

The Mediating Effect of English Self-efficacy on the Relationships between Motivation to Learn, Intention to Share Knowledge, and Job Performance Among Military Personnel: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Extensive research on the relationship between employees' use of English in the workplace and their job performance has revealed that the use of English at work leads to increased job performance and positive interactions among staff. In relation to this, a good command of English among military staff, especially officers, is of great importance to the Armed Forces, as military personnel often serve abroad and need to be proficient in communicating their instructions and orders to a foreign team. Although the extant literature supports the direct role of self-efficacy in determining job performance apart from intention to share knowledge and motivation to learn, self-efficacy in English skills has rarely been examined as a mediator that explains the effect of knowledge sharing intention and learning motivation on job performance. Therefore, this paper aims to develop a conceptual framework that can be used to improve the understanding of English self-efficacy and its relationship with employees' motivation to learn, intention to share knowledge, and capability to perform a job. This framework informs and guides future research that will test the hypothesized relationships. The findings would assist the Human Resource Department, Defense Operations and Training Departments and Education Directorate of the Malaysian Armed Forces to design or revise military training syllabi and approaches.

Keywords: Motivation to Learn, Intention to Share Knowledge, English Self-Efficacy, Job Performance

1. Introduction

Poor international language skills detrimentally affect employees' efficiency. Various scholarly works have evidenced that the inability of employees to communicate well in English severely impedes their performance at work (Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Estival & Molesworth, 2020). Indeed, learning a foreign language like English can be challenging, which leads to misunderstandings and communication failures in the workplace (Ahmmmed, 2018; Ramlan et al., 2018). In the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF), poor English language skills prevent officers from fulfilling their local and, more critically, foreign assignments, which causes imbalances in their opportunities for career progress and foreign mission assignments. Moreover, a lack of

English language proficiency has undesirable consequences not only for military personnel's job performance but also for the credibility of their self, profession, and institution (Orna-Montesinos, 2018).

Given that performance is influenced by individual variables like employees' personal characteristics, motivations, experience, and abilities (Bartone, 2017), the current paper sought to comprehensively review the individual-level determinants of military personnel's work performance in relation to their English proficiency. In particular, motivation to learn, self-efficacy, and intention to share knowledge have been established as individual predictors of employees' performance in the military context (Chauvin et al., 2020; Lanvers, 2017; Legault, 2017). Though a majority of scholars have stressed the significance of military officers' English proficiency for them to manouvre the international environment (Jeggy, 2014; Jodaei et al., 2018) limited empirical findings exist on the relationship between language proficiency and job performance in the military (Baigorri-Jalon, 2010; Crossey, 2008). Additionally, the literature offers scarce evidence on how military organisations can facilitate officers' achievement of required English language standards for them to perform well at their jobs (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). Another gap in the literature is the dearth of research on the mediating role of self-efficacy in the effects of intention to share knowledge (Hu & Zhao, 2016) and motivation to learn (Anam & Stracke, 2020) on job performance, despite the fact that many studies have posited self-efficacy as a mediator through which individual factors affect employee performance.

Overall, the aforementioned relationships have been overlooked in the military context. Therefore, this paper aimed to assess the influence of individual antecedents that facilitate military personnel's achievement of required English proficiency levels and subsequently, improve their performance. Intention to share knowledge is modelled as a predictor of individuals' job performance because in foreign assignments, officers who have resolved potential language barrier issues can effectively help their peers build knowledge and skills by sharing their own valuable expertise in English. In addition, according to Lanvers (2017), motivation to learn English lead to high English proficiency, which decreases feelings of frustration and stress due to stagnant career and personal development. Such feelings, if left unchecked, would eventually impede performance. Moreover, a person's self-efficacy in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English is known to sharpen their behavior and performance of a task (Chauvin et al., 2020). Thus, studying the antecedents of military officers' job performance via their English skills efficacy has great value to the MAF as well as to stakeholders, including scholars and related agencies.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Job Performance

According to Koopmans et al. (2014), job performance consists of three distinct dimensions: task performance (skills), contextual performance (support capabilities), and counterproductive work behaviors (deterrents of performance). Task performance can be defined as an individual's ability to perform critical functional or technical tasks associated with their job responsibilities (Campbell, 1990). In this paper, task performance is proposed to assess how well military officers perform their assigned duties. The second dimension, contextual performance, is defined

as "behaviors that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must operate" (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). This dimension is frequently applied in the military context to non-specified job behaviors, such as collaboration, communication, and job-related knowledge sharing. The third dimension, counterproductive work behavior, is defined as "behavior that is detrimental to the organization's well-being" (Macovei, 2016). As military personnel are responsible for providing positive counsel, spreading goodwill, and advancing military objectives, this dimension is relevant to their job performance.

2.2 English Self-Efficacy

According to the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), self-efficacy belief is the most effective method of determining an individual's sense of personal capacity to execute a task or a performance (Bandura, 2008). Self-efficacy is defined by (Bandura, 1978) as a concept which describes how an individual evaluates his/her ability to carry out a required course of action in future situations. It is thus associated with a particular cognitive procedure reflecting one's belief and confidence in his/her ability to perform a particular task (Tenaw, 2013). Bandura (1986) further emphasized that self-efficacy beliefs are inferred from four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological state. Individuals form self-efficacy by assessing their capabilities to apply their cognitive skills in a particular situation so as to achieve desired outcomes. These assessments change over time, as they can also be influenced by personal experiences as well as sociocultural interactions (Mills, 2014). The degree of certainty or strength in one's self-efficacy varies, depending on the task at hand (Martin, 2004). For instance, one can have a high self-efficacy in reading and comprehending written English while perceiving a low self-efficacy in spoken English. Self-efficacy also varies depending on the situation. For example, with reference to users of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), an individual could have higher self-efficacy in reading an email message than in reading a scientific article. Moreover, communicating in a language that is not one's native language or first language can be difficult because it necessitates the coordination of multiple cognitive abilities to complete a task. In this case, individuals do not use incremental language skills in isolation, but rather in conjunction with one another (Hinkel, 2006). Consequently, one's efficacy in speaking the English language may be better when delivering a prepared speech compared to when conversing with a colleague in a socio-professional setting. Based on this understanding of self-efficacy, an individual's self-efficacy in mastering English is hereby termed English self-efficacy in this paper. To activate this English self-efficacy factor among individuals, four foundational cognitive skills must be applied: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Aydođan & Akbarov, 2014). As it is an essential affective factor in predicting an individual's performance, resilience, effort, and belief in completing a task (Schunk & Pajares, 2002), military personnel must possess English self-efficacy to boost their job performance.

2.3 Intention to Share Knowledge

Knowledge sharing has been explained in terms of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). It has been observed that a successful exchange process can lead to an obligation to reciprocate predicted future monetary and non-monetary gains (Gouldner, 1960). Based on the SET, it is deduced that interpersonal interactions occur when diverse parties jointly engage in activities and exchange valuable resources. Such interactions motivate other employees, particularly those with

limited skills, to enhance their own capabilities and job performance (Bello-Pintado, 2015). Although knowledge sharing is advantageous to organizations, it cannot be forced or mandated; rather, it is reliant on an employee's willingness to share his/her knowledge (Bock et al., 2005). Studies have noted that individual factors, such as intention, confidence, and reciprocity, have key influences on the willingness to share knowledge (Ali & Dominic, 2016). In line with this, Dhir and Goke-Pariola (2002) found that knowledge is transmitted through social interactions, wherein language is the primary facilitator of such communication. Individuals' ability to share knowledge is thus heavily contingent on their communication aptitude, making language a significant factor in the effectiveness of knowledge sharing, particularly in multilingual organizations (Ahmad & Widén, 2015). It is therefore critical for military personnel, particularly those assigned to international assignments, to possess a high level of proficiency in the most common international language, English. This is to ensure that knowledge is efficiently transmitted for improvements in the performance of other members and the military as a whole.

2.4 Motivation to Learn

Czarniawska (2001) defined 'motivation to learn' as an employee's desire to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to perform his/her tasks more consistently and effectively. Ramawickrama et al. (2017) proposed that individuals' capability, which includes their personality, cognitive ability, motivation, and professional experience, can influence their job performance. In the context of human resources, employees' motivation has been noted to improve their behavior when their efforts to achieve goals and deliver high-quality work are accomplished (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). It appears that intrinsic motivation, or internal drive, is a more powerful determinant of behavior than extrinsic motivation. This is because intrinsic motivation is within the individual, whether it is to encourage others to perform a task or to indulge in a certain behavior. Based on this, the current paper posits individuals' intrinsic motivation to learn English as the link to their long-term engagement with the organization (Schimansky, 2014). In the military setting, military officers with a strong desire to learn English as requisite for their job execution and performance are deduced to possess intrinsic motivation. Driven by their intrinsic desire to learn English, their competence in the English language would expectedly improve. When this occurs, not only would they gain more confidence, but they would also have more visible job advancement and earn more respect from their colleagues, even serving as role models for co-workers. Such a phenomenon not only benefits the individual's job performance, confidence, and recognition, but also the organization's performance, thereby leading to better career prospects (Gao & Lv, 2018; Khalid, 2016).

2.5 Relationship between Motivation to Learn and Job Performance

Empirical research Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016) and Latorre et al. (2016) has proven the link between learning motivation and employee behavior. It appears that highly motivated employees, for example, tend to strategically retain their organizations' core competencies. Additionally Usman et al. (2011) discovered that academic professionals' desire to learn has a significant positive effect on their organization's learning culture, which results in the organization's high performance. Employees' motivation to learn improves their skills and performance as well, by inspiring them to acquire significant knowledge necessary to perform

their jobs; in contrast, those less motivated to learn typically witness their skills deteriorating (Theorell et al., 1990).

There is a need to raise organizations' awareness about the importance of encouraging staff members to improve their English language skills, which manifests in improved performance and behavioral cohesion among colleagues. It is for this reason that military organizations dispatch their employees to both local and international territories to study English, to ensure they have the competence to use the English language when interacting with other international bodies and teams. This paper considers the motivation to learn English as an important inherent force that keeps military officers interested in continuing to master the language. In this regard, learning modules and training approaches should always consider the motivation of learners to maximize the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA). Since military doctrines and instructional documents are in English, mastering English through continuous motivation to learn keeps military officers up-to-date on new developments and management practices. As a result, the motivation to learn English is essential to improve English proficiency and gain KSA for better job performance, as a lack of KSA is known to lead to poor job performance (Sterling & Boxall, 2013). Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the motivation to learn English and job performance.

2.6 Relationship between Motivation to Learn, English Self-efficacy, and Job Performance

Self-efficacy has been identified as a powerful predictor of employees' motivation and learning. As previously stated, military officers are expected to attend a variety of English improvement courses to perform tasks related to foreign missions, drills, and deployment. Thus, it is critical to investigate the factors influencing their job performance, particularly in terms of language training. According to Zimmerman (2000), self-efficacy beliefs adapt to indirect changes in employee achievement by interfering with self-regulatory learning processes. This empirical evidence of self-efficacy's role as a powerful mediator of employees learning and motivation validates educators' long-held belief that employees' self-confidence in their academic pursuit is an important outcome of their motivation to learn. Indeed, Anam and Stracke (2020) stated that learners' efforts and interest in learning English provides them a certain level of motivational engagement as well as a strong belief in their ability to conduct their own tasks. In the current study, it is believed that a high level of English self-efficacy, specifically in the four skills of speaking, writing, listening, and reading, may explain the effect of military officers' motivation to learn on their English proficiency. In turn, such proficiency would enable them to perform better in their work, particularly on their foreign missions. This discussion has therefore led to the following hypothesis:

H1a: English self-efficacy mediates the relationship between the motivation to learn English and job performance.

2.7 Relationship between Intention to Share Knowledge and Job Performance

The literature Hsu (2008) and Swanson et al. (2020) has established that when knowledge is shared, employees have more access to intellectual resources and are able to develop job-related competencies. Empirical studies (Masa'deh et al., 2017; Razmerita et al., 2016) on knowledge management have also proposed that knowledge sharing is a critical social asset that businesses must leverage, given that it improves employee performance and organizational success. Knowledge sharing increases the quantity and quality of organizational knowledge, which in turn, enhances employees' skill development and innovation. Kuruppuge and Gregar (2017) found that knowledge sharing is positively correlated with job-related skills and job performance when new or inexperienced personnel are given access to intellectual capital. Swanson et al. (2020) contended that successful organizations tend to foster a knowledge-sharing environment, such that employees do not only share newly acquired knowledge, but also make intellectual resources that are useful for job performance accessible to others. In line with previous research, Muqadas et al. (2016) similarly asserted that knowledge sharing can foster employee innovation and performance in public universities. In this paper, military personnel's intention to share their accumulated knowledge with others would enhance productivity and performance as well as create cohesive rapport with others, to the extent of making their team more effective. It is further deduced that communication skills are important for knowledge sharing, particularly in face-to-face communication. Additionally, socialization skills are crucial in mentoring and developing military personnel's work performance through knowledge sharing activities. Following this logic, this hypothesis was formulated:

H2: There is a significant relationship between the intention to share knowledge in English and job performance.

2.8 Relationship between Intention to Share Knowledge, English Self-efficacy, and Job Performance

Previous studies have indicated that employee performance can be predicted with greater significance when self-efficacy is tested as a mediator between the intention to share knowledge and individual work performance. For instance, Hu and Zhao (2016) discovered that self-efficacy mediates the effect of information sharing on innovation behavior, since employees who engage in knowledge sharing practices with their coworkers are likely to have higher levels of self-efficacy and consequently, are more innovative in their job performance. Likewise, established a framework for Malaysian educators to understand the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between information sharing behavior and creative work behavior with the aim of enhancing organizational performance. The study provided scholars and managers with a new perspective on the importance of knowledge sharing and self-efficacy as a measure to stimulate innovative work behavior among educators in higher learning institutions. Self-efficacy is also associated with the learning of English; thus, it is plausible that when military personnel intend to share their knowledge with others, they have a strong belief in their self-efficacy in mastering the four skills of the English language, which would render them more capable of communicating their tasks with others and performing their own tasks well (Weekley & Ployhart, 2005). Through knowledge sharing, these personnel would become more actively

involved in several aspects of decision-making, and thus, more motivated in their job execution and job performance. Based on this discussion, the next hypothesis was formulated as:

H2a: English self-efficacy mediates the relationship between the intention to share knowledge in English and job performance.

2.9 Relationship between English Self-Efficacy and Job Performance

Researchers (Burns et al., 2018; Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019) have established the critical effect of self-efficacy on employees' job performance, wherein it engenders higher levels of service quality, effectiveness, and efficiency among employees at work. For instance, Soodmand Afshar and Hosseini Yar (2019) confirmed the role of self-efficacy in predicting the job performance of EFL teachers in Iran. Likewise, Shahrabani and Garyn-Tal (2019) found that perceptions of self-efficacy enhance the likelihood of constructive decision making as well as general and physical risk taking among female military personnel. Research findings further concur that individuals with greater self-efficacy believe they can outperform their peers; consequently, they set higher standards for themselves and anticipate to produce better results at work (Machmud, 2018). In line with this notion, Fosse, Buch et al. (2015) found that self-efficacy is a substantial predictor of military performance, accounting for 60% of job performance in three Norwegian military academies. On the other hand, a lack of self-efficacy can significantly weaken employees' performance and diminish their capability to perform their job duties. In line with these arguments, English self-efficacy is also known to enhance work performance (Chen, 2021; Kitikanan & Sasimonton, 2017) because employees' high self-efficacy entails stronger effort, interest, and purpose in mastering the English language, which increases their language performance and therefore, their job performance. Based on this justification, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: There is a significant relationship between English self-efficacy and job performance.

3.0 Research Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of this study were developed based on the empirical evidence and assumptions drawn from previous studies. The literature has noted that self-efficacy in learning English acts as a mediator in the effects of motivation to learn and intention to share knowledge on job performance. Based on this, an integrated framework was proposed to illustrate the linkages that exist among the following variables: (1) motivation to learn (independent variable), (2) intention to share knowledge (independent variable), (3) English self-efficacy (independent variable and mediator), and (4) job performance (dependent variable). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of these relationships.

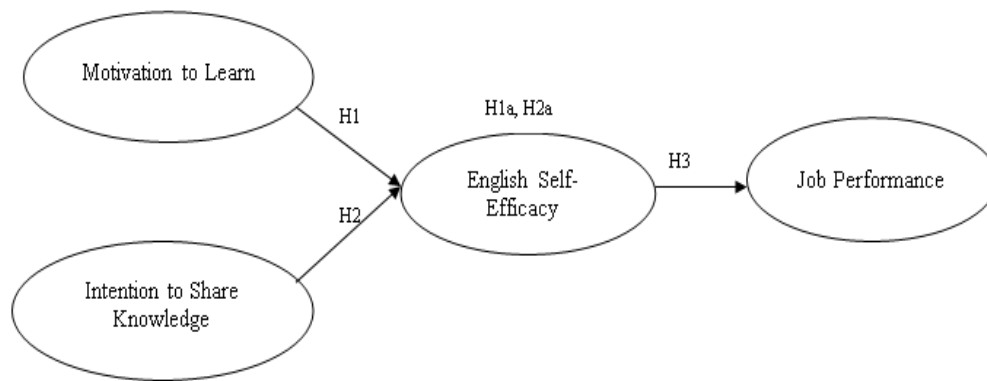


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

4.0 Managerial Implications

In view of the practical perspective, this paper offers potential solutions to the problem of poor English aptitude that is plaguing the military and weakening officers' job performance. The ideas put forth by this study are therefore useful for multiple military departments, especially Human Resources (HR), the Education Directorate, and the Defense Operations and Training unit. HR Department could leverage the study's model to shape a military organizational climate that is conducive for enhancing English proficiency level among military officer. It can formulate more effective policies to command specific English language skill requirements in officer selection, training, and career planning. The Defense Operations and Training Department also benefits from this study in selecting suitable officers for foreign assignments and missions. Specifically, the findings advocate the recruitment of officers who are motivated in learning English and willing to share knowledge without worrying of language barriers.

Apart from these departments, the onus is also on MAF's Education Corps to make sure military officers reach the targeted levels of English language skills. Accordingly, pedagogical implications can be drawn from the mediating role of English self-efficacy in improving job performance, since the mediation points to the significant importance of officers' self-efficacy in language proficiency acquisition and training. As such, this paper's proposition facilitates effective English learning in the military by endorsing the review and revision of existing learning materials, syllabi, and teaching methods in the military's English training. In particular, the efficacy of foreign language mastery relies greatly upon syllabus design and the assimilation of language theory with practical language skills, which are areas English trainers must pay serious attention to. In this regard, this paper hopes to aid the MAF headquarter's English department make more informed decisions on suitable courses and self-learning techniques for military officers.

5.0 Conclusion

While individual factors have been established in the extensive literature that affected employee's job performance, they have rarely been researched in the military setting, which is

vastly different from most workplace contexts. Therefore, this paper proposed a framework that aims to examine how job performance related to English proficiency in the military setting is directly influenced by personal factors. Drawing upon existing evidence on the direct relationships between intention to share knowledge and self-efficacy, motivation to learn and self-efficacy, and self-efficacy and job performance, this paper further postulated self-efficacy as a mediator that explains the effects of the two individual variables (intention to share knowledge and motivation to learn) on employees' job performance. The proposed conceptual framework was developed to generate future empirical evidence on the aforementioned issues and serves as a model for upcoming research to assimilate the key individual factors associated with English proficiency that predict job performance specifically in the military context.

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