EFL Students' Self-Efficacy in Assisting German Exchange Students in Daily Communication

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Abstract

This study explores the self-efficacy of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in assisting German exchange students in daily communication during the Borneo Mobility Program at Universitas Katolik Santo Agustinus Hippo. Grounded in Bandura and Wood's (2021) updated Self-Efficacy Theory, the research examines four key sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states. Although EFL students possess formal training in English, many face difficulties in real-life intercultural interactions due to language barriers, unfamiliar accents, and cultural differences. These challenges often result in communication anxiety and diminished self-confidence. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study involved in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis with seven EFL students who acted as language assistants. The findings reveal that mastery experiences, particularly previous successes in real communication tasks, play the most significant role in shaping students' self-efficacy. Verbal encouragement from peers and mentors, as well as exposure to successful role models, also contributes meaningfully. This study concludes that fostering self-efficacy through experiential learning and institutional support can enhance students' communicative performance. The implications suggest practical strategies for preparing EFL students for intercultural communication roles and contribute theoretically to understanding self-efficacy in informal, cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, EFL students, intercultural communication, Borneo Mobility Program, phenomenological study

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-efficacy is a concept introduced by Albert Bandura (1997), referring to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks and achieve specific goals. Bandura explains that self-efficacy influences how individuals think, feel, and act. Those with high self-efficacy tend to be more persistent in facing challenges and are better at overcoming obstacles than those with low self-efficacy. This belief system is particularly crucial in educational contexts, where confidence in one's abilities significantly affects learning motivation and performance. In line with this, Schunk and Pajares (2009) highlight that before engaging in academic tasks, individuals first evaluate their own abilities. When they perceive themselves as capable, they are more likely to approach learning activities with confidence and resilience.

Several factors contribute to the development of self-efficacy. First, prior successful experiences play a significant role, as past achievements can boost confidence in handling similar challenges (Usher & Pajares, 2021). When students succeed in previous communication tasks, they are more likely to feel assured in future interactions. Second, observational learning influences self-efficacy. Witnessing peers succeed in similar situations can increase one's belief in their abilities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). For example, students observing their classmates effectively communicating with foreign students may feel encouraged to do the same. Third, social support from peers and mentors provides moral encouragement and helps students navigate challenges (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2017). Support from friends, professors, or mentors fosters confidence and facilitates problem-solving in cross-cultural communication. Fourth, constructive feedback strengthens self-efficacy by offering clear and specific guidance for improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2017). Positive reinforcement and targeted suggestions can enhance students' communication skills. Lastly, psychological and emotional factors also affect self-efficacy. Anxiety and stress can undermine confidence, whereas effective emotional regulation contributes to higher self-efficacy in communication tasks (Artino et al., 2012).

In the context of communication, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of EFL students' interactions with foreign students. Strong communication skills are essential in building students'

confidence when facing cross-cultural challenges. In a multicultural communication environment, students must develop the ability to express ideas clearly, understand different cultural norms, and overcome language barriers effectively (Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Previous successful communication experiences can enhance students' confidence, while observing peers successfully engage in cross-cultural interactions can further strengthen their self-efficacy. This indicates that both personal experiences and social modeling significantly contribute to the development of communicative self-efficacy among EFL learners.

The Borneo Mobility Program (BMP) is an international exchange initiative designed for students, academics, and researchers who wish to explore the cultural richness, biodiversity, and global issues of Borneo, particularly in Ngabang, West Kalimantan. Emphasizing education, culture, community, and environment, this program aims to foster meaningful connections between international participants and local communities. Through immersive activities, BMP promotes mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue, and long-term friendships. It features several sub-programs, such as the Borneo Researcher Mobility Program, Borneo Lecturer/Teacher Mobility Program, and Borneo Student Mobility Program, which include cultural documentation, community-based projects, language exchange, global issue workshops, and homestays with local families.

In its most recent implementation, approximately six international students from Germany participated in BMP, engaging in collaborative activities with local residents. At Universitas Katolik Santo Agustinus Hippo, local students take on the role of language assistants, supporting these international students in their daily communication needs. However, throughout this experience, many local students encounter significant communication challenges. Language barriers, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in understanding foreign accents often hinder their ability to interact effectively. Moreover, cultural differences in expressions, gestures, and communication styles can lead to misunderstandings. These experiences are compounded by a lack of confidence, which frequently results in communication anxiety.

Such challenges diminish students' sense of self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their own ability to perform tasks successfully in cross-cultural settings. Many of them feel uncertain about their

communication skills, become anxious about making mistakes, and are hesitant to respond spontaneously in unfamiliar situations. These difficulties not only affect the individual student's growth but also impact the success of the BMP's goals. Given this context, it becomes essential to examine the self-efficacy of EFL students involved in supporting international participants. Understanding their experiences and confidence levels can provide valuable insights for improving the program's structure and enhancing intercultural communication outcomes for future participants.

Various studies have examined self-efficacy in language learning; however, limited research has specifically explored the self-efficacy of EFL students in assisting foreign students with daily communication. Previous studies, such as those by Usher and Pajares (2020), emphasize that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in motivating students to face challenges and persist in difficult situations. Similarly, research by Bandura and Wood (2021) highlights that an individual's belief in their ability to succeed can significantly influence learning outcomes and academic achievement. Bong and Skaalvik (2003) also stress that self-efficacy is domain-specific, meaning a student may have high self-efficacy in one area (e.g., academic writing) but low self-efficacy in another (e.g., oral communication in a foreign language). Therefore, exploring how EFL students perceive and apply their self-efficacy in real-world intercultural interactions is vital to understanding their role and effectiveness in supporting foreign students' communication needs.

These studies have primarily focused on self-efficacy in academic contexts such as writing, reading, mathematics, and general classroom performance. However, there is a gap in research regarding self-efficacy in real-life cross-cultural communication situations, particularly among EFL students who assist foreign peers in daily conversations. This context is unique as it blends language use, cultural awareness, and interpersonal confidence outside formal academic settings. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing EFL students' self-efficacy in cross-cultural communication with German students, identifying the specific challenges they face and the sources that shape their self-efficacy in these intercultural interactions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review includes the current knowledge regarding self-efficacy among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, particularly in the context of assisting foreign students in real-life communication. It highlights substantive findings from scholarly research and provides theoretical and methodological contributions to the topic. A literature review surveys books, peer-reviewed articles, and other academic sources relevant to a specific issue or theory. Through this process, it offers a comprehensive description, synthesis, and critical evaluation of existing works in relation to the research problem under investigation.

2.1. Self-Efficacy in Language Learning

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks successfully (Bandura, 1997). In language learning, self-efficacy plays a central role in shaping learners' motivation, persistence, and performance. As Schunk and Pajares (2009) assert, "learners are more likely to engage in a task if they believe they are capable of succeeding in it" (p. 37). This belief is particularly relevant for EFL students engaged in spontaneous, intercultural communication beyond the classroom environment. Bandura (1997) identified four primary sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. These sources interact dynamically to strengthen or weaken an individual's confidence. For instance, successful communication with foreign students can increase mastery experience, while observing peers successfully engaging in such interactions contributes to vicarious experience. Supportive feedback from teachers and peers, known as verbal persuasion, also enhances self-efficacy. Lastly, a student's emotional state, such as anxiety or confidence, influences their ability to perform communicatively.

2.1.1. Applications in Intercultural Contexts

Recent studies have extended the theory of self-efficacy into informal intercultural environments. For example, Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2007) examined the self-efficacy of French language students and found a strong correlation between high self-efficacy and oral performance. Similarly, Zou and Kaur (2025) emphasized that mastery and vicarious experiences had a significant effect on students' pronunciation strategies in real-world speaking tasks. These findings

show that self-efficacy contributes not only to academic success but also to functional communication in diverse settings.

In the context of Indonesian universities, particularly within the Borneo Mobility Program, EFL students are required to assist German exchange students in daily communication. These tasks demand immediate interaction without prior rehearsal, involving verbal and non-verbal cues that are culturally nuanced. Yet, few studies have investigated how these EFL students develop self-efficacy in such intercultural, non-academic roles. Therefore, the present research aims to address this gap.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes by applying Bandura's self-efficacy theory beyond academic language learning, into real-life, cross-cultural communication. Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of EFL students. Through in-depth interviews and non-participant observations, the study highlights emotional, social, and cognitive aspects that are often overlooked in quantitative research.

3. METHODS

This study applied a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in assisting German exchange students during the Borneo Mobility Program. This approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of personal experiences from the participants' own perspectives, particularly related to their communication roles in an intercultural setting. The design followed the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018), including bracketing, data collection through interviews, and thematic analysis. The only adjustment made was the application of this design in the specific context of non-academic, informal cross-cultural communication.

The research was conducted at Universitas Katolik Santo Agustinus Hippo in West Kalimantan, which hosted the Borneo Mobility Program. The participants consisted of seven undergraduate students from the English Language Education study program who had served as liaison officers for German exchange students. These students were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), with specific criteria: (1) being actively enrolled in semester 4 to 6, (2) having direct experience assisting

German students in informal settings, and (3) being involved in communication activities throughout the program.

Data collection involved two main techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The interviews aimed to explore participants' personal experiences, challenges, and confidence related to their role as language facilitators. Each interview was conducted individually, lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and was recorded with prior consent. The interview questions were developed based on Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, particularly focusing on four key factors: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states. The question framework also followed the guidelines proposed by Artino et al. (2012). Additionally, document analysis was conducted on program reports, liaison officer handbooks, and students' written reflections. This method followed the document analysis process described by Bowen (2009) and was used to support and triangulate the interview data.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing meaningful information from the transcripts and documents. Data display was carried out through thematic coding and categorization to identify patterns among the participants' experiences. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring themes and verifying them through member checking and triangulation. This method was chosen for its systematic and rigorous structure in analyzing qualitative data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, validation techniques were applied following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Triangulation was achieved by combining interviews and document sources. Member checking was conducted by sharing the transcript summaries with the participants for verification. Peer debriefing sessions were also held with academic colleagues to validate the data interpretation. These efforts were made to enhance the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the study findings.

4. RESULT

This section presents the results of the study and discusses them in relation to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which includes four key sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional and psychological states. The findings are based on the responses of seven participants who served as language assistants for German exchange students during the Borneo Mobility Program. The classification of their experiences is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of Participants Based on Four Factors of Self-Efficacy

Name	Mastery Experience	Vicarious Experience	Verbal Persuasion	Emotional & Psychological States	Dominant Factor
Gregorius Yulianto Ardi	✓	✓	✓	✓	Emotional & Psychological
Yohanes Abxy Perbrianto	✓	✓	✓	✓	Emotional & Psychological
Citi Putri	✓	✓	✓	✓	Mastery Experience
Dwi Despita Pawasya	✓	✓	✓	✓	Verbal Persuasion
Angela Febriana	✓	✓	✓	✓	Verbal Persuasion
Silvester Yosando	✓	✓	✓	✓	Mastery Experience

Skolastika Jaya	✓	✓	✓	✓	Mastery Experience

All participants experienced all four self-efficacy factors during their roles. However, mastery experience emerged as the most dominant factor. Students who frequently engaged in guiding, instructing, or facilitating communication developed stronger confidence due to their direct involvement and successful outcomes. These hands-on experiences provided a sense of achievement that enhanced their belief in their ability to communicate effectively in English. Vicarious experience was also significant, as many students reported observing their peers' successful communication strategies. Through imitation and reflection, they were able to adjust their own approaches, improving their competence over time. This process mirrors Bandura's assertion that observing others can positively shape one's own behavior and beliefs.

Verbal persuasion played a crucial role in building students' self-efficacy. Supportive feedback from lecturers, classmates, and even the German students themselves reassured them of their abilities and encouraged them to persevere in challenging communication tasks. This external encouragement reinforced their internal motivation and helped to reduce their self-doubt. Meanwhile, emotional and psychological factors were initially a barrier. Most students experienced anxiety, nervousness, or lack of confidence, especially in the early stages of the program. However, these emotions diminished as students gained more practice and familiarity with their intercultural roles. Through continued exposure and reflection, they developed better emotional regulation, resilience, and self-trust.

These findings align with Bandura's framework, which emphasizes the interplay between experience, observation, verbal input, and internal state in shaping one's self-efficacy. Importantly, the study highlights that structured support, authentic interaction, and reflection are key in fostering students' confidence in real-world intercultural communication. The outcomes also suggest that the liaison officer role not only supported the German exchange students but also significantly contributed to the professional and linguistic growth of the EFL students themselves.

5.   DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm and extend Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy by demonstrating how EFL students develop communicative confidence through a combination of personal experience, observation, encouragement, and emotional adaptation. Although all four self-efficacy factors were present in each participant's experience, the dominance of mastery experience highlights the critical role of authentic, real-world practice in shaping students' belief in their language abilities. This supports prior studies which emphasize that actual success in task performance is the most powerful source of self-efficacy development, especially in second language contexts (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

The significance of vicarious experience in this study underscores the importance of peer modeling in cross-cultural learning environments. Students reported that observing fellow liaison officers provided them with practical strategies to navigate intercultural communication more effectively. This finding aligns with research by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2016), which emphasizes that modeling the behavior of competent peers fosters not only competence but also motivation. Verbal persuasion also played a meaningful role, especially as it came from multiple sources—lecturers, peers, and international students. Encouragement helped students overcome initial doubts and motivated them to persevere in unfamiliar and sometimes intimidating situations. As Bandura notes, the persuasiveness of verbal input depends on the credibility and frequency of the source, and in this context, students benefited from being part of a supportive academic and social environment.

Emotional and psychological states initially functioned as barriers, with many students expressing anxiety, insecurity, and hesitation. However, over time, students gained emotional control and resilience, reinforcing Bandura's idea that emotional regulation is both an outcome and a contributor to self-efficacy. This study contributes to the understanding that emotional responses are not static but can evolve as learners are exposed to continuous, structured intercultural experiences. Importantly, the findings also reveal that self-efficacy in this context is not confined to academic performance alone but extends to informal, spontaneous, and culturally sensitive communication. This expands the application of Bandura's framework beyond traditional classroom or testing environments and situates it within dynamic intercultural

experiences. The participants' growth in public speaking, cultural empathy, and interpersonal communication also suggests that programs like the Borneo Mobility Program not only support exchange students but serve as a platform for local students' personal and professional development.

In sum, this discussion supports the idea that EFL learners' self-efficacy is a multi-dimensional construct shaped by context, interaction, and reflection. It highlights the value of experiential programs in fostering language confidence and recommends that similar initiatives be sustained and further developed by educational institutions.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the self-efficacy of EFL students in assisting German exchange students during the Borneo Mobility Program at Universitas Katolik Santo Agustinus Hippo. Grounded in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997), the research identified how mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional and psychological states influenced students' beliefs in their communicative abilities. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis, it was found that all participants experienced all four sources of self-efficacy, with mastery experience emerging as the most dominant. Direct involvement in guiding and interacting with German students contributed to increased confidence, enhanced intercultural awareness, and improved language competence. The value of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how non-academic, real-world intercultural experiences can shape language learners' self-beliefs. The findings offer practical insights for language educators and institutional program developers to design initiatives that foster student growth not only in linguistic proficiency but also in intercultural competence and self-confidence. Moreover, this research highlights the importance of integrating experiential learning into EFL education to promote authentic communication skills.

However, the study has limitations. It involved a small number of participants from a single university and program, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus was primarily on informal communication, without comparative analysis across different intercultural or academic settings. Future research should consider

broader participant demographics, including students from multiple institutions and exchange contexts. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into how self-efficacy evolves over time. Exploring the role of institutional support systems and mentoring structures may further enhance our understanding of how to strengthen students' intercultural and communicative readiness in global exchange programs.

7. REFERENCES

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