

The Relationship Among TCSL Teachers' Self-Efficacy, Students' Learning Motivation, and Academic Performance

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With China's tremendous economic strength and significant promotion of international status, the Chinese language is becoming a highly valued and widely accepted language globally, which causes rapid growth in the number of Chinese language learners all over the world. At the same time, the number of teaching Chinese as a second language (TCSL) teachers in mainland China is also increasing. However, since the foreign students are from different cultural backgrounds, therefore, it brings big challenges for TCSL teachers to manage students in the class and ensure the instructional quality. Teachers' self-efficacy, which stems from Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory, has been proved by a large amount of studies as an important factor which has effect on teachers' teaching behavior and students' academic performances, and then makes further improvement on teaching quality. However, in recent years, researches on relationship among TCSL teachers' self-efficacy, foreign students' learning motivation, and learning outcomes are relatively few in mainland China. This study makes a thorough inquiry on the relationship among TCSL teachers' self-efficacy, foreign students' learning motivation, and academic performance in universities of mainland China, and ends by drawing a conclusion that any study we do should always comprehensively take individual differences and external factors into account.

Keywords: teaching Chinese as a second language, self-efficacy, learning motivation, learning achievement

Introduction

Nowadays, with the improvement of China's international status, Chinese is becoming more and more important language in the world. Therefore, every year there are large amount of foreigners come to China for learning Chinese. At the same time, with the development of teaching Chinese as a second language (TCSL), an increasing number of TCSL teachers entered in Chinese teaching area (including novice and part-time teachers).

Usually, in universities of mainland China, foreign students are adults (aged from 18 to 25) and they are from different cultural background (Asia, Europe, Africa ...). Thus, it is a big challenge for TCSL teachers to manage students in the class and ensure the instructional quality. Many TCSL teachers, even some are veterans, may sometimes feel that they do not have strong ability to manage the whole class. The depressed mood will directly make teachers produce frustration feeling and feel that they are disabled to teach anymore (Xu & Cheng, 2007). Therefore, for the purpose of improving TCSL teachers' instructional quality, which is also the most important topic in TCSL career, we need to have a scientific know about TCSL teachers' psychological status and help them overcome negative emotions in teaching.

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In fact, teachers usually have an overall feeling on their teaching abilities, whether they can influent students successfully and whether they can finish teaching tasks on time. This feeling is called “teachers’ self-efficacy” (Xu & Cheng, 2007), and a large amount of evidence have shown that teachers’ self-efficacy is an important factor which has effect on teachers’ teaching behavior and students’ academic performances. However, with the worldwide development of TCSL in recent years, researches on relationship among TCSL teachers’ self-efficacy, foreign students’ learning motivation, and learning outcomes are relatively few in mainland China.

The purpose of this study is to make a thorough inquiry on the relationship among TCSL teachers’ self-efficacy, foreign students’ learning motivation, and academic performance in universities of mainland China.

Literature Review

Self-Efficacy Theory

The concept of “teachers’ self-efficacy” is originally from Bandura’s Self-efficacy Theory, according to Bandura’s Self-efficacy Theory, “Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the sources of action required to manage prospective situations” (1986).

Teachers’ Self-Efficacy

Teachers’ self-efficacy can be defined as teachers’ beliefs about whether they are capable to teach their subjects to students even to those who are with learning difficulties (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 1998). The theoretical understanding of teachers’ self-efficacy supposes a set of beliefs that teachers have abilities to make a positive influence on students’ study. The previous researches indicated that teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs were found to show effective classroom management (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990), to be more active to probe innovative teaching ways (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997), to help students set more appropriate learning goals (Ross, 1998; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007), and to be more prone to encourage students’ independent learning (Woolfolk et al., 1990). Therefore, it is significant to do research on teachers’ self-efficacy.

In literature reviews related to teachers’ self-efficacy, most studies discussed from teacher’s point of view. For example, Gorozidis and Papaioannou (2011) implemented a research on self-efficacy in physical education teachers in a middle school of Greek, and as a result, they found that teachers with high self-efficacy had a positive attitude toward the physical education curriculum and also tended to insist their current efforts in the long run. Pan (2013) also stated that teachers’ self-efficacy would have a direct effect on their teaching process in Taiwan. However, understanding of the role of teacher’s self-efficacy in teaching and learning may be more objective when we consider from students’ viewpoints.

TCSL Teachers’ Self-Efficacy

TCSL teachers’ self-efficacy includes their ability to manage the class and teaching process, their self-confidence about their teaching style, and their emotional feeling about teaching (Xu & Cheng, 2007). In the next parts of this paper, the author will systematically expounded the relationship among teachers’ self-efficacy, students’ learning motivation, and academic performance respectively, and try to identify the particularity of TCSL teachers in universities of mainland China, combined with the author’s own teaching experience as a TCSL teacher.

Relationship Between Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Students' Learning Motivation

“Motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2009).

Learning motivation is a concept which is derived from motivation theory and exerted in a particular learning process. Learning motivation is an important issue in educational fields. Therefore, it is meaningful to explore the factors which may have impact on students' learning motivation. To achieve teaching objectives, a teacher should implement teaching activities, support students' motivation, and maintain a positive learning atmosphere.

Teacher who has high-leveled self-efficacy tend to be better using a wide variety of teaching strategies to enhance students' learning motivation (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001).

Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, and Steca (2003) also made a conclusion that teachers' self-efficacy has a strong positive effect on students' learning motivation.

All the findings above show us that generally speaking, teachers with higher self-efficacy would have a more positive influence on students' learning motivation. However, as mentioned before, since most of the foreign students are adults and from different cultural body, they have abilities to evaluate teaching status, therefore, it is worthy to probe whether TCSL teachers with high self-efficacy will also have a positive effect on foreign students' learning motivation. And furthermore, in turn, future studies can also investigate whether there exist a mutual impact between TCSL teachers' self-efficacy and students' learning motivation, that is to say, whether high students' motivation will lead to high teachers' self-efficacy.

Relationship Between Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Students' Academic Performance

So far, there are only few longitudinal studies carried out to examine how teachers' self-efficacy exerts influence on students' achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). In their study on 2,184 teachers among Junior High School, Caprara et al. (2006) found that teachers' self-efficacy only has small longitudinal effects on students' academic achievement.

In fact, according to the writer's observation during teaching process, it can be boldly supposed that teachers' self-efficacy should have some positive influences on students' academic performance. However, the effect is not significant and indirect, because students' academic outcomes could be effected by many reasons. For example, students' intelligence quotient (IQ) level, motivation, teachers' teaching style, the relationship with teacher and peers, family background, study interest Take TCSL class for example, foreign students, even are effected by teachers' high self-efficacy and perform very actively in the class, their final academic results may not be good. The reason of this situation depends on students' individual differences (especially from the perspective of natural characters and learning habits). For example, some students prefer enjoying active class atmosphere than the result itself, some students naturally do not have talents on language learning, and others may never spend time on reviewing lessons after class, they just study during the limited class time.

Future studies can also try to investigate whether there is a bi-directional influence between TCSL teachers' self-efficacy and students' academic performance. It means that students' excellent academic results may be effective to improve teachers' self-efficacy in the class.

Relationship Between Students' Learning Motivation and Their Academic Performance

In TCSL classroom, students will always be asked what their motivations on Chinese learning are and the answers are multifarious.

According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), motivation was divided into three major forms: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and a-motivation. Autonomous motivation means one engaged in some activity is based on spontaneous purpose, for example, interest or volition. Take TCSL class for example, some students' motivations for learning Chinese are interests in language or they want to know more about Chinese culture. Controlled motivation, in contrast, is regarded as someone engages in a behavior because of inner or environmental pressure. For example, in Indonesia, Chinese teachers' salary is relatively high, so some students learn Chinese for teaching in Indonesia. Some other students may under the pressure that if they do not understand Chinese, they cannot do business in China. Finally, a-motivation is described as a kind of state, which is lack of intention to conduct a behavior, means no motivation. Research on self-determination theory has concluded that autonomous motivation would produce the best outcomes, whereas controlled motivation, especially a-motivation may result in negative consequence (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Other important points should be included in this part are ethnic and age factors. In TCSL classroom, during the author's teaching experience, it can be easily observed that there is no definitely relationship between foreign students' learning motivation and their academic performance. Motivation-performance relationship, in fact, is really situational.

In general, students from Asian part always treat their marks seriously, even they do not have strong interest in learning they still work hard and expect a good final result. In contrast, European and African people concentrate much more on the learning process rather than academic performance. It can be seen that in one classroom, European and African students always perform actively, show great interest and motivation on Chinese and seldom be shy to speak out, while Asian students keep silent, busy doing notes. However, Asian students always get higher marks than the European and African.

Age also takes a significantly role in relationship between students' learning motivation and their academic performance. It often happens on one comparatively elder student that even he/she shows great motivation in learning, they may fall behind than the other young people because of the drop of their memory.

Conclusion

All in all, the process (both in mind and behavior) between students' learning motivation and their academic performance is so complex, where are their talents on, how much efforts they would like to pay on study, the IQ level of them are all important factors which cannot be ignored in study. The present study also gives TCSL teachers an inspiration that any study we do should always comprehensively take individual differences and external factors into account.

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