasis has been placed on cultivating the English learning ability of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in education in non-native English-speaking countries. EFL learners encounter more difficulties and challenges in English learning than native speakers, such as insufficient vocabulary, a lack of an English communication environment, and obstacles in cross-cultural understanding. These factors can cause EFL learners to have lower class participation, less time spent on learning, and a lack of English academic confidence, which in turn leads to poor English grades. English proficiency often reflects the differences in students' language learning abilities, which may also directly affect the educational level and job opportunities they receive in the future.

Therefore, this article will adopt the research method of literature review to analyze, summarize, and discuss the relevant empirical research on the impact of learning motivation and self-efficacy on the English academic performance of EFL learners. This article aims to explore the relationship among EFL learners' learning motivation, self-efficacy, and English proficiency. Based on the limitations existing in the current empirical research, this article will put forward some suggestions for future research.

## 2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Learning Motivation

Motivation is an important factor influencing the English academic performance of EFL learners.

According to the self-determination theory (SDT), motivation is divided into autonomous motivation and controlled motivation [1]. Learners with autonomous motivation usually recognize the importance of learning and actively engage in the learning process. By setting short-term or long-term learning goals, learners can promote their continuous learning, which also indicates that they have high-quality motivational performance. For learners with controlled motivation, their learning motivation usually stems from the influence of external factors, such as the supervision of parents and teachers, the examination mechanism, rewards and punishments. The external pressure not only leads learners to have a low level of learning motivation but also is not conducive to the cultivation and development of their excellent learning ability. Therefore, the quality of motivation has a significant impact on the continuous development and commitment of learners in

their studies. The SDT theory also suggests that when the three psychological needs of learners, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are met, it can help them enhance autonomous motivation and improve learning effectiveness [1].

Furthermore, the L2 motivational self-system proposed by Dörnyei explains the three important components for L2 language learners to stimulate and maintain their motivation for language learning, namely the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience [2]. It mainly emphasizes that the intrinsic motivation of L2 language learners plays a crucial role in promoting their long-term language learning, rather than just being driven by extrinsic motivation [2].

Therefore, by combining the SDT theory and the L2 motivational self-system, it is possible to have a clearer understanding of why there are differences in English academic performance among EFL learners of different motivations.

### 2.2 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is another important factor influencing the English academic performance of EFL learners. Self-efficacy refers to the degree of belief and confidence that learners have in achieving their learning goals and tasks during the learning process [3]. It usually affects the learning time that learners devote, the learning effect, and the academic performance [3]. In the social cognitive theory (SCT), it is emphasized that learners cannot just rely on the support of the external environment in their studies [4]. Learners should actively exert the role of human agency and self-regulated learning, set reasonable learning goals and plans, and achieve them through continuous efforts [4]. Bandura's SCT theory explains the reasons for the occurrence of students' autonomous learning behaviors, and self-efficacy plays a core role in students' learning.

For learners, the most effective and direct way to enhance self-efficacy is to gain successful experiences and insights in the learning process, namely mastery experiences [3]. Furthermore, it also includes learners obtaining some vicarious experiences by observing the class performance of their peers during the learning process; learners received verbal persuasion from teachers and parents; and the anxiety and tension emotions and psychological states exhibited by learners when completing more difficult learning tasks [3]. These factors often affect the dynamic changes in learners' self-efficacy [3].

Therefore, combining Bandura's SCT theory can provide a more in-depth explanation of why EFL learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to get excellent English scores in English tests.

### 3. Learning Motivation and Academic Achievement in English Learning of EFL Learners.

Peng and Fu conducted an in-depth study on the relationship between learning motivation and English learning outcomes of 960 EFL learners from different universities and majors in China. The researchers adopted an experimental method combining online and offline English learning environments. This experiment adopts quantitative research methods, with questionnaire surveys as the main way of data collection. After the questionnaire survey was completed, the experimenter randomly selected 10 students for anonymous interviews, aiming to re-examine the validity of the questionnaire results. This experiment controlled the ratio of men to women to basically achieve balance. After the questionnaire collection was completed, the study used SPSS and AMOS to conduct a detailed analysis of the questionnaire content. For example, reliability tests, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and structural equation modelling (SEM). The research results indicate that both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation have significant positive predictive effects on students' English learning outcomes. In a blended English learning environment, students show a significantly higher demand for extrinsic motivation to obtain a quality job than for intrinsic motivation. In addition, this study also suggests that educators should attach importance to cultivating EFL students' interest in learning and enhancing their understanding of Western culture, thereby stimulating their intrinsic motivation to learn English. This study also has some limitations: 1) this study employed a cross-sectional design, which involves data collection at a single time point and cannot reflect the dynamic change process between EFL learners' learning motivation and their English learning outcomes; 2) the research subjects of this study are EFL students in Chinese universities. Therefore, the research results do not have universal applicability; 3) this study was conducted using a self-report questionnaire test, where participants responded to a limited and fixed number of items. These kinds of tests were relatively mechanical. The results may not truly reflect the actual learning performance of learners in the class. Therefore, researchers can observe and assess the performance of EFL learners in English classes again and further examine the degree of deviation and validity of the data in the self-report questionnaires [5].

Zhang and Wang conducted an in-depth study on the relationship between learning motivation and English grades of college students majoring in English from several universities in China through quantitative experiments. Meanwhile, the emphasis of the article is the study of the

moderating effects of three personality traits on the learning motivation and academic performance of EFL learners. The article aims to fill the research gap on the regulatory mechanisms of personality traits that were lacking in previous motivation studies. A total of 273 participants were involved, with females accounting for approximately 86%. The researchers divided the data collection into two parts. Firstly, the researchers adopted a random sampling method and distributed Likert scale-based online questionnaires to the students to effectively collect and measure their learning motivation and Big Five personality traits. Then, the researchers collected the students' test scores in the TEM-4 (Test for English Majors Band 4) as the evaluation criteria for their English scores. During the data analysis stage, the study employed correlation and hierarchical regression analyses to examine the relationships among variables and the impact of different personality traits on learners' motivation and English performance. The research results indicate that EFL learners with strong learning motivation tend to achieve better English grades. It also shows that the learning motivation of EFL learners can positively predict their English academic performance. Furthermore, the research results show that the level of agreeableness often has a significant impact on the learning motivation and academic achievements of EFL learners in China. EFL students with a lower level of agreeableness tend to have a stronger sense of competition and initiative, which will generate a stronger intrinsic motivation to drive them to academic effort and achieve high performance. Agreeableness has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between EFL learners' learning motivation and English academic performance, while neuroticism and openness do not have a moderating effect. The study expands the theoretical research on the relationship among learning motivation, personality traits, and English academic performance. However, there are also some limitations: 1) there is a serious imbalance in the male-to-female ratio in the sample of the study, with male participants accounting for only approximately 14% of the total number of participants. This leads to the relatively low reference and application value of the research results; 2) this study adopts the data collection method of a questionnaire survey, which may lead to problems such as social desirability bias or measurement errors. It is difficult to verify whether all the participants gave objective and true answers; 3) this study adopted a cross-sectional research design, which is more suitable for completing the investigation and data collection in a short period. However, in the correlation analysis, it can only prove that there is a correlation between learning motivation and English academic performance, but it cannot reveal whether there is a causal relationship between them [6].

Moreover, some scholars have discussed the impact of the learning motivation of EFL Learners in other countries on their English proficiency. Solak also adopted a quantitative research approach. The study analyzed the impact of motivational factors on EFL learners from different majors at a university in Turkey on their English course grades. Among the total 230 participants, the ratio of men to women reached 1:4. Their native language is Turkish, and English is an additional language they learn. The study used Gardner's Attitude / Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and the Likert scale to collect data on various factors that might affect the learning motivation of the participants and their English learning performance. And data analysis was conducted using SPSS. The research results show that: 1) there is a significant correlation between the motivation of Turkish EFL learners and their English course grades; 2) it is concluded from the AMTB scale that most motivation-related factors have a significant impact on the English academic performance of Turkish EFL learners. For instance, the encouragement and support given by parents to students, as well as the positive feedback and evaluation from teachers; 3) gender differences and professional differences among students can also have an impact on their motivation factors. For example, Turkish female EFL learners perform significantly better than male EFL learners in English learning. They typically exhibit a more positive interest in learning and lower levels of anxiety [7].

Guo et al. discussed the influence of motivation and perseverance on the English performance and self-regulated learning (SRL) of EFL learners in primary schools in Hong Kong, China. This study, involving 723 primary school students in Hong Kong, China (with a relatively balanced ratio of male to female participants), designed standardized questionnaires and English tests as the main methods for collecting data. This study employed a variety of data analysis methods and conducted detailed analyses. For example, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs), multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs), and SEM. The study results demonstrate that: 1) there is a significant positive correlation between the learning motivation of EFL learners and their English grades; 2) male EFL learners with strong intrinsic learning motivation and a growth mindset will achieve excellent results. However, among female EFL learners, the relationship between intrinsic learning motivation, growth mindset, and English academic performance is not significant; 3) the motivation and perseverance of EFL learners play a crucial guiding role in predicting how they effectively utilize self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies; 4) different from the previous research results, this study indicates that the learning motivation, perseverance and SRL of EFL learners

are not affected by gender differences; 5) among EFL learners, female learners tend to perform better than male learners in English language learning. The study also has some limitations. The research sample consisted solely of primary school students, which rendered it relatively limited. Moreover, there are social expectation biases in the self-report questionnaires. And cross-sectional experimental designs have inherent limitations. These limitations also provide an improved direction for the further optimization of future experimental design [8].

#### 4. Self-Efficacy and Academic Achievement in English Learning of EFL learners.

Wu et al. aimed to analyze the influence of self-efficacy, motivation, and learners' language use anxiety on the English language scores of undergraduate EFL learners in Chinese elite universities. Among the 223 participants in the study, the ratio of male to female participants was approximately 3:1. The study adopted a quantitative research method with a cross-sectional experimental design. The experimenters distributed multiple online questionnaires with different contents (including the Likert scale) to the participants. And all the different types of English test scores (CET4/6, IELTS, TOEFL) provided by the participants were uniformly and standardized converted into 100-point scores. The researchers conducted correlation analysis and regression analysis on all the collected data by using SPSS. The research results indicate that: 1) self-efficacy and learning motivation of EFL learners have a significant positive correlation with their English proficiency; 2) there is a significant negative correlation between language use anxiety of EFL learners and their English proficiency; 3) the self-efficacy and learning motivation of EFL learners are negatively correlated with language use anxiety; 4) the self-efficacy of EFL learners plays a mediating role in explaining how learning motivation and language anxiety affect English academic performance. There are some limitations in the study: 1) this experimental study selected the different types of English test scores provided by the participants as important indicators to measure their English learning achievements. This might overlook the impact of differences in difficulty and assessment standards among various examinations; 2) this experimental design is only aimed at the group of high-level EFL college students in Chinese elite universities for research, and the experimental subjects are special and single. This makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the education of the general college student group; 3) the proportion of male and female participants in this experimental design is unbalanced, which may also limit



the application of the research conclusions in actual educational scenarios [9].

Li et al. discussed the interaction among self-efficacy, learning motivation, and English learning outcomes of Chinese EFL learners, and explored the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) and gender differences on the relationship among the above three factors. The study adopted a longitudinal experimental research design, conducting three anonymous multi-dimensional questionnaire surveys and standardized TOEFL English tests on 483 middle school students of different grades from China at different times. The surveys were conducted every two months, and the gender ratio of the participants was balanced. To enhance the reliability and validity of data collection, the researchers tested the validity of both the questionnaire and the English test questions before the test. The researchers used SPSS and M plus to conduct statistical analysis on the data. The researchers employed a variety of models and statistical methods in the data analysis. For example, the researchers employed the cross-lagged panel analysis (CLPA) to test the dynamic relationship of the interaction among the three variables. And the researchers verified the correlation between the variables using confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and Pearson correlation coefficients. The research results demonstrate that: 1) there is a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy, learning motivation, and English academic performance of EFL learners. Moreover, EFL learners with high self-efficacy could predict their English scores in exams; 2) English academic performance of EFL learners can also positively predict self-efficacy and autonomous motivation, but English academic performance cannot predict controlling motivation; 3) the self-efficacy, learning motivation, and English academic performance of EFL learners will not be affected by SES and gender differences. There are some limitations in the research: 1) although the study adopted a longitudinal experimental design, its duration was relatively short. Therefore, the results of the study may not be sufficient to represent long-term universal applicability; 2) the study adopted the sampling method of convenience sampling to select the participant group. Compared with the stratified sampling method, it was less rigorous and subject to sampling bias; 3) the selection of samples in the study was only for the secondary school student group in a certain Chinese city. The sample type is single, which may lead to limited generalizability of the findings. 4) the answers in the questionnaires may carry social expectations and subjective biases, and researchers cannot ensure that the participants' responses are completely objective. This is the inherent drawback of the self-reported questionnaires [10].

Alrabai examined the relationship between self-efficacy

and English academic performance among 221 undergraduate EFL learners majoring in English from a university in Saudi Arabia. The study adopted quantitative research methods and controlled the balance of the number of male and female participants. The experimental design collected data by distributing online self-efficacy questionnaires. And the final English test scores of the students will be used as the standard data to measure their English academic performance in the experiment. The final test includes a comprehensive assessment of the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of EFL learners. Then, the experimenters conducted descriptive statistical analyses and Pearson correlation coefficient analyses on the data. The research results show that: 1) there is a significant positive correlation between the self-efficacy of EFL learners among Saudi college students and their English grades; 2) the beliefs of Saudi university EFL learners in English learning have a significant impact on their achievement of excellent grades; 3) there are many factors that affect the low self-efficacy of Saudi EFL learners and lead to poor English grades, such as low learning motivation, high anxiety, and low awareness of autonomous learning. The study also has the problems of a single research sample and the inherent limitations of self-report questionnaires. Moreover, the external validity of the study will be affected by the problem of a single sample. Therefore, the research results may not apply to educational research in other countries or regions. In addition, the study mainly examined the impact of EFL Learners' self-efficacy on English academic performance. But there are relatively few analyses of the relevant factors influencing the self-efficacy of EFL learners. Therefore, whether the interaction between self-efficacy and other factors will have an impact on the English academic performance of EFL learners, researchers need to conduct more correlation studies in future research [11].

Chen and Sukying analyzed the relationship between self-efficacy, learning motivation, SRL, and English academic performance among 237 high school EFL learners from economically underdeveloped areas in China. The researchers employed a quantitative research method. The research design strictly controlled the ratio of male to female participants, achieving an approximately 1:1 ratio. The experimenters measured and evaluated the subjects' intrinsic motivation for learning English, self-efficacy, and SRL by distributing questionnaires with different test contents to the subjects. Moreover, the experimenters aimed to reduce the instability of the data. Therefore, the experiment used the average score of the students' English scores in the last two monthly exams as the English score of the participants in this experiment. In the data analysis stage, the data analysis method used in this study is basi-

cally the same as that used by Alrabai. The research results indicate that: 1) there is a significant positive correlation among EFL learners' self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, SRL, and English academic performance; 2) there is a connection between the self-efficacy of EFL learners and SRL. Teachers can help improve EFL students' SRL strategies by continuously encouraging them to enhance their self-efficacy in English learning. The study also has some limitations: 1) the descriptive statistical analysis method cannot explain whether there is a causal relationship among the variables in the data; 2) the study employed a cross-sectional research design with a limited sample, so the research results may not be universally applicable; 3) the self-reported questionnaires possess inherent limitations [12].

## 5. Discussion and Suggestions

Based on the induction and analysis of the existing empirical research in the third and fourth parts of this article, it is concluded that there is a significant positive correlation between the learning motivation, self-efficacy and English academic performance of EFL learners.

Researchers have demonstrated and explained from different perspectives how the learning motivation of EFL learners affects the changes in their English academic performance. Peng and Fu investigated the relationship between learning motivation and English academic performance of EFL learners in Chinese colleges by simulating a blended English learning environment [5]. Zhang and Wang also selected EFL learners in Chinese universities as the research group. But in their study, researchers introduced the variable of personality traits to investigate the moderating effect of personality traits on the learning motivation and English academic performance of EFL learners [6].

Both Solak and Guo et al. examined whether gender differences would have an impact on the motivation of EFL learners and thereby affect their English academic performance [7,8]. However, the results of these two studies are substantially different. The research results of Solak indicated that gender differences would have an impact on their motivation among college EFL students in Turkish, while the research results of Guo et al. show that gender differences would not have an impact on the learning motivation of primary school EFL learners in Hong Kong, China [7,8]. Therefore, whether the different results are caused by age differences among the population, this article suggests that researchers conduct further verification in future studies.

Furthermore, in these empirical studies, the experimental subjects of the researchers were mostly targeted at a single

country or a specific group of people, and the sample size was relatively small. Therefore, this article suggests that researchers can increase the sample size and enrich the diversity of research subjects in future studies.

In the empirical research analysis of the impact of EFL learners' self-efficacy on English academic performance, it can also be found that researchers have demonstrated and explained the relationship between them from different perspectives. Wu et al. and Alrabai are both studies conducted on undergraduate EFL learners and provide a cross-cultural research perspective for future studies [9,11]. Based on this, this article suggests that researchers can conduct longitudinal experimental studies from a cross-cultural perspective in future research to enrich the research results in this field, and enhance the generalizability of the research results in practical education. Chen and Sukying conducted a study on high school EFL learners in economically underdeveloped regions of China [12]. The study analyzed and discussed the relationship among self-efficacy, learning motivation, SRL, and English academic performance [12]. The researchers considered that there are currently relatively few studies targeting Chinese high school students. Therefore, the study also aims to provide high-quality empirical research resources for this field. Based on this, this article suggests that researchers increase their studies on high school EFL learners in different countries and regions in future research and further enrich the research in this field. Furthermore, Li et al. conducted a study on the EFL learner group of Chinese secondary school students from different grades [10]. The study analyzed the interaction among self-efficacy, learning motivation, and English learning outcomes [10]. The research results also conclude that SES differences and gender differences do not have an impact on EFL learners' self-efficacy, learning motivation, and English proficiency [10].

Overall, researchers usually strictly control the gender ratio of the participants to achieve a basically 1:1 balance. However, in the studies of Zhang and Wang and Wu et al., there was a serious imbalance in the male-to-female ratio, which might limit the generalizability of the research results [6,9]. In addition, all the researchers adopted the quantitative research method. Data collection from participants was conducted through experimental designs of various questionnaires and Likert scales. In the self-report form of questionnaires, participants are very likely to be affected by social expectation bias, which can directly affect the accuracy of the experimental data. Moreover, most of the researchers adopted the cross-sectional design. Although it enables researchers to complete data collection in a short period and improve efficiency, it cannot be used to explain the long-term dynamic change process

between EFL learners' learning motivation and their English learning outcomes. Li et al. adopted a longitudinal study experimental design; the researchers conducted tests and investigations on the subjects three times at different time points [10]. The longitudinal study experimental design addresses the shortcomings of the cross-sectional experimental design, which provides more sufficient data support for the analysis of experimental data and enhances the explanatory power of the research results. However, this experimental study only lasted for four months; there is still a possibility that the research results may not be universally applicable and generalizable [10]. Based on this, this article suggests that researchers can use a mixed data collection method in future studies to reduce the subjectivity existing in questionnaires. This article also suggests that researchers conduct more longitudinal experimental studies to enrich the number of research results with universal applicability.

## 6. Conclusion

This article explores the significant role of learning motivation and self-efficacy in the English academic performance of EFL learners. Based on a comprehensive analysis of existing empirical research, this article concludes that EFL learners with high learning motivation and high self-efficacy will achieve better results in English examinations.

Research results on learning motivation indicate that learning interest is an important factor that prompts EFL learners to maintain high intrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation performance of EFL learners can effectively predict their English academic achievements. Furthermore, the research results emphasize the moderating effect of personality traits on the relationship between EFL learners' learning motivation and their English proficiency. This also indicates that in actual teaching, teachers should promptly adjust their teaching strategies in response to EFL learners with different personality traits. Research results on self-efficacy emphasize the complexity of the influencing mechanism of EFL learners' self-efficacy. Research has found that multiple factors can lead to low self-efficacy among EFL learners, such as low learning motivation or high anxiety. Moreover, the English academic performance of EFL learners can also positively predict their self-efficacy and autonomous motivation. The research results show that teachers can help EFL learners enhance their self-efficacy through encouragement, which can also promote the improvement of their SRL.

This article also puts forward some reasonable suggestions for future research. Firstly, researchers can conduct longitudinal experimental studies from a cross-cultural

perspective in future research, continuously enriching the research results in the field of educational psychology, and enhancing the generalizability of research results in actual teaching applications. Secondly, researchers can adopt a hybrid data collection method in future studies to reduce the subjectivity existing in questionnaires. Thirdly, researchers can increase their studies on high school EFL learners in different countries or regions in future research to address the gap in the limited research in this field.

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