

## **Promoting Communicative Self-efficacy and a Positive Attitude towards English Language Learning through a Collaborative Authentic Task**

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### **Abstract**

Self-efficacy and positive attitude are among factors contributing to success in language learning, yet encouraging these important traits among language learners in the classroom is often difficult. This study aims to investigate the extent to which a collaborative authentic task helped promote communicative self-efficacy and a positive attitude towards English language study among second-year dental students taking an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in a public university in Thailand. Specifically, the students were asked to interview foreigners in English about a topic in the field of dentistry, and then report their findings and reflect on their individual performance and experience during a feedback session with their instructor. Pre-task and post-task questionnaires were developed and distributed to 96 dental students, and a semi-structured interview was used to explore students' attitudes in greater depth. It was discovered that most of the participants perceived that their self-efficacy was higher in some aspects after they had completed the task. Results from the semi-structured interviews also demonstrated that this group of students recognized the importance of English in their profession. Furthermore, the overall attitude of the students toward the collaborative authentic task was favorable, with most participants reporting that they found it very useful and challenging as it provided them with the opportunity to use English in real life. Considering the conclusions of the study, teachers are encouraged to implement collaborative authentic tasks in the classroom to enhance students' self-efficacy and positive attitude toward English learning.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, attitude, authentic task, collaborative learning

### **Introduction**

Various factors affect success in learning a language, among them are self-efficacy and attitude. Self-efficacy is viewed as one of the motivational constructs (Bandura, 1997). Attitude is also regarded as one of the factors influencing second language acquisition as it affects how much effort learners put into their language learning (Gardner, Lanlonde & Moorcroft, 1985). In this regard, the two variables are similar. Learners who are self-efficacious and who possess a positive attitude towards a language have been found to put forth more effort, persevere longer when faced with difficulties, and, thus, perform better at language learning.

Although listening and speaking are the skills that are most frequently used in everyday life, Thai students have little opportunity to practice these skills in English. According to Biyaem (1997 as cited in Piamsai, 2017), their lack of opportunity to use the language in daily life is among many obstacles faced by Thai students who seek to master English speaking. Learners need a reason to learn, and what makes learning English meaningful to them is interaction with real language and real speakers of the language in real-life situations. However, in a country like Thailand, where English is not an official language

the opportunity to have authentic interaction in English. This is demotivating to some students. The lack of experience in using English in real life situations also affects their confidence in speaking the language. Prospects of having genuine interaction with foreigners thus seem daunting to Thai students. It was hoped that assigning an authentic task to provide the students with an opportunity to use English to complete a meaningful and interesting task would enhance both motivation and confidence. By working on it collaboratively, students would be able to support one another, which was intended to reduce their anxiety as well as facilitate learning. Once they had completed the task successfully, the sense of achievement would enhance their self-efficacy and positive attitude towards English learning.

While the body of research in the area of self-efficacy is extensive, research on self-efficacy and attitude in foreign language learning with regard to communicative ability, especially in Thailand, is still lacking, with no such research focusing on how dental students perceive their ability to communicate orally in English. As a result, this study was conducted in an attempt to fill in this research gap. Among the four communicative skills in English language, speaking skill is the only skill that was focused on in this study.

The objectives of this study were twofold: (1) to investigate the dental students' self-efficacy with regard to English oral communication skills; and (2) to determine the extent to which an authentic collaborative task helped promote their self-efficacy and positive attitude towards English language study.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Self-efficacy**

Recent years have seen an increase in interest regarding self-efficacy in foreign language learning. Bandura (1977, 1997) has defined self-efficacy as an individual's judgment of his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals. In the context of second language learning and use, self-efficacy is believed to influence learners' motivation and learning as it mediates between learners' aptitude, past achievements and subsequent performances (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is believed to have the potential to influence students' learning processes by helping or hindering their progress (Bandura, 1984).

According to Bandura (1977), individuals acquire information about their own abilities from four major sources, which are (a) mastery experiences or performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experience, (c) verbal or social persuasion, and (d) physiological and emotional states. Among the four sources, direct experiences of mastery are the most effective way to create strong self-efficacy. When individuals experience success from their performance, it positively enhances their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 1984, 1991; Schunk, & Zimmerman, 1997). Vicarious experience is the second source of information that individuals use to judge their self-perception. Observing their peers attaining success at a task conveys a vicarious sense of positive efficacy and the belief that they, too, can accomplish the task (Bandura, 1997). Verbal or social persuasion is the third source of an individual's self-perception. One's self-efficacy is influenced by encouragement, especially from trustworthy or credible sources. Verbal persuasion is effective in motivating a person to make a greater effort to master an activity, and this promotes development of skills and a strengthened sense of personal efficacy. Praise and encouragement from the teacher and peers can give students greater confidence in their abilities. Finally, individuals rely on their emotional states when judging their capabilities to perform tasks. As stress and tension may have negative effects on self-efficacy, in order to enhance self-efficacy, attempts ought to be made to reduce individuals' stress and change their negative emotional states.

Many studies have found positive correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992; Weda, Samad, Patak & Fitriani, 2018). Results from numerous studies also indicate a positive relationship between students' self-efficacy and language proficiency (Hakimeh & Tarbiat, 2015). Significant positive correlations between self-efficacy and English language achievement have been found, and learners who are self-efficacious, or perceive themselves as competent, tend to be more successful in their English language performance (Mahyuddin et al., 2006). Findings from research conducted by Haleh and Mahnaz Saeidi (2015) also revealed a positive correlation among EFL learners' listening self-efficacy beliefs, listening autonomy, and listening comprehension ability. Studies also found correlation between self-efficacy and speaking skill. Students who were more confident in their speaking ability performed better than those with low efficacy (Khatib & Maarof, 2015). This is in line with the result of the study by Gunawan (2017), which showed the significant influence of self-esteem on speaking achievement. Based on the study by Kitikanan & Sasimonton (2017), there is positive correlation between English self-efficacies of all four skills and English learning achievement. It is even suggested that developing self-efficacy in only one aspect might result in higher achievement in the overall English language. Self-efficacy alone, however, does not always guarantee successful performance. Learners may believe that they are capable and possess the necessary skills needed to succeed, yet choose not to perform because they have no incentive to do so (Bandura, 1977).

### **Attitude toward Language Learning**

Another factor which can enhance students' desire to learn is a positive attitude toward learning and the target language. Crystal (1997) defines language attitudes as the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others. Krashen (1985) proposes that attitudes can act as barriers or bridges to learning a new language and are an essential environmental ingredient for language learning. Chambers (1999) also maintains that learning occurs more easily when the learner has a positive attitude towards the language and learning. Research findings suggest that attitudes are important aspects in successful language learning (Lightbown and Spada 1993, Gardner and MacIntyre 1993). Various studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between attitude, motivation and second language learning and proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, Lalonde & Moorcroft, 1985) and attitude has been found to be one of the significant factors influencing foreign language learning as it dictates how much effort students put into that learning. Hence, it can be said that learners who possess positive attitudes towards communicating in English will be more involved in communicative activities and may persevere in the face of difficulties, whereas learners with negative attitudes are likely to be less willing to participate in English communication and learning. Brown (2000) studied a large number of research articles on the effects of attitude on language learning and concluded that positive attitudes towards the self, the target language, and the target language community enhanced proficiency. As attitudes are related to second language achievement, improving the students' positive attitude towards English may increase their desire to learn it, and eventually raise their proficiency.

### **Collaborative Authentic Tasks**

A plethora of literature can be found on how the use of authentic tasks that are motivating, engaging and learner-centered, can facilitate and promote language learning. Therefore, in foreign language learning contexts in which exposure to the language being learned is scarce, there is an imperative need to implement materials and design tasks that will enable learners to meaningfully and purposefully use the language. According to Wiggins and McTighe

(2005), authentic tasks refer to performance tasks and activities designed to simulate or replicate important real-world challenges. Breen (1985) further defines authentic tasks as chosen tasks designed to engage learners in authentic communication and authentic aims for learning. Learners are required to use their knowledge in real-world contexts with genuine purposes, audience, and situational variables. The importance of authentic activities or tasks in a learning environment was highlighted by Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989), and various studies have found a positive relationship between use of authentic tasks and motivation (Peacock, 1997; Al Azri, & Al-Rashdi, 2014). Apart from authentic tasks, collaborative learning is also believed to have an effect on learners' interest (Slavin, 1983). The term refers to an educational approach in which the learning environment is structured so that students at various performance levels work together in a small group towards a common learning goal (Gokhale, 1995; Prichard, Bizo, & Stratford, 2006). It has been found that, when working in groups, students are more engaged and involved in the learning process. They can also learn about their strengths and weaknesses while working collaboratively to accomplish a task in groups. As they watch, interact with, and learn from their peers, they may learn new ways of tackling problems (Slavin, 1983). According to Poellhuber, Chomienne and Karsenti (2008), collaborative learning has been found to be associated with an increase in motivation (self-efficacy and interest), and peer interaction has been evaluated positively. Sharan (1980) also proposes that collaborative learning in small groups has a positive effect on academic achievement, students' attitudes, and interpersonal skills. Collaborative authentic tasks, therefore, refer to tasks which simulate real-world challenges and on which learners are required to work collaboratively to achieve. Woo, Mehringer, Agostinho & Reeves (2007) found that instructor's inclusion of authentic activities on which students had to collaborate improved the quality of student interaction and learning in online classrooms.

## **Methodology**

The present research employed mixed-methods consisting of a pre-task questionnaire, a post-task questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

## **Participants**

Ninety-six sophomores at a public university in Thailand took part in the study. The participants comprised 40 male and 56 female dental students aged between 19 and 20 years old. For the semi-structured interviews, seven students volunteered to take part. At the time of the study, the participants were enrolled in an *English for the Dental Profession* course, designed specifically for second-year students in the Faculty of Dentistry. This course is offered to all second-year Dentistry students after they have completed two foundation English courses in their first year. The focus of the course is on practice in the four language skills, with a special emphasis on reading and listening to academic English.

## **Instruments**

Pre-task and post-task questionnaires and semi-structured interview questions were employed to collect the data. Both pre-task and post-task questionnaires were adapted from the Questionnaire of English Self-efficacy (QESE) scale developed by Wang, Kim, Bong and Ahn (2013). Each questionnaire consisted of 12 questions which asked the participants to self-rate their own perceived English communicative proficiency. The pre-task questionnaire was completed before, and the post-task questionnaire after they conducted the task. To measure the participants' self-efficacy, all items on the questionnaires begin with "how well do you think you can ....?" Responses were scored on a 5-point rating scale from 5 (I can do it very well) to 1 (I cannot do it at all). The questionnaire was created to measure the

following aspects: (a) self-efficacy for listening (Items 7, 8, and 9); and (b) self-efficacy for speaking (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 and 12). The mean score of all 12 items was calculated to represent each participant's self-efficacy. The questions served two purposes. They aimed, not only to collect data about the participants' self-efficacy, but also to draw their attention to the skills they would need in tackling the interview task.

The second part of the pre-task questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions which served to help the participants focus on the task that they would undertake. To ensure that the answers were detailed and clear, the participants were informed that they could write their answers in either Thai or English. Similarly, the second part of the post-task questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions asking the participants to provide details about their perceived performance after they had attempted the task and reflected on their experience. The responses were scrutinized for emerging themes.

To acquire in-depth information about the participants' self-efficacy and attitudes, semi-structured interview questions were used after the feedback discussion session with the instructor. The five questions aimed to elicit in-depth information about the participants' experience of the task, in particular, their feelings about how they had done (See Appendix). The responses were analyzed and categorized for emerging themes.

The content validity of the questionnaires and semi-structured interview questions was established by a group of academic professionals, and the instruments were tried out among a group of 31 students who had taken the same ESP course in the previous academic year. This ensured that the items in the questionnaires and semi-structured interview questions measured what they were intended to. The questionnaires were administered to participants in this study by the researcher and two other instructors who taught the same course in different sections. Participants were fully informed about the objectives of the study before the administration of the questionnaires which took place during a class session. They completed the questionnaires in class voluntarily, and signed a consent form to indicate their willingness to participate in the study.

## Data Collection

The participants were assigned a group survey project to interview foreigners on a dentistry-related topic of their interest. The task was one of the three course assignments. They were told that all members would receive the same score for group performance and the score would be based on the group's ability to complete the task successfully—interviewing at least eight foreigners about a topic of their interest in the field of dentistry, reporting their findings and reflecting on their individual performance and experience. The aim of the task was to encourage effective communication with members of the public, in particular native speakers of English, increase students' confidence in speaking English, and raise self-awareness of their communicative skills in English.

As a group, the students worked collaboratively to choose a dentistry-related topic and develop a hypothesis such as "*We predict that most people prefer female dentists.*" They then had to prepare four questions that could help them obtain evidence to prove their hypothesis. The participants were given sample questions as guidelines such as "*Would you consider having dental treatment in Thailand?*", "*When you think of a dentist, what first comes to mind?*", "*In your country, what view do people have of dentists?*" Then, in order to help the students learn about the interviewees' thoughts on the ideal dentist, the participants had to add as the 5<sup>th</sup> question, "*In your opinion, what makes a good dentist?*" or "*What qualities should a dentist possess?*" The instructor checked the questions and approved or suggested changes as appropriate. The instructor then pre-taught some useful vocabulary and expressions for the task. The participants were next asked to role-play the survey interview in class with students from other groups so that they could familiarize themselves with the

interview process, try out their questions, become aware of problems that could occur during the interview, and prepare themselves for the actual task. The participants were told to take photographs or a video of the interviews to show to the teacher during the discussion feedback session, in which they had to reflect on the experience and share the survey results.

The research data was collected in three stages as follows:

***Step 1: Pre-task questionnaire***

After the instructor explained the task to the students and had them role-play the survey interview in class, the participants were given a pre-task questionnaire and asked to indicate the extent to which they felt that each item described their own perceptions of their speaking and listening abilities. The 12 QESE scale questions on the questionnaire covered the key aspects about which Thai students typically express anxiety. The students also had to answer open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire which asked them about the challenges they anticipated they might face during the interview, and rate their perceived ability to deal with such challenges.

***Step 2: Post-task questionnaire***

After they had completed the task, the participants were given a post-task questionnaire to self-rate their ability to communicate in English based on their interview experience. They were also asked to give details about the challenges they encountered and how they handled those challenges, how they felt about the task, if they found the task useful, what they thought they had done well/not so well, and whether they thought the task had made them more aware of their English abilities.

***Step 3: Semi-structured interview***

Once the survey task had been completed, the participants met with the instructor in small groups during a feedback session to report their interview results and reflect on their experience. Following that, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven volunteer participants so that the researcher could elicit more in-depth data (See Appendix). The interviews were conducted in Thai, recorded, and the transcripts were translated into English.

**Data Analysis**

A paired t-test was used to test the differences between the pre-and post-task results of the self-efficacy questionnaires. The mean score of all 12 items was calculated to represent the participants' sense of their English self-efficacy. The participants' answers from the semi-structured interview were also analyzed. The semi-structured interviews that took place during the feedback discussion session were recorded, transcribed, and scrutinized for emergent themes.

## Results and Discussion

The results related to the first research objective (to investigate the dental students' self-efficacy with regard to English oral communication skills) can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. A comparison of pre-task and post-task scores**

Statements	<i>M</i> Pre-task ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> Post-task ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> Diff ( <i>SD</i> )	Standard Error of Mean	t	p
Participants' perceived English communicative self-efficacy in _____.						
1. pronouncing English words correctly	3.30 (.81)	3.53 (.83)	.23 (.73)	.08	3.07	.00
2. starting a conversation in English	3.49 (.82)	3.89 (.84)	.40 (.80)	.08	4.84	.00
3. introducing yourself in English	4.01 (.62)	4.20 (.73)	.19 (.74)	.08	2.47	.02
4. asking questions in English	3.75 (.70)	3.88 (.70)	.13 (.68)	.07	1.79	.08
5. answering questions in English	3.67 (.75)	3.68 (.76)	.01 (.73)	.08	.14	.89
6. making yourself understood	3.71 (.65)	3.77 (.69)	.06 (.66)	.07	.93	.36
7. understanding English spoken at a normal speed	3.67 (.89)	3.77 (.87)	.10 (.81)	.08	1.25	.21
8. understanding English spoken by native speakers of English	3.36 (.88)	3.61 (.89)	.25 (.78)	.08	3.14	.00
9. understanding English spoken by non-native speakers of English	3.23 (.75)	3.28 (.74)	.05 (.77)	.08	.66	.51
10. paraphrasing when someone doesn't understand what you are trying to say	3.07 (.79)	3.39 (.83)	.31 (.70)	.07	4.37	.00
11. using the right words when communicating in English	2.97 (.76)	3.29 (.74)	.32 (.61)	.06	5.21	.00
12. communicating in English without having to think of what to say in Thai first	2.93 (.98)	3.24 (.95)	.31 (.81)	.08	3.77	.00
<b>Overall</b>	<b>41.16</b> <b>(6.92)</b>	<b>43.52</b> <b>(7.20)</b>	<b>2.3</b> <b>(5.06)</b>	<b>.52</b>	<b>4.58</b>	<b>.00</b>

Overall, it can be summarized that the participants' self-efficacy was significantly higher after they completed the collaborative authentic task. Paired T-test showed a

significant difference between the post-task ( $M = 43.52$ ,  $SD = 7.20$ ) and pre-task test scores ( $M = 41.16$ ,  $SD = 6.92$ ) ( $t = 4.58$ ,  $p = .00$ ) which means that, after the intervention, the participants perceived that their communicative skills were higher.

The results can be explained using Bandura's theory (1977) of four sources of self-efficacy expectations—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological or emotional states, all of which have influential effects on individuals' self-efficacy. The participants' higher self-efficacy after they had conducted the task can be attributed to their mastery experience, gained through repeated attempts and exposure to use of English as they were performing the task. They also gained vicarious experience while working alongside their peers, observing others succeeding and growing more confident themselves. Social and verbal persuasion was affected as the participants collaborated with group members throughout the planning, preparation, and execution stages. They received positive feedback and guidance from their instructor during the role-play, and they received encouragement and support from their group members while carrying out the interviews. Effects from the three sources positively impacted the participants' emotional state, allowing them to overcome their anxiety. The results are in keeping with a study conducted by Araban et al. (2012) which found that cooperative learning provided both direct experience and vicarious experience to all group members. In cooperative situations, even weak students have a chance to learn and achieve. By witnessing their peers completing a task successfully, students can gain stronger self-efficacy from the belief that they too can succeed at a similar task. Poellhuber, Chomienne and Karsenti (2008) also confirmed that peer interaction and collaborative learning had positive impacts on student self-efficacy beliefs and persistence in learning.

When taking a closer look at the data reported in Table 1, some aspects of the participants' self-efficacy after the intervention were significantly higher than before the intervention, while others remained unchanged. The skills they perceived as better included their ability to (1) pronounce English words correctly ( $t = 3.07$ ,  $p = .00$ ), (2) start a conversation in English ( $t = 4.84$ ,  $p = .00$ ), (12) communicate without having to think of what to say in Thai first ( $t = 3.77$ ,  $p = .00$ ), (8) understand native speakers ( $t = 3.14$ ,  $p = .00$ ), (10) paraphrase ( $t = 4.37$ ,  $p = .00$ ), (11) use the right words ( $t = 5.21$ ,  $p = .00$ ), and (3) introduce themselves in English ( $t = 2.47$ ,  $p = .02$ ). The data correspond to the results of Leeming, P. (2017)'s longitudinal study investigating self-efficacy of Japanese university students in an oral English course that followed a Task-Based Language Teaching approach. Findings showed significant growth in speaking self-efficacy after the students had worked together in small groups to complete tasks that required feedback or report to the entire class.

It is interesting to note that the aspects of their perceived self-efficacy which remained unchanged included the ability to (5) ask questions in English ( $t = 1.79$ ,  $p = .08$ ), (7) understand English spoken at a normal speed ( $t = 1.25$ ,  $p = .21$ ), (6) make themselves understood ( $t = .93$ ,  $p = .36$ ), (9) understand non-native speakers ( $t = .66$ ,  $p = .51$ ), and (5) answer questions in English ( $t = .14$ ,  $p = .89$ ). Based on the data, the participants' perceived listening ability was not raised. It appears that the participants struggled when engaged in a conversation in which English was spoken at a normal speed and the other person was a non-native speaker of English. The non-native speakers' accents when speaking English could have made it difficult for the participants to understand. According to Hirai (1999)'s study in Japanese EFL learner, although the students may be able to recognize the words graphically, they might not be able to connect the words' spoken phonological form with its meaning when listening. Moreover, a possible explanation for the participants' low communicative

self-efficacy is that because of the lack of proficiency of non-native speakers, the participants did not understand what was asked during the interview, and this might have caused the participants to feel that they lacked the ability to ask questions in English or make themselves understood. Also, during the interview task, it is most likely that the participants did not get to answer questions in English as they were playing the role of interviewer and were focusing on asking the foreigners questions and not vice-versa. This could explain why the participants did not feel they improved in answering questions in English.

In response to the second research objective (to determine the extent to which an collaborative authentic task helped promote self-efficacy and positive attitude toward English language study among second-year dental students in an English for the Dental Profession course), responses from the open-ended questionnaires and the semi-structured interview were mostly positive. Despite the anxiety and stress they reported feeling when the task had been assigned to them, the participants said that they found the task challenging and interesting as they had rarely had a chance to communicate with foreigners in real-life situations before, and enjoyed the opportunity to practice English authentically. They felt good that people were able to understand their English, and vice versa. They said that after they had conducted the survey interview, they felt good about their ability to communicate in English with foreigners in the real world. As the questions in the open-ended questionnaire were similar in nature to those in the semi-structured interview, but did not yield as much detail, only excerpts from the semi-structured interview responses are shown:

*“I don’t get to use English at all outside of class, and I never had a chance to have a real conversation with a foreigner. I was afraid I would not understand what the foreigners said due to their accent and speed, but when the foreigners couldn’t understand me, I tried to explain to them and used simpler words.” (S.1)*

*“I felt nervous when the teacher said I had to do the interview task because I never talked to foreigners. I was nervous and uncomfortable at first, but I found that many foreigners were actually nice” (S.2)*

*“I found non-native speakers of English very difficult to understand, and they didn’t understand me when I asked them questions. I didn’t know if it was because their English wasn’t good, or because mine was bad. So when I had that problem, I would repeat the question, speak more slowly or paraphrase the questions, using easier words.”(S.4)*

*“I felt proud of myself. It felt good to have a chance to use my English skills in real life as I normally don’t have a chance to speak in English. I felt great because I could communicate with foreigners and we understood each other.”(S.6)*

*“I realized I’m actually pretty good at using English in real life. I could understand what the foreigners said even though their accents were hard to understand and they spoke quite fast.”(S.7)*

*S= student*

Not only did the participants’ perceive their self-efficacy as being higher after their successful authentic language experience, but their attitudes toward the collaborative authentic task was also found to be positive. They reported that doing the task with their group members helped them feel more confident. The lowered anxiety may have contributed to their raised self-efficacy. The participants also had a chance to witness their peers succeeding at the task, and this vicarious experience most likely made them perceive their self-efficacy as stronger. Law, Chung, Leung and Wong (2015) confirmed that collaborative

tasks fostered self-efficacy and interest in learning. The participants communicated positive perceptions towards the implementation of the collaborative authentic task.

*“I think it was good to do this as a group because we had an opportunity to share opinions and brainstorm with friends.”(S.1)*

*“The task made me more confident. I was very nervous at first but getting out of my comfort zone was interesting. When I was doing it with my friends I could talk to foreigners without feeling shy.”(S.2)*

*“I was too shy to approach a foreigner and ask for an interview, so I let someone else in my group do it first, and I watched how he did it and after that I did the interview myself.”(S.3)*

*“It was fun because we got to talk with people from different countries. They shared with us their stories and experiences. It was also good to do it as a group because friends can enhance friends’ confidence.” (S.4)*

*“I prepared questions, wrote scripts and role-played with friends before we interviewed a foreigner. I copied my friend who was good at English—like his choice of words and pronunciation.”(S.5)*

*“My group members helped each other plan and solve problems during the interview. We were able to help each other because everyone has different abilities and ideas. We also gave each other encouragement. I think the task improved our teamwork skills.”(S.6)*

*“The task was very useful. It was also fun and challenging. It gave me the chance to do something new to improve my English skills.”(S.7)*

All of the participants said they saw English as important to their future careers as dentists. They also said the task made them more aware of their English ability and shortcomings and expressed desire to be better at English. Finally, they found the task meaningful and relevant. Not only did they learn to use English in communicating with foreigners in a real-life situation, but they also got to learn about dentistry in other countries and what qualities people looked for in a dentist. This is shown in the following excerpts:

*“The task helped me to improve my English speaking and listening skills which are necessary for dentists.”(S.1)*

*“The task inspired me to improve my English skills. I want to be better at pronunciation.”(S.2)*

*“English is very important to survive and communicate with people from all over the world. I want to improve my speaking and listening skills. I also need to be more fluent so we won’t have ‘dead air’ during the interview.”(S.3)*

*“It is good to know foreigners’ view about dentistry. I learned more about dental treatment and dental practice in other countries.”(S.4)*

*“I received a lot of new information from the interview. As future dentists, knowing what people think and what they want us to be can help me in my future career.” (S.5)*

*“I thought my English ability was quite good and could communicate with other people, but in reality I felt nervous and couldn’t think of the words I wanted to say. I want to be more confident when using English.”(S.6)*

Based on the questionnaire and interview responses, it could be said that a lack of exposure to situations in which students were required to interact with foreigners in English contributed to their anxiety and low self-confidence in using the language. However, after successful completion of the task, the participants demonstrated significantly enhanced self-

efficacy, as well as a positive attitude towards the communicative task and learning English. The participants reported that they found the task challenging, fun, and very useful as it provided them with the rare opportunity to practice their speaking and listening skills— skills they realize will be useful in their future careers. The fact that they did it in groups in which all members took part from start to finish — from forming the hypothesis, developing the questionnaire, and conducting the survey, to the reporting of survey results -- provided the participants with vicarious experience from which to learn from their peers, which helped boost their self-efficacy.

The findings from this study are in keeping with the results from a study conducted by Castillo et al. (2017), which showed that the use of authentic materials and tasks had an impact on students' communicative competence. Through collaborative authentic tasks, all four sources of self-efficacy -- namely mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal -- can be addressed. According to Law, Chung, Leung and Wong (2015), collaborative learning might be an effective approach in enhancing students' interest in learning English, and through the process students may be able to become more self-efficacious in learning English. The study by Ortiz and Cuéllar (2018) also found that authentic tasks foster oral production among English as a foreign language learners.

## **Conclusion**

Good communicative skill in the English language is increasingly essential for a dental career, especially as Thailand is now a popular destination for dental tourism. Self-efficacy and a positive attitude are, no doubt, two key factors that contribute to dental students' proficiency in learning English. This study, therefore, sought to explore the extent to which the collaborative authentic task helped promote communicative self-efficacy and positive attitudes among dental students taking the *English for the Dental Profession* course. The findings reveal that, on the whole, the participants' perceived self-efficacy after the intervention were significantly higher than before the intervention in most aspects, including their ability to pronounce English words correctly, start a conversation in English, introduce themselves in English, understand native speakers, paraphrase, use the right words, and communicate without having to think of what to say in Thai first. However, other aspects of the participants' perceived self-efficacy were found to be unchanged. These included the ability to ask and answer questions in English, make themselves understood, and understand non-native speakers. These should perhaps be investigated further and they comprise areas that instructors should focus on during English language teaching sessions.

The participants' attitudes towards the collaborative authentic task were also found to be positive. Most reported that they found the task useful, interesting, and challenging. They enjoyed the opportunity to use their skills to communicate with foreigners in the real world. They also enjoyed working with their peers in groups as they could rely on one another for help and felt more confident when conducting the task.

## **Recommendations**

As language instructors, it is important to be aware of factors that contribute to the communicative ability of students in order to help them in their learning processes by adapting and optimizing lesson contents and teaching methods. The findings of this study offer some pedagogical implications. The participants in the study reported an increase in self-efficacy with respect to English communication skills and found the authentic task, as well as the collaborative aspect of the task, to be a positive experience. Instructors should, thus, attempt to promote the students' communicative self-efficacy as well as positive attitude

toward English learning through collaborative authentic communicative tasks. In other words, instructors should incorporate real-world tasks, which are meaningful and challenging into the lessons. Making use of the four sources of self-efficacy is also likely to help the students become more efficacious learners of English. Instructors may be able to do so by providing the students with opportunities to use English in the real world so that they can gain mastery experience. Instructors can also use the pre-task role-play sessions and post-task reflective sessions as opportunities to give the students positive feedback so that they can benefit from verbal persuasion. Giving the students a chance to learn from their peers as they work collaboratively on a task can also provide vicarious experience. The students' anxiety towards communicating in English will then be lowered in conjunction with their raised self-efficacy.

Considering the conclusions of the study, instructors are encouraged to use collaborative tasks to enhance students' self-efficacy and their positive attitude toward English learning. Equipped with these variables, the students are likely to be more willing to learn and communicate in English.

For future research, investigation could be conducted on how the students' raised self-efficacy can be further developed through more authentic collaborative communicative tasks. Investigation into the use of pedagogical strategies such as scaffolding and positive feedback to enhance students' self-efficacy might also prove effective in identifying ways to strengthen their experiences. Studies to investigate and promote the self-efficacy of EFL/ESP learners in other academic disciplines might also yield a broader understanding on strategies and approaches that language instructors and curriculum developers can adopt to enhance efficacious and competent EFL/ESP learners.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It should be noted that this study only investigated the effect of an authentic collaborative task on the students' self-efficacy beliefs and attitudes and did not examine the students' academic performance. The participants were not placed in proficiency level groups and the study did not focus on the self-efficacy levels of students with different proficiency levels. Also, as the seven students taking part in the semi-structured interviews were volunteers, and likely to possess certain characteristics, they may not be representative sampling of the entire population. Additionally, as this ESP course focuses on all four language skills, and is not just an English communication course, students did not have many opportunities to practice their listening and speaking skills throughout the course. This could have, to some extent, impacted the results of their self-efficacy assessment.

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## **Appendix**

### **Semi-structured interview questions**

Question 1: How would you describe your overall experience with the survey interview task?

1.1 Have you done this kind of task before?

1.2 Have you had any experience communicating with foreigners outside of class in a real world situation?

1.3 How did you feel when the teacher assigned you the task? What problem(s) did you anticipate?

1.4 How did you prepare for the task?

Question 2: What is your opinion about the task?

2.1 Was it useful? Why or why not?

2.2 Did you gain anything from the experience?

2.3 Do you think the task helped improve your English listening and speaking ability?

2.4 Do you think you've become more confident in using English to communicate with foreigners?

2.5 All in all, did you enjoy the task? Why or why not?

Question 3: What problem(s) did you have when interviewing foreigners? How did you deal with the problems?

Question 4: How do you feel about working on this task in groups? Please describe in detail.

Question 5: What have you learned about your own speaking and listening ability? Please describe in detail.