



## Exploring English Language Self-Efficacy among Shan Undergraduates Majoring in English in Thailand

Nangail Suriyaphong<sup>1</sup>, Nan Hlaingkham<sup>2</sup>, Supornphan Konchiab<sup>3\*</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Faculty of Business and Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Chiang Mai, Thailand

email: [supornphan@rmutl.ac.th](mailto:supornphan@rmutl.ac.th)

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### ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy plays a significant role in language learning because learners' beliefs in their abilities influence motivation, confidence, and academic achievement. This study investigated the level of self-efficacy in English language learning among Shan students majoring in English at a public university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The study employed a quantitative research design using the Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE), which consisted of 32 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The participants were 11 Shan students from the English for International Communication (EIC) and Business English (BE) programs at RMUTL. Data were analyzed using percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings revealed that the overall level of English self-efficacy among Shan students was high ( $\bar{x} = 3.66$ ). Among the four language skills, speaking skill had the highest self-efficacy level ( $\bar{x} = 3.78$ ), followed by listening skill ( $\bar{x} = 3.66$ ), reading skill ( $\bar{x} = 3.65$ ), and writing skill ( $\bar{x} = 3.55$ ). The results suggest that English teachers should continue promoting students' academic self-efficacy to enhance English language learning and confidence in language use.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Self-efficacy has become one of the most influential concepts in education and psychology because it affects how individuals think, feel, motivate themselves, and perform tasks. In language learning, self-efficacy is particularly important because learners' beliefs in their abilities can influence their confidence, persistence, and academic achievement. Students who believe they can successfully learn and use English are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, communicate confidently, and overcome learning difficulties. Consequently, self-efficacy has been recognized as a key factor contributing to successful English language learning. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform specific tasks and achieve desired goals. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is people's judgment of their abilities to organize and execute actions required in particular situations. Individuals with strong self-efficacy tend to approach challenges confidently and persist in difficult situations, while those with low self-efficacy often avoid challenging tasks and experience anxiety. Bandura (1977) further explained that people are more likely to engage in activities when they believe they are capable of achieving successful outcomes. Self-efficacy is influenced by several factors, including mastery experiences, vicarious

experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states. Similarly, Maddux (2009) emphasized that self-efficacy is not simply the possession of skills, but rather the belief in one's ability to apply those skills effectively in different situations. Therefore, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping learners' motivation, confidence, and academic performance. In English language learning, self-efficacy has been widely studied due to its significant relationship with language achievement and communication skills. Bandura (1986) described academic self-efficacy as learners' confidence in completing academic tasks successfully. Learners with high self-efficacy tend to perceive difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats, whereas learners with low self-efficacy often lack confidence and avoid complex learning situations (Bandura, 1994; Schunk, 1990). Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of self-efficacy in English learning across different contexts. Wei and Soransataporn (2012) found that Chinese students had high general self-efficacy but low self-efficacy in English learning. Similarly, Kitikanan and Sasimonton (2017) reported that self-efficacy in listening, speaking, reading, and writing positively correlated with English learning achievement among Thai learners. Khatib and Maarof (2015) also revealed that female students demonstrated higher self-efficacy in speaking English than male students, while senior students showed greater confidence than junior students.

The Tai Yai, also known internationally as Shan people, are an ethnic Tai group currently residing in Shan State of Myanmar as well as parts of China, India, Laos, and northern Thailand. Due to migration and economic opportunities, many Shan families have moved to northern Thailand, bringing their children to continue their education in Thai schools and universities (Thanasin, 2011). The Thai government has also implemented educational policies to support migrant and ethnic minority students by providing equal access to educational opportunities and essential services, according to Office of the Basic Education Commission. As a result, an increasing number of Shan students are pursuing higher education in Thailand to improve their academic qualifications, future careers, and social acceptance. Many Shan students pursue higher education in northern Thailand. Among various academic programs, English-related majors such as English for International Communication (EIC) and Business English (BE) have become popular choices among Shan students because these programs provide opportunities for future careers in international communication, tourism, translation, hospitality, and business. Both programs require students to use English as the primary language of instruction and emphasize language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, translation, and intercultural communication. Since students are expected to use English effectively in both academic and professional contexts, confidence in their English abilities, or self-efficacy, becomes an important factor influencing their learning success. Although previous studies have widely explored self-efficacy in English language learning among Thai and international students, limited research has focused on Shan students studying in English-major programs in Thailand. Considering the unique educational and sociocultural background of Shan students, investigating their English self-efficacy may provide valuable insights into their language learning experiences and academic development. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the overall perceived levels of self-efficacy among Shan students in their English language learning and to explore their levels of self-efficacy in each English language skill, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

- (1) What were the overall perceived levels of self-efficacy among Shan students in their English language learning? and
- (2) What were the levels of self-efficacy of Shan students in learning each language skill?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Definition of Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to successfully perform specific tasks and achieve desired goals (Bandura, 1977). It influences how people think, behave, and motivate themselves when facing challenges. In English language learning, self-efficacy reflects learners' confidence in their ability to use English skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing effectively. Learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, persist in difficult tasks, and achieve better academic performance. In contrast, learners with low self-efficacy may experience anxiety, lack confidence, and avoid challenging language-learning situations (Maddux, 2009).

### **2.2 Key Contributors to Self-Efficacy Development**

Bandura (1977) proposed four major sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states. Among these sources, mastery experiences are considered the most influential because they are based on individuals' direct experiences of success. When individuals successfully accomplish tasks repeatedly, they are more likely to develop stronger confidence in their abilities and believe that they can successfully perform similar tasks in the future. Therefore, successful experiences contribute significantly to increasing self-efficacy. The second source is vicarious experience, which refers to learning through observing others' successful performances. According to Bandura (1977), observing people with similar abilities succeed through continuous effort can strengthen individuals' beliefs that they are also capable of achieving success. Such observations can motivate individuals to imitate positive behaviors and develop greater confidence in their own abilities. The third source, verbal persuasion, involves receiving encouragement, positive feedback, and supportive comments from others. Positive verbal support can persuade individuals to believe in their capabilities and motivate them to persist in challenging tasks. Redmond (2010) explained that encouragement and constructive feedback can positively influence individuals' beliefs about their performance and ability to accomplish tasks successfully. Finally, emotional and physiological states also influence self-efficacy beliefs. Individuals' emotions, stress levels, anxiety, and physical conditions can affect how they perceive their abilities in specific situations. Positive emotions and good mental health can enhance confidence, whereas stress and anxiety may reduce self-efficacy. Therefore, managing emotional conditions and coping effectively with challenges can help individuals strengthen their sense of self-efficacy.

### **2.3 Significance of Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy plays an important role in individuals' motivation, behavior, achievement, and psychological well-being. Kolbe (2009) stated that believing in one's abilities contributes to intellectual strength, determination, and perseverance. Individuals with strong self-efficacy are more likely to overcome obstacles and persist in achieving their goals despite difficulties. Similarly, Bandura (1994) explained that a strong sense of self-efficacy positively influences human accomplishment and personal well-being. People with high self-efficacy tend to make positive life choices, demonstrate greater motivation, perform tasks effectively, and cope better with challenges, stress, and adversity. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to experience self-doubt, anxiety, and depression. In addition, self-efficacy significantly affects individuals' thought processes and behaviors. According to Bandura (1994), people with high self-efficacy

believe they can successfully accomplish tasks and solve problems even in difficult situations. They tend to remain motivated and confident when facing challenges. On the other hand, individuals with low self-efficacy often perceive themselves as incapable of succeeding, which may lead to anxiety, confusion, avoidance behaviors, and failure to solve problems effectively. Maddux (2009) further emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in several aspects, including psychological well-being, physical health, self-regulation, psychotherapy, and collective efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs are closely related to mental health because individuals with low self-efficacy often feel less capable than others in handling difficult situations, which may contribute to depression and anxiety. Moreover, avoidance behaviors and emotional distress are commonly associated with weak self-belief. Therefore, improving self-efficacy through positive experiences, self-regulation, and supportive environments can help individuals manage challenges more effectively and enhance their overall well-being.

## **2.4 Previous Studies**

Previous research has highlighted the significant role of self-efficacy in academic achievement, psychological well-being, and English language learning across various contexts. Research in Thailand and international settings consistently shows that learners with high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater confidence, motivation, and language performance. For example, Khatib and Maarof (2015) found that female and senior students showed higher speaking self-efficacy, while Kitikanan and Sasimonton (2017) reported positive relationships between English self-efficacy and English learning achievement among Thai learners. Similarly, Wei and Soransataporn (2012) revealed that although Chinese students had high general self-efficacy, their English self-efficacy remained low. Other studies have also connected self-efficacy with cooperative learning, self-regulated learning, and oral presentation skills (Siriphot & Hamcumpai, 2020; Wattananan & Tepsuriwong, 2015). Although these studies provide valuable insights, most research has focused on Thai or international students in general contexts. Limited attention has been given to ethnic minority learners, particularly Shan students majoring in English in Thailand. Therefore, further investigation is needed to better understand self-efficacy in this specific educational and sociocultural context.

## **3. METHOD**

### **3.1 Research Approach**

This study employed quantitative research design using a questionnaire survey. Quantitative research was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to measure the levels of English self-efficacy among Shan students systematically.

### **3.2 Research Participants**

The participants in this study were 11 Shan students enrolled in the English for International Communication (EIC) and Business English (BE) programs at a public university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they met the specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. First, all participants were Shan students studying in English-major programs. Second, they were required to use English as the primary language of instruction in their academic studies. Third, the participants were willing to participate voluntarily in the research. Although there was approximately 30 Shan students enrolled in the EIC and BE programs, only 11 students agreed to participate in this study. The selected participants shared similar

academic backgrounds in English language learning. Both the EIC and BE programs emphasize the development of English communication skills and prepare students for future careers involving English usage. Students in both majors studied subjects related to speaking, listening, reading, writing, translation, and intercultural communication. In addition, the Business English program also includes courses in international business administration, marketing, accounting, and management. These programs require students to use English regularly in academic and professional contexts. Therefore, Shan students in these majors were considered an appropriate group for investigating self-efficacy in English language learning.

### **3.3 Research Instruments**

The research instrument used in this study was an online questionnaire, adapted from the Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE) developed by Wang et al. (2013) and later applied by Kitikanan and Sasimonton (2017) in the Thai context. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I collected participants' demographic information, including gender, age, education level, major, English language learning experience, and cumulative grade point average (GPAX). Part II measured students' English self-efficacy levels. This section consisted of 32 items covering four English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The questionnaire items were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Most likely agree), 4 (More likely agree), 3 (Likely agree), 2 (Less likely agree), to 1 (Least likely agree). To ensure the quality and appropriateness of the questionnaire, the adapted instrument was reviewed by the research advisor and English language experts to examine content validity, clarity, and suitability for the research context. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of students who shared similar characteristics with the target participants but were not included in the main study. The pilot testing aimed to identify unclear wording, improve item reliability, and ensure that participants could understand the questionnaire items correctly. Feedback from the pilot study was used to revise and improve the questionnaire before the actual data collection process.

### **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

The researchers distributed the online questionnaire to Shan students during the first semester of 2021. Participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations. The interpretation of the mean scores followed Likert scale criteria:

4.20–5.00 = Very high

3.40–4.19 = High

2.60–3.39 = Moderate

1.80–2.59 = Low

1.00–1.79 = Very low

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 Demographic Information**

Among the 11 participants, eight were female (72.2%), two were male (18.2%), and one preferred not to mention gender (9.1%). Most participants were between 21–22 years old and 23 years old or above. The majority were senior students (63.6%). Almost half of the students had more than 15 years of English language learning experience.

#### 4.2 Overall Levels of English Self-Efficacy

The findings revealed that Shan students had a high overall level of English self-efficacy ( $\bar{x} = 3.66$ ). As shown in Table 1, speaking skill had the highest self-efficacy level, followed by listening, reading, and writing skills.

**Table 1.** The Self-Efficacy Levels in Learning Each Language Skill

Items	Language Skills	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	Speaking	3.78	0.95	High
2	Listening	3.66	0.77	High
3	Reading	3.65	0.79	High
4	Writing	3.55	0.77	High
	Total	3.66	0.83	High

#### 4.3 Self-Efficacy Level in Speaking Skill

Table 2 shows the self-efficacy level on speaking skills of Shan students. Overall, Shan students tended to have a high level of self-efficacy in speaking skills. Particularly, they were able to introduce themselves in English ( $\bar{x}=4.45$ ) which was ranked at a very high level. Following this, they were able to give directions in English ( $\bar{x}=3.91$ ) and discuss subjects of general interest in English ( $\bar{x}=3.82$ ). However, the self-efficacy on asking and responding to the teacher's questions was the lowest but remained high ( $\bar{x}=3.55$ ).

**Table 2.** The Self-Efficacy Levels in Speaking Skill

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	I can describe something to other people in English.	3.73	0.79	High
2	I can give the directions in English.	3.91	0.94	High
3	I can tell a story in English.	3.64	1.12	High
4	I can ask my teacher questions in English.	3.55	1.04	High
5	I can introduce myself in English.	4.45	0.82	Very High
6	I can discuss subjects of general interest in English.	3.82	1.08	High
7	I can respond to my teachers' questions in English.	3.55	0.82	High
8	I can introduce others in English.	3.64	0.92	High
	Total	3.78	0.95	High

#### 4.4 Self-Efficacy Level in Listening Skill

Table 3 shows the self-efficacy level on listening skills of Shan students. It can be seen that their self-efficacy was at a very high level in understanding numbers spoken in English ( $\bar{x}=4.36$ ). Moreover, they understood online media/clips such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, or Twitter in English ( $\bar{x}=3.91$ ). However, their self-efficacy in understanding English films without subtitles was at a moderate level ( $\bar{x}=3.18$ ).

**Table 3.** The Self-Efficacy Levels in Listening Skill

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	I can understand the stories told in English.	3.64	0.81	High
2	I can understand TV programs in English.	3.55	0.69	High
3	I can understand English radio / podcast programs.	3.45	0.82	High
4	I can understand online media/clips in English.	3.91	0.70	High
5	I can understand English dialogue in audio recordings about everyday life.	3.55	0.82	High
6	I can understand English films without subtitles.	3.18	0.60	Moderate
7	I can understand English songs.	3.64	0.67	High
8	I can understand numbers spoken in English.	4.36	0.67	Very High
Total		3.66	0.77	High

#### 4.5 Self-Efficacy Level in Reading Skill

As shown in Table 4, Shan students tended to have a high level of self-efficacy in understanding English information from reading through online social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, website, blogs ( $\bar{x}=4.09$ ). This is followed by their self-efficacy in doing English homework and assignments by themselves without any help from others ( $\bar{x}=3.91$ ) and reading or translating English short stories. ( $\bar{x}=3.91$ ). In contrast, their self-efficacy in guessing the meaning of unknown words when reading an English text. ( $\bar{x}=3.18$ ) and understanding English academic articles and reports were at a moderate level ( $\bar{x}=3.18$ ).

**Table 4.** The Self-Efficacy Levels in Reading Skill

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	I can do my English homework and assignments myself without any help from others.	3.91	0.70	High
2	I can guess the meaning of unknown words when I am reading an English text.	3.18	0.60	Moderate
3	I can find out the meanings of new words using a monolingual dictionary.	3.73	0.79	High
4	I can understand English text messages or news in everyday life.	3.45	0.82	High
5	I can understand the basics of English literature when I read them by myself.	3.73	0.90	High
6	I can read or translate English short stories.	3.91	0.70	High
7	I can understand English academic articles and reports.	3.18	0.87	Moderate
8	I can understand English information from reading through online social media.	4.09	0.54	High
Total		3.65	0.79	High

#### 4.6 Self-Efficacy Level in Writing Skill

As shown in Table 5, the students tended to have a high self-efficacy to form new sentences from words they had just appropriately learned ( $\bar{x}=3.91$ ). Furthermore, they were able to write messages in English and post them on social media channels ( $\bar{x}=3.73$ ), as well as writing

emails/letters in English ( $\bar{x}=3.73$ ). However, their ability to use English idioms or phrases to produce English sentences ( $\bar{x}=3.27$ ) and write an academic report in English ( $\bar{x}=3.00$ ) was at a moderate level.

**Table 5.** The Self-Efficacy Levels in Writing Skill

Items	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	I can write messages in English and post them on social media channels.	3.73	0.79	High
2	I can write an academic report in English.	3.00	0.77	Moderate
3	I can do my assignments or any written tests in English.	3.64	0.50	High
4	I can form new sentences from words I have just learned properly.	3.91	0.70	High
5	I can write emails/letters in English.	3.73	0.79	High
6	I can use English idiomatic or phrases to produce English sentences.	3.27	0.79	Moderate
7	I can write diary entries in English.	3.64	0.81	High
8	I can write an essay assignment in English.	3.45	0.82	High
Total		3.55	0.77	High

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Perceived levels of self-efficacy among Shan students in their English language learning

The findings revealed that Shan students majoring in English demonstrated a high overall level of self-efficacy in English language learning, particularly in speaking and listening skills. This suggests that the participants generally believed in their ability to use English effectively in academic and everyday contexts. The high level of self-efficacy may have contributed positively to their confidence, motivation, and persistence in learning English. According to Bandura (1994), individuals with strong self-efficacy tend to approach difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats, which enables them to remain motivated and solve problems effectively. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to experience anxiety, self-doubt, and avoidance of challenging situations. Therefore, the findings imply that Shan students possessed positive beliefs about their English learning abilities, which may support their academic performance and language development.

One possible explanation for the high self-efficacy among Shan students is their strong determination and motivation to succeed in a society outside their homeland. As ethnic minority students studying in Thailand, Shan students may need to adapt academically, socially, and linguistically to achieve educational and career opportunities. Their experiences may encourage them to develop greater perseverance, responsibility, and confidence in learning English. This interpretation is consistent with Kolbe (2009), who argued that self-efficacy is closely associated with determination, perseverance, and the ability to overcome obstacles. In addition, the relatively high GPAX reported by most participants may reflect their academic commitment and confidence in their learning abilities.

The findings of this study are also consistent with previous research on English self-efficacy. Kitikanan and Sasimonton (2017) found that Thai learners majoring in English demonstrated relatively high self-efficacy across listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Similarly, the Shan students in this study reported high self-efficacy in all four language skills. However, the ranking of

the skills differed between the two studies. While Kitikanan and Sasimonton (2017) reported that writing had the highest self-efficacy among Thai learners, the present study found that Shan students showed the highest confidence in speaking skills, followed by listening, reading, and writing. These differences may be influenced by learners' educational backgrounds, learning experiences, communication practices, and social contexts. Nonetheless, both studies emphasize that self-efficacy plays a significant role in successful English language learning

### **5.2 Levels of self-efficacy of Shan students in learning each English language skill**

The findings showed that Shan students demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy across all four English language skills, with speaking and listening skills receiving the highest mean scores, followed by reading and writing skills. This indicates that the participants generally felt confident in using English for communication, particularly in familiar and practical situations. The high level of speaking self-efficacy may be associated with students' frequent exposure to everyday communication tasks, such as introducing themselves, giving directions, and discussing general topics. These communicative activities are commonly practiced in English-major courses and daily interactions, which may strengthen learners' confidence through repeated mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1997), successful experiences increase learners' beliefs in their capabilities, leading to higher self-efficacy. However, students reported lower confidence in asking and responding to teachers' questions spontaneously, suggesting that unprepared academic interaction remains challenging and may cause anxiety in real-time communication.

Similarly, listening self-efficacy was relatively high, especially in understanding numbers and online English media. This finding reflects the influence of digital technology and social media on English language exposure among young learners. Shan students may develop listening confidence through frequent engagement with English-language platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and podcasts. Consistent with Naruponjirakul (2019), learners tended to feel more confident in understanding practical spoken English used in daily life. However, understanding English films without subtitles remained difficult, indicating that authentic listening tasks involving fast speech, unfamiliar accents, and contextual interpretation still pose challenges.

In terms of reading and writing, Shan students showed stronger self-efficacy in informal and social-media-related English than in academic English tasks. Students were confident in reading online information and writing messages on social media, but they reported lower confidence in understanding academic articles, writing reports, and using English idioms appropriately. These findings may reflect limited exposure to academic English and insufficient opportunities to practice formal writing and idiomatic expressions. Lornark and Muangsamai (2010) explained that academic reading often becomes difficult because of technical vocabulary and complex terminology. Likewise, Rungsripattanaporn and Na Ranong (2018) found that Thai EFL learners struggled with interpreting English idioms due to contextual and figurative meanings. Therefore, although Shan students demonstrated generally high self-efficacy, academic reading and writing skills still require further support and instructional development.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study investigated English self-efficacy among Shan students majoring in English at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna. The findings revealed that Shan students had a high overall level of English self-efficacy. Among the four language skills, speaking skill had the highest self-efficacy level, while writing skill had the lowest.

The study highlights the importance of promoting students' confidence and motivation in English learning. English teachers should create supportive learning environments, provide constructive feedback, and encourage students to practice academic English skills. Activities that enhance mastery experiences, communication opportunities, and positive emotional support may help improve students' English self-efficacy.

Future studies should involve larger participant groups and include qualitative methods such as interviews to gain deeper insights into Shan students' English learning experiences and self-efficacy development.

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