

Interpersonal skills and self-efficacy among Chinese college students

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Abstract

This paper explored the intricate relationship between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy among Chinese college students. The primary objective was to analyze this relationship and propose strategies for enhancing the support provided by college heads to teachers. The study described the profile of respondents in terms of sex, age, school type, subject being taught in the college; determined the respondents' interpersonal skills in terms of interpersonal skill of reject, interpersonal skill of hearing, and interpersonal skill of sharing; assessed the respondents' self-efficacy in terms of self-efficacy with friends, self-efficacy with family, and self-efficacy with society; tested the differences of responses when grouped according to profile; tested the relationship between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy and proposed a professional development program to enhance interpersonal skills of college students in China. Concurrently, the researcher found that Chinese colleges and universities should strengthen the education of interpersonal skills and self-efficacy, it has far-reaching implications for educational strategies and interventions designed to promote the holistic development of students. It was concluded that majority of respondents in the study were male sophomores hailing from urban areas. It was highlighted that students should focus on refining their interpersonal skills, as this can enhance their self-efficacy and self-confidence both academically and socially. Emphasizing open communication was also deemed crucial for fostering a harmonious living environment among students. Moreover, significant discrepancies were observed in responses regarding school culture and safety management based on grade levels and majors. The study further established a significant correlation between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy, prompting the development of an action plan aimed at enhancing the interpersonal skills of Chinese students.

Keywords: interpersonal skills, self -efficacy, Chinese college students, development, implication, educational strategies

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1. Introduction

In every student's daily life, it is inevitable to encounter the issue of interpersonal communication, which to some extent reflects the level of individual self-efficacy. Interpersonal communication refers to the mutual relationship between people and their interactions with each other. The process in which an individual conveys certain information to other individuals through certain means of expression such as language, writing, or body movements, facial expressions, and others (Terra, 2023). Sociology defines interpersonal relationships as a social relationship established by people in the process of production or life activities (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). Meanwhile psychology defines interpersonal relationships as direct psychological connections established during interpersonal interactions. These interpersonal relationships have a significant impact on everyone's emotions, life, work, and more (Jouany & Martic, 2023).

Self-efficacy is a concept proposed by Bandura in 1977. In summarizing previous research, he found that previous theories and studies mainly focused on people's knowledge acquisition and behavioral response types. Therefore, the process of controlling the interaction between these knowledge and behaviors is ignored by everyone. Bandura believes that people's judgment of their own abilities plays a major role in their self-regulation system. Therefore, the concept of self-efficacy was proposed. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perception and belief in their ability to adapt to environmental challenges. A person who believes they can handle various things well will be more proactive in life. This behavior can reflect an individual's sense of control over the environment. Therefore, self-efficacy refers to the ability of individuals to handle various pressure and challenges in life based on a confident theory (Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2021).

From this, it can be seen that self-efficacy is not a skill, but stems from confidence. Self-efficacy is a level of confidence in one's ability to complete specific tasks based on skills. There is a certain gap between possessing skills and being able to integrate them to demonstrate competent behavior. Even if an individual possesses sufficient skills and lacks confidence in their own abilities, they cannot demonstrate competent behavior well (Damasio, 2018). Self-efficacy has specificity. Self-efficacy is only specific to specific task areas and is not a general personality trait. Because the demand for skills varies in different task areas. Therefore, there are certain differences in a person's level of self-efficacy in different task domains (Lippke, 2020). According to Cebu (2023), high self-efficacy levels, has no correlation between age or gender, but has a significant relationship with year level. Recommendations include implementing self-efficacy enhancement programs for better academic performance. Moreover, Luo et al. (2023) disclosed that Chinese college students displayed positive correlations among academic self-efficacy, academic achievement, and learning engagement. Structural equation modeling revealed learning engagement mediating the link between academic self-efficacy and achievement.

Meanwhile, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese universities implemented blended online-offline teaching and restricted campus access. A study assessed college students' well-being, interpersonal relationships, and forgiveness pre- and post-pandemic. Results indicate significant changes, emphasizing the pandemic's impact on mental health and suggesting policy adjustments and counseling approaches for intimate relationships (Cheng et al., 2023). In addition, Yin and Shi (2022) explored how Chinese college students engage in face-to-face synchronous and online asynchronous interactions and their association with academic learning, satisfaction, and perceptions of learning environments. Findings from 3,999 undergraduates reveal four learner types, with face-to-face interactions generally yielding better outcomes, yet online interactions fostering autonomy and thesis completion.

Research gaps include limited exploration of how China's cultural context affects interpersonal skills and self-efficacy among college students, scarcity of longitudinal studies tracking their development over time, gaps

in understanding how gender, socioeconomic status, and regional differences intersect with these skills, and a lack of research on how digital communication technologies influence them (Campos & Scherer, 2024). Challenges encompass inadequacies in traditional teaching methods addressing these skills, societal pressures prioritizing academic achievement over interpersonal development, resource limitations hindering extracurricular skill-building opportunities, and difficulties in accurately assessing these skills (Ozcan, 2021). Problems involve communication barriers due to language and communication style differences, confidence issues impacting students' ability to navigate interpersonal interactions, social isolation potentially impeding skill development, and the complex role of social media both facilitating and hindering the development of these skills (Abuarqoub, 2019).

This paper investigated the interpersonal skills and self-efficacy of Chinese college students. Firstly, the researcher took students in the 2022 level as the research object and discussed the issues related to interpersonal skills and self-efficacy of the subjects in this study through the use of interpersonal skills questionnaires, and drew conclusions. The study on interpersonal skills and self-efficacy among Chinese college students holds significant implications and benefits for various stakeholders. Firstly, educators and policymakers can gain insights into the effectiveness of current educational practices in fostering these essential skills and self-beliefs. By understanding the challenges and gaps in addressing interpersonal skills and self-efficacy, they can refine teaching methods and curricula to better equip students for success in academic, professional, and personal domains. Additionally, students themselves stand to benefit from the study, as heightened awareness of the importance of interpersonal skills and self-efficacy can empower them to actively cultivate these qualities, enhancing their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. Moreover, employers and recruiters can leverage the findings to tailor recruitment and training strategies, recognizing the value of interpersonal competencies and self-efficacy in the workplace. Ultimately, the study serves as a valuable contribution to the field of education and psychology, offering practical insights that can inform interventions and initiatives aimed at promoting holistic student development and success.

Objectives of the study - This study assessed the interpersonal skills and self-efficacy among Chinese College Students. Specifically, this determined the respondents' interpersonal skills in terms of interpersonal feeling, communication with friends, communication with school and resilience and communication skills; assessed the respondents' self-efficacy in terms of sharing mind, self-awareness, facing difficulty and adaptive skills and personal growth; tested the relationship between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy and proposed a professional development program to enhance interpersonal skills and self-efficacy of college students in China.

2. Methods

This study used a quantitative descriptive study as the research method. The quantitative descriptive design allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, providing a deeper understanding of the interconnections between goal setting and work performance. This design is appropriate for research questions that require a precise description of a phenomenon without manipulating variables or drawing causal inferences. The researcher can collect data from a variety of sources that provide a comprehensive account of the phenomenon under study. The descriptive method is a research technique used to systematically describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon. In the study, the descriptive method is employed to assess the interpersonal skills and self-efficacy of Chinese college students.

In order to accomplish the research objectives, the researcher utilized both the total population and a sample from a college in China, where the researcher is affiliated as a faculty member. The total population consisted of 1360 students from the college, and the sample comprised 300 students specifically from Anhui College of Technology in China. The selection of the total population was facilitated through collaboration with the Human Resource Department of the college, ensuring access to comprehensive data on students. To determine the appropriate sample size, the researcher employed the Raosoft Calculator, a widely used tool for calculating sample sizes in research studies. This approach allowed for a representative subset of the larger student

population to be included in the study, ensuring sufficient statistical power and generalizability of findings. By combining data from both the total population and a strategically selected sample, the researcher could effectively address the research objectives and draw meaningful conclusions regarding interpersonal skills and self-efficacy among college students in China.

The researcher adapted a survey questionnaire based on validated scales to assess interpersonal skills and self-efficacy by Axboe et al. (2016). The instrument was composed of two parts. First part delved on the interpersonal skills in terms of interpersonal feeling, communication with friends, communication with school, and resilience and communication skills. Second part elicited self-efficacy in terms of sharing mind, self-awareness, facing difficulty and adaptive skills and personal growth.

After thesis title was proposed and approved, the data gathering procedure commenced with a thorough review of existing literature relevant to each title. This involved conducting searches in academic databases, journals, and other reputable sources to identify key theories, methodologies, and findings related to accounting or finance within the context of the Bureau of Immigration. Following the literature review, a detailed research proposal was formulated outlining the objectives, research questions, methodology, and timeline for data collection. This proposal underwent review and approval by the academic advisor or dissertation committee. With the research proposal approved, data collection activities were initiated. This involved administration of the surveys and it was done personally by the researcher. Gathering of data took one week to complete. Prior to this, letters of permission were secured from the school and other authorities involved. Also, the researcher conducted a brief orientation explaining the purpose of the study and the importance of the respondent's participation in the survey. They were given informed consent to ensure that they were not coerced. Each respondent was given 30-45 minutes to complete the survey. Then the researcher retrieved completed questionnaire. Data were gathered from relevant stakeholders within the Bureau of Immigration, including officials, employees, and other pertinent individuals. After the data collection phase, the gathered information was meticulously analyzed using appropriate statistical or qualitative analysis techniques. This analysis aimed to derive meaningful insights and patterns related to the identified variables and outcomes of the paper.

Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical software. The profile of the respondents was described using descriptive statistics including frequency distributions and percentage distributions. Weighted mean and rank were calculated to determine the career self-efficacy and career orientation. The links between the variables were investigated using correlation analysis and regression analysis. All statistical analyses and data processing were conducted using SPSS version 26, a widely used statistical software package.

The study meticulously integrated ethical considerations at every stage of the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was diligently obtained from all participants, with measures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional review boards, and conflicts of interest were transparently managed. Data were securely stored, encrypted, and backed up to prevent loss or unauthorized access. Following completion of the project, data disposal adhered to strict protocols, including shredding physical copies and securely wiping digital data. Throughout, measures were taken to prevent accidental or unauthorized access, with documentation maintained for audit purposes. These rigorous ethical practices ensured responsible handling of participants' data and upheld the integrity of the research.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the summary table on interpersonal skills. The composite mean (3.35) indicates that the respondents agreed in general. Among the indicators cited, interpersonal feeling and communication with friends obtained the highest weighted mean. Meanwhile, indicators such as communication with school and resilience and communication skills ranked least.

Table 1*Summary Table on Interpersonal Skills*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Interpersonal feeling	3.46	Agree	1
2. Communication with friends	3.38	Agree	2
3. Communication with school	3.37	Agree	3
4. Resilience and Communication Skills	3.19	Agree	4
Composite Mean	3.35	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The findings from Table 6 suggest that respondents generally agreed with the statements related to interpersonal skills, as indicated by the composite mean score of 3.35. Notably, the indicators of interpersonal feeling and communication with friends received the highest weighted mean scores, indicating strong agreement in these areas. This suggests that respondents generally perceive themselves as adept at understanding and expressing emotions in interpersonal interactions, as well as maintaining effective communication within their friend circles. Conversely, indicators such as communication with school and resilience, as well as communication skills, ranked lower in terms of weighted mean scores. This implies that respondents may perceive themselves as less proficient in communicating with school authorities or demonstrating resilience in challenging situations, highlighting potential areas for improvement in these aspects of interpersonal skills. Overall, the findings indicate a nuanced assessment of various dimensions of interpersonal skills among the respondents, with strengths in some areas and opportunities for growth in others. The significance of strong interpersonal connections extends beyond emotional well-being and academic success—it directly correlates with higher life satisfaction. Diener and Seligman's study (2022) underscores the importance of positive social relationships as a fundamental factor influencing overall life satisfaction. College students who cultivate meaningful friendships experience a greater sense of fulfillment and contentment in various aspects of their lives. In summary, fostering positive interpersonal feelings and effective communication with friends is integral to the holistic well-being and success of college students. These relationships contribute not only to emotional support and academic achievement but also to a heightened sense of life satisfaction, creating a foundation for a fulfilling college experience.

Table 2*Summary Table on Self-efficacy*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Sharing Mind	3.29	Agree	1
2. Self-awareness	3.13	Agree	4
3. Facing Difficulty	3.23	Agree	2
4. Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth	3.19	Agree	3
Composite Mean	3.21	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents the summary table on self-efficacy. The composite mean (3.21) indicates that the respondents agreed in general. Among the indicators cited, Sharing Mind and Facing Difficulty obtained the highest weighted mean. Meanwhile, indicators such as Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth and Resilience and Self-awareness ranked least. This suggests that respondents may perceive themselves as less proficient in adapting to new situations, fostering personal growth, and demonstrating resilience, as well as in self-awareness. Overall, these findings highlight areas where respondents feel more confident in their self-efficacy and areas where they may perceive opportunities for improvement.

Collaborative learning, as outlined by Le, et al. (2018), fosters deeper understanding, diverse perspectives, and innovative solutions. Sharing knowledge within a group setting, strengthens individual understanding and problem-solving skills, ultimately boosting confidence in academic abilities. Working together creates a sense of community and mutual support, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing motivation to persist through challenges, according to Bandura (1997). Witnessing peers successfully navigate difficulties serves as inspiration,

further enhancing self-belief and promoting a culture of perseverance. Collaborative learning environments offer a platform to share academic stress, providing emotional support and alleviating individual burdens, as suggested by Al-Samarraie, and Saeed, (2018). This reduction in anxiety and stress not only improves focus but also contributes to overall emotional well-being, positively influencing academic performance. Overcoming challenges builds resilience, fostering the ability to bounce back from setbacks and learn from them, according to Duckworth & Seligman (2006). Successful navigation of difficulties also nurtures a growth mindset, as proposed by Dweck (2006), strengthening self-efficacy and the belief that abilities can improve with effort. Facing academic challenges, as discussed by Hattie (2008), provides opportunities to learn from mistakes, refine study strategies, and develop critical thinking skills. This process instills confidence in one's ability to adapt and learn, leading to a stronger sense of academic competence.

Table 3*Relationship Between Interpersonal Skills and Self-Efficacy*

Sharing Mind	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Self-awareness	.416**	0.000	Highly Significant
Facing Difficulty	.416**	0.000	Highly Significant
Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth	.364**	0.000	Highly Significant
Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth	.425**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communication with friends			
Sharing Mind	.373**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-awareness	.592**	0.000	Highly Significant
Facing Difficulty	.585**	0.000	Highly Significant
Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth	.606**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communication with school			
Sharing Mind	.444**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-awareness	.498**	0.000	Highly Significant
Facing Difficulty	.482**	0.000	Highly Significant
Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth	.594**	0.000	Highly Significant
Resilience and Communication Skills			
Sharing Mind	.629**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-awareness	.588**	0.000	Highly Significant
Facing Difficulty	.464**	0.000	Highly Significant
Adaptive Skills and Personal Growth	.594**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p -value < 0.01

Table 3 presents the association between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy. The computed r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was a significant relationship and implies that the better is the interpersonal skills, the better the is the self-efficacy. This suggests that a significant relationship existed between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy. Furthermore, these results imply that as interpersonal skills improve, so does self-efficacy. In other words, individuals who exhibit better interpersonal skills are likely to also have higher levels of self-efficacy. This underscores the importance of interpersonal skills in fostering confidence and effectiveness in various aspects of personal and social interactions.

Wilkins, et al. (2015) conducted a study revealing a positive correlation between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy in college students. The research demonstrates that as interpersonal skills are honed and improved, there is a subsequent boost in confidence, positively impacting both academic and social spheres. This correlation suggests that the ability to navigate social interactions effectively contributes to an individual's belief in their capabilities. A 2020 meta-analysis by Wang et al. further substantiates the relationship between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy by demonstrating that social skills training significantly enhances self-belief across various age groups and contexts. This meta-analysis not only supports the correlation found by Wilkins et al. but also provides evidence of a causal link, suggesting that deliberate efforts to enhance social skills lead to improvements in self-efficacy.

Upeinieks et al.'s 2019 study delves into the influence of social support networks on self-efficacy. The

findings showcase that individuals with robust social support networks exhibit higher self-efficacy. This emphasizes the positive impact of meaningful social connections on an individual's confidence and belief in their ability to navigate challenges and achieve goals. Park et al. (2019) explores the role of collaborative learning environments in promoting higher academic achievement and self-efficacy among students. The study indicates that environments emphasizing collaborative learning, which inherently require strong interpersonal skills, contribute to increased self-belief and academic success compared to individual learning settings. This suggests that the ability to effectively collaborate with peers positively influences students' confidence in their academic capabilities. In summary, the amalgamation of these studies highlights the critical intersection of interpersonal skills and self-efficacy. From college students to diverse age groups, the evidence consistently indicates that honing interpersonal abilities not only correlates with higher self-efficacy but also serves as a catalyst for improved confidence in both academic and social contexts. This insight has profound implications for educational strategies and interventions aiming to enhance students' holistic development.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The students needed to hone their interpersonal skills, which can contribute to higher self-efficacy and higher self-confidence in academic and social settings. Students needed to be encouraged to open communication, which will contribute to a harmonious living environment. There was a significant relationship between interpersonal skills and self-efficacy. School administrators may strengthen the cultivation of students' interpersonal skills: teachers and schools should pay attention to the cultivation of students' interpersonal skills so that students can communicate positively and efficiently. Schools may strengthen the cultivation of students' self-efficacy: teachers and schools should pay attention to the cultivation of students' self-efficacy to provide support for students to go to work smoothly in the future. The university Dean may arrange interpersonal skills training on a regular basis: schools can actively guide students to participate in interpersonal skills training programs organized by the school to provide students with ways to improve. Schools can regularly arrange the promotion of interpersonal skills and self-efficacy. Schools can organize the promotion of communication skills and self-efficacy to enhance students' awareness of positive communication and self-confidence.

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