

Individual Differences: How Remedial Teaching Transforms Low-achievers When Learning English

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Abstract: While perceived self-efficacy has been extensively investigated, the relationship between low-achievers' perceived self-efficacy and learning outcomes is relatively unexplored. The central aim of the study was to deepen our understanding of how remedial teaching transformed low-achievers' learning outcomes in English and how low-achievers gained control over learning English. The research involved forty-two semi-structured interviews with the students, the instructor, and the class mentor at two phases over a period of ten months. The students were two seniors enrolled at a technology university in Taiwan. The results suggested that remedial teaching was beneficial to the students' academic and emotional perceived self-efficacy. The improvements emphasized that individualized remedial teaching, direct supervision from teachers, and an appropriate support system led to better academic and emotional self-efficacy. Such findings underscore the importance of recognizing students' individual differences and characteristics in learning.

Key words: remedial teaching; perceived self-efficacy; low-achievers; learning outcomes

1. Introduction

English is a global language (Crystal, 2003). It is nearly impossible for us to fully participate globally without a common world language — English because English is the language of world communication. All college students in the 21st century in Taiwan, regardless of their specialization, will require linguistic fluency in English to pursue their studies and for future job opportunities. In the age of globalization, individuals with limited English skills are losing ground financially, and their employment opportunities suffer.

There are multiple varied factors that contribute to successful foreign/second language learning. Over the previous years in Taiwan, school reform efforts to increase English fluency were begun primarily because of a concern regarding the number of low achievers in this skill. To predict and improve their academic achievement, educators and researchers have become increasingly interested in understanding students' motivation and perceived self-efficacy. Both Gardner (2001) and Wachob (2005) believe that motivation is a key factor that contributes to successful academic learning outcomes. However, motivation does not happen suddenly; Bandura emphasizes that motivation is primarily formed and derived from learners' perceived self-efficacy over time (1984, 1986, 1991, & 1993). Within the extensive literature on perceived self-efficacy, comparatively little research has focused on how perceived self-efficacy can be changed to help improve low-achievers' learning outcomes. As

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low-achievers are confronted with a series of obstacles in their attempts to meet academic, personal, and social success, teachers must respond to the needs of them by creating individually responsive learning that spotlights a variety of instructional practices that help prevent further failure at school.

The central aim of the present study was to deepen our understanding of how remedial teaching affects and shapes low-achievers' learning outcomes in English. More specifically, this study was conducted to investigate how low-achievers gain control over learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with the intervention of remedial teaching, and it suggests the theoretical and practical implications of the process. The participants of interests are two EFL senior college students from the Department of Applied English of a technology university in Taiwan.

The study aims to contribute to our growing understanding of how and to what extent remedial teaching shapes students' inner transformation and learning outcomes, which is especially critical when there is no one-size-fit-all solution to those who struggle to keep up with their classes. In the end, an appropriate education, especially higher education, should help students enhance learning outcomes, acquire skills, and develop concepts that will be useful throughout their lives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Students' Perceived Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1986 & 1997), human achievement depends largely on perceived self-efficacy, which focuses on the interactions of human development, personal factors, and environmental factors (see Figure 1). An individual's ultimate development grows from their early experiences at home. Over time, his/her own experiences help construct self-efficacy as his/her ability to address situations and difficulties matures. An individual's experiences with and stimulation from the environment shape his/her inner self, and he/she learns to become more capable in addressing challenges. Bandura (1986, 1997) states that perceived self-efficacy is an individual's judgment, execution and beliefs in terms of his/her ability to successfully perform and accomplish at designated levels. In other words, students with positive perceived self-efficacy feel more confident, possess more control of their learning and believe that they have the capability and motivation to accomplish their goals. However, students with lower perceived self-efficacy think that they might not have the capability to succeed because their beliefs about their ability to succeed influence how they behave, perform, and react to difficulties (Bandura, 1984; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Therefore, perceived self-efficacy plays a critical role in a student's performance and achievement even though it does not definitely define one's ultimate learning outcomes. Bandura (1993) proposes that, "Students' beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities determine their aspirations, level of motivation, and academic accomplishments" (p. 117). Perceived self-efficacy is greatly correlated with a learner's attitude and learning outcomes because an individual's behavior or practice is guided by their perceived capability (Eslami-Rasekh, Rezaei, & Davoudi, 2012).

Researchers have identified three types of self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006; Muris, 2001): academic, social, and emotional. Academic self-efficacy refers to a learner's perceived ability to master academic subjects to achieve their expectations. Social self-efficacy is a learner's ability to address peer relationships. Emotional self-efficacy demonstrates a learner's ability to regulate their negative emotions when encountering challenges and difficulties. Studies further note that both emotional and social self-efficacy have a great effect on an individual's academic learning outcomes

(Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006). More specifically, successful academic achievement is positively related to emotional and social self-efficacy. However, it is also important to be aware that students with high self-efficacy do not necessarily succeed or accomplish their designated goals (Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent, and Larivee, 1991; Bagozzi et al., 2013); and students with more ability occasionally fail because of low self-efficacy. These students fail because they do not believe that they can succeed; their self-perceptions lead them to poor performance. Bank & Woolfson (2008) emphasize that, “how teachers or other professionals perceive students’ learning status may not be as important as how students perceive themselves” (p. 53). Students’ self-perceptions play a significant and crucial role in their ultimate learning outcomes.

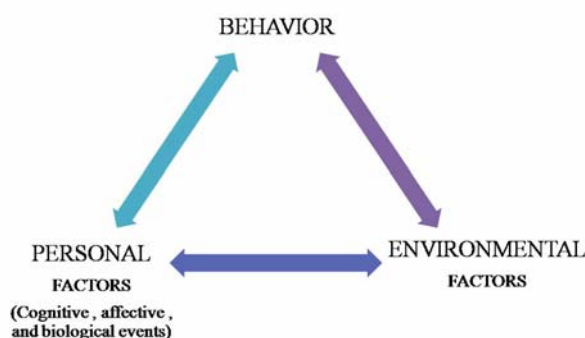


Figure 1 Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory: Factors of Human Development

Bandura (1984, 1986, 1991 & 1993) notes that perceived self-efficacy is an important source of motivation. To Bandura (1993), perceived self-efficacy is the most crucial mechanism to allow individuals to exercise control over their level of functioning and accomplishment. In other words, perceived self-efficacy is the foundation for students to define their goals, how much effort they want to devote to the goals, how much time it will take to achieve those goals and how they will handle difficulties. With all of those qualities established, the students would then generate motivation toward their designated goals. Therefore, perceived self-efficacy must be established to produce the necessary motivation for students to succeed academically, socially and personally (Gardner, 2001; Wachob, 2005). As research (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Pietsch, Walker, & Chapman, 2003) indicates, perceived self-efficacy is closely related to students’ motivation. Gradually and hopefully, motivation leads to behavioral changes and improves an individual’s performance (Csizer, Kormos, & Sarkadi, 2010; Eslami-Rasekh, Rezaei, & Davoudi, 2012; Hsiao, Tu, & Chung, 2012; Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006).

2.2 Influences from Teachers on Learning Outcomes

Several studies have noted that teachers have a significant effect on students’ overall performance (Adeyemi, 2008; Covill, 2011; Kuzborska, 2011). An increasing number of recent publications and empirical studies have reassessed the positive contributions that teachers make to their students’ motivation, and eventually overall academic performance (Kiany & Shayestefar, 2011; Tse, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1999). As noted, teachers play a crucial role, directly or indirectly, on students’ learning outcomes. Al-Hadidi and Al-Mukhini (2012) emphasize that students’ EFL achievement is greatly affected by the education-related factors derived from teachers such as teachers’ qualifications, teaching methodology and English textbooks. The competence, experiences and capability of teachers, how and what they bring into the classroom, and the textbooks they use all influence how well students perform and what they accomplish. Teachers have important implications for how and what students learn.

Furthermore, teachers greatly contribute to student learning outcomes. Bandura (1993) stated, “Teachers’ beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve” (p. 117). The teachers’ influence on their students comes from not only their pedagogical practices but also from the beliefs that the teachers hold on their students. More importantly, emotional guidance would support students over time and help motivate them, which is especially critical because motivation is dynamically changing and is not a constant state of mind (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Motivation requires constant emotional support and guidance so it can continuously grow and be maintained.

2.3 Remedial Teaching to Promote Academic Success

At-risk learners present significant challenges for teachers. Their learning difficulties typically include a weak knowledge base, underdeveloped skills, poor problem-solving abilities, the inability to organize information, poor motivation and a negative attitude toward oneself (McLaughlin & Vacha, 1992; Olivares, 1993). To improve learning effectiveness, the needs of those with learning difficulties must be addressed although most students are interested in and capable of learning. Remedial teaching is designed to cater to the needs of students who are unable to progress with the class in a normal classroom. These students typically function and perform at a lower than average level because of learning or learning related problems. Thus, the major objective of remedial teaching is to ensure that low-achievers can attain learning competencies according to their capabilities and characteristics. As there is a growing consensus that effective interventions help at-risk students reconnect with their peers and learning, research (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004) pointed out that remedial teaching must assist students find a match between their characteristics and the school environment so that their academic and behavior demands can be met. More importantly, individualized programs with intensive remedial sessions can be implemented to help students consolidate basic knowledge, master their learning strategies, strengthen their confidence and increase the effectiveness of their learning because an appropriate education should help the students to acquire skills and develop concepts that will be useful throughout their lives. Studies have shown that students who received remedial teaching were more motivated and more likely to achieve academic success than their peers who did not take remedial teaching classes (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Jadal, 2012; Luo, 2009; McLaughlin & Vacha, 1992; Tian, 2004; Yang, 2010). With appropriate and additional help, low-achievers’ learning difficulties can be identified to provide further scaffoldings.

3. Research Questions

In view of the preceding literature review, the following research questions will be addressed, considering the point of view of the students:

- (1) How do college EFL low-achievers perceive their learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?
- (2) What difficulties have the low-achievers encounter while learning English?
- (3) How has remedial teaching affected low-achievers’ learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

This research employed a qualitative case study approach to gain insight into the participants' attitudes, behaviors, values, concerns, motivations, aspirations, and perceptions of how remedial teaching had transformed and shaped two students' learning in English and their overall learning capability over a period of 10 months. Furthermore, the research relied on a naturalistic method, which is founded on the belief that reality is socially constructed and fluid and that interactions between the researcher and the surrounding individuals are crucial to construct a meaningful reality (Angen, 2000).

A semi-structured interview method was chosen. Interviews were conducted based on the interview protocols (see Appendix 2 & 3). The interviews with the students and the teachers (the instructor and the class mentor) were scheduled at each individual's convenience and occurred over a period of 10 months from September 2012 to July 2013. The interviews were limited to approximately 30 to 60 minutes and conducted roughly at two-week to one-month intervals. A total of 36 interviews with the students (18 for each, three interviews in Phase 1, fourteen in Phase 2, and one after Phase 2), and 6 interviews with the students' teachers were conducted. All of the interviews were conducted in Chinese, which is the native language of the researcher, students, and teachers. All of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated by the researcher. To confirm on the authenticity of the interviews, the transcriptions, in both Chinese and English, were returned to the interviewees using e-mail. The revisions were performed with caution to remain close to the interviewees' perspectives.

At the beginning of the study, each participant completed a form (see Appendix 1) containing her basic demographic information and language learning background. None of the participants were blind as to the nature of the study. The students were informed prior to participating that the researcher was interested in investigating how remedial teaching might affect their learning outcomes in English and their overall learning capability; however, the students were not informed of the expected results. The data collection sessions were conducted individually and were tape recorded for subsequent coding and analysis.

In this study, two different phases were performed, with 18 weeks in each phase. In the first semester, Phase 1, both participants were initially asked to propose a study schedule addressing how they wanted to improve their Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores. Given that TOEIC test had been widely accepted as an overall evaluation of students' performance as a graduation threshold in terms of EFL proficiency in Taiwan, it was chosen as a means to measure students' overall learning outcomes, one at the end of the first semester and the other at the end of the second semester. As what they had planned, the goal for Phase 1 was to score TOEIC at 600 points or higher with the upcoming goal of reaching 650 points by the end of their senior year. Since the remedial teaching sessions were arranged outside of regular classes, each participant decided how to receive their remedial teaching sessions, how often they wanted to attend, how long they wanted to remain in each session, and what material required the help of the instructor. Self-regulation and self-discipline was basically the concern and goal to carry out the project in Phase 1. After discussing and revising the plans with the instructor, the participants enacted their plan and schedule for the first semester. In addition, it must be noted that the remedial teaching was arranged outside of the normal school setting.

During Phase 1, the students only attended four remedial teaching sessions assisted by the instructor. Six interviews with the students were performed to capture their feelings, thoughts, and perspectives regarding the

self-regulated remedial teaching sessions. Two interviews with the instructor were conducted to learn about the students' progress and difficulties. The class mentor was also invited to provide insights regarding the students' performance over the previous three years.

In the second semester, Phase 2, the instructor aggressively intervened by proposing a remedial teaching plan to the participants. It must be noted that the participants did not take any of the instructor's classes during the time of participation in the study. The remedial teaching classes lasted approximately 90 minutes and were taught at approximately 1-week intervals. During the 18-week of Phase 2, a total of 14 remedial teaching classes were offered. Each session lasted 90 minutes. Following each class, each participant was interviewed for approximately half an hour to obtain their feedback and view of how remedial teaching could further assist them to learn English and on the TOEIC test.

At the beginning of Phase 2, the instructor interviewed the participants and established a specific goal for each participant. As planned, both of them had to reach TOEIC at 650 points or higher at the post-test because of the graduation requirement. During Phase 2, the participants were strictly supervised regarding their study schedule, progress, time devoted to self-study and goals. The participants were then requested to attend all of the remedial teaching sessions, 14 sessions, to follow their established schedule. A TOEIC test (the post-test) was taken in May 2013 to measure the students' final learning outcomes.

During Phase 2, both participants completed two online mock TOEIC exams, which were offered to all English majors at the participants' school, each week before attending the sessions, for a total of 28 mock exams. In each remedial teaching session, the instructor discussed the questions that the students considered to be difficult. In addition, the students were asked to discuss their class assignments with the instructor. During the process, the instructor gained more understanding about each participant's learning difficulties and determined methods to address their real needs and their understanding. Furthermore, the interviews conducted after each class were crucial because they provided opportunities for the students to uncover their feelings and revealed their difficulties with academic performance and emotional struggle during the process.

4.2 Triangulation

Achieving objectivity required the triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and perspectives. This research was triangulated using the perspectives of the instructor and the class mentor (see Table 2). The interview data from the instructor and the class mentor were intended to serve as additional sources of information to validate the results from the students' perspectives. Overall, the study documented the participating students' thoughts and feelings regarding how the intervention of remedial teaching affected their English learning and how they regained the control of their learning in English over an extended period of time, thus revealing their struggles and personally significant transformations and changes.

4.3 The Participants

The participants who volunteered to participate in the study were two seniors enrolled at the Department of Applied English at a technology university in central Taiwan. According to the 2011 Educational Testing Service (ETS) report (TOEIC Newsletter 28, 2011), the average TOEIC score for undergraduates at science and technology institutes is 422 points (243 points for listening and 179 points for reading comprehension) whereas the average for undergraduates at comprehensive universities is 585 points (316 points for listening and 269 points for reading comprehension) in Taiwan. Of the 45 senior students, 10 failed to fulfill the 650-point or higher graduation requirement at the beginning of their senior year. The 10 students were individually interviewed to

explore their voluntary participation in the study. Initially, five students were chosen. Three students refused to further attend the remedial teaching sessions. The remaining two students, both female, fully participated in the entire 10-month remedial teaching sessions. The pre-, mid-point, and post-remedial teaching TOEIC scores of the participating students were shown in Table 1.

4.4 Data Analysis

The transcripts were coded using open and axial coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, all of the interview data were initially divided into sections based on the research questions. During the open coding, I carefully went through the interview transcripts, summarized the participants' perspectives, grouped these summaries and precisely described them under headings in each section. General categories were identified after the stage of open coding. The categories were then reorganized to create related and more specific groups of data using axial coding. During axial coding, the headings were revised and refined to more accurately reflect the data, and more thoroughly reflect the nature of the interviewees' comments. Finally, relevant sections of the transcripts were added to the refined categories to fully capture the scope and nature of the interviewees' perspectives.

5. Results

5.1 The Perspectives of the Teachers

The instructor (2 interviews) and the class mentor (1 interview) were interviewed to provide insights about the students in Phase 1. Three themes were observed: (1) negative feedbacks regarding the participants' learning attitudes; (2) a belief that the students possessed no self-discipline in learning; (3) a belief that the students did not have a fundamental knowledge of English. The responses of the teachers were generally negative relative to the students' participation in the remedial teaching sessions and the previous performances:

They are just not aggressive enough. They made the appointments with me. But, things always happened that they could not make it to the class...whenever they came, they were just not well-prepared. They did not do their homework before they attended the classes. So, they usually waited for me to ask them questions. It was difficult for me to know what their difficulties were if they could not figure out their own problems. (The instructor)

Both of them have been very polite and keen to studying despite the fact that their academic performances were not as good as expected. I believe that they just could not find an appropriate way to catch up with their studies. They might work hard, but they just seem helpless...but they have never asked for assistance. If they need help, they need to reach out and take initiative. Instead of waiting for help, they should initiate and ask their peers or teachers. But, they haven't done so. (The class mentor)

To the teachers, the participating students were simply not aggressively involved in their studies. Further, concern for the students' motivation derived from the teachers' belief that, minimal progress could occur if the students were not aggressive or could not be motivated. From the teachers' perspectives, the participating students' low achievement appeared to derive from their low motivation. In addition, the instructor indicated that the students neither self-regulated nor adhered to the developed study plan. According to the plan, the students were expected to attend seven sessions and to have completed their assignments before they attended each of the sessions. The following comments helped us to understand the instructor's perspectives.

They [the students] really needed to brush up on their basic knowledge in English...sometimes they couldn't even explain the basic grammar rules of English. As English major, I believed that they should at least have

the fundamental knowledge so they could move on to the next level. (The instructor)

They [the students] could barely make any progress because they could not meet their deadlines and they failed to deliver. They were just NOT (emphasis) determined to do this for themselves. I guessed they also felt helpless because they were frustrated that they did not do well in their other classes. (The instructor)

I am here to help if they are well prepared. But, I will not be able to help them if they are not ready. As a teacher, I am here to offer my help. But, I really don't know where to start because they seem to have no knowledge of the basic grammar structure to start with, which makes it hard for me to teach them. (The instructor)

For the past three years, they had failed in a couple of my classes. I talked to them about the remedial teaching, but they didn't seem to be interested. I really think they need help. They need to know what their problems are. Without that, they will be locked in that situation and can never make any progress. (The class mentor)

The class mentor appeared to emphasize her concern regarding these two students' initiative. From her perspectives, studying was personal and the students must develop their own strategy and have control of their study in terms of academic learning outcomes. In other words, these two students were passive learners, which hindered advancement to a higher level.

To closely follow up on the students' progress, the teachers were further interviewed three times in Phase 2. Themes from the teachers offer a framework for understanding: (1) a belief that the students became more positive toward learning; (2) the impact of remedial teaching on in-class learning.

As both teachers indicated, the participating students seemed to regain their confidence in learning. When asked about what changes they had observed from the students, they both pointed out that the students had been more aggressively involved in their classes; for example:

They would come to me after classes to ask about their problems from my lectures. As their class mentor for the past few years, I really think they finally took their initiatives and realized that they had to do something. (The class mentor)

Unlike Phase 1, they now are more willing to talk about their problems. I believe that they need to know what their difficulties are before they take actions. Talking about their problems helps them relieve that stress...they now understand that someone else is having similar problems. Neither of them is alone. I believe that the process of sharing indeed help them move forward. (The instructor)

The impact of remedial teaching was gradually shown throughout Phase 2. Like many at-risk learners, self-confidence and learning attitude were predominant concerns for both teachers. The concern for self-confidence rose from the teachers' belief that, if confidence and aggressive learning attitude were not established, little could be accomplished. In their own words,

I am pretty concerned about their learning attitude, especially after spending a semester with them. They did not show their determination in Phase 1. So I am not sure if they continue to behave like that, how could I offer my help to them? However, I have to say that I do see quite a lot of changes, especially from their attendances. So far, they have showed up on time. (The instructor)

...they are usually shy. They rarely socialize with their classmates. I think they might be just quiet...From their performance, I realize that they do have difficulty learning English. They don't seem to have the confidence and skills to do well in most of the classes. I think college life might be too much change for them...I am surprised that they came to me for the questions they have had from the lectures. They have more control of what happens around them now. They know what their goals are. (The class mentor)

In addition, they responded that the students became determined to accomplish the goal they had set for

themselves. The teachers described it as follows:

I noticed that they asked a lot more questions after classes. They came to me whenever they had questions. They discussed their career plans with me so I know that both of them are determined that they would like to finish their college studies on time. (The class mentor)

The exam [TOEIC test] is coming up. I can tell that they have worked so hard just to accomplish their goal...they have started to hunt for a job, which shows that they want to make it happen. Without hitting that goal, there is no way for them to receive their degree. (The instructor)

In addition to the changes on academic performances, the two students seemed to develop a strong bond with each other and with the instructor as the teachers described:

I saw them hang out a lot ever since they join the remedial teaching program, especially in Phase 2. They even went to the library together. It is good that they have each other so that they know that they are not alone. (The class mentor)

I am more than an instructor to them. We talk about things besides the school studies. They share their struggles with me. I know what they have been through. The talk we have had after each session is a wonderful experience for me and them as well. They learn how to open up to their difficulties; and through the process of sharing, they realize that learning how to learn is more important than the test scores...they rediscover themselves. (The instructor)

5.2 The Perspectives of the Students

5.2.1 Question 1: How do college EFL low-achievers perceive their learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?

In analyzing the data from Phase 1, four categories emerged: (1) “I have tried my best”; (2) “I need to do better”; (3) an absence of self-confidence; and (4) being disoriented and without self-discipline. Each category was unique in terms of the problem that it addressed and the source it derived from. When discussing reasons for not having achieved 650 points or higher on the TOEIC exam at participation, both participants appeared to be upset with themselves in the following descriptions:

I tried to study for the exam [TOEIC exam] myself and whenever I could. I really did. I even went to the library to push myself to do the work. Just like what I did in high school, I studied as hard as I could. I really don't know why I am still far behind. I cried when I received the test result last time. [Amanda, Interview 1]

I did what I had to do. I read English articles and reviewed the English exercises from the classes I took. I had been doing that since my freshmen year. I sometimes feel that I might not be smart enough because I did not do well in some of my English classes. [Nora, Interview 1]

Because they hadn't reached the 650-point goal, both Amanda and Nora knew that they would have to study harder. With only one year left before graduation, it was obvious to them that they had to be determined to work toward the goal if they wanted to graduate in a year. Like many students, confidence and capability were predominant concerns for both Amanda and Nora.

I definitely have to pass the exam [TOEIC exam at 650 points or above] if I would like to graduate in a year. This is the requirement for all of us [all the seniors]. Not being able to reach goal will make my employment opportunity suffer so I definitely have to finish my study in a year. [Amanda, Interview 1]

I used to be good at English. That's also why I decided to major in Applied English when I applied for admission for this university. But now, I am not sure if I am still good at English. I start to have doubts in myself. Things are no longer the same. Sometimes I feel that English has somehow become my weakness. I

know this might sound ironic and strange. [Amanda, Interview 2]

Even though I still have a year to work on that [TOEIC exam at 650 points or above], I am worried. I am worried because I always have that “what if” questions in mind. Making it happen is necessary. Looking back at the past three years, I started to realize that I am still far from the average in terms of overall learning outcomes. This is pretty much different from my performance in high school. [Nora, Interview 2]

With the approaching end of the first semester, it was apparent that both Amanda and Nora were not sufficiently aggressive in their attendance in the remedial teaching sessions. Amanda and Nora only attended four sessions and failed to complete the designated homework as they had planned. Concern regarding improvement and self-discipline was generated from the belief that, if routines and self-discipline were not established, little could be accomplished.

I sometimes couldn't come to the class because I need to run some errands. I planned to come. But sometimes things happen. When I did not attend the remedial sessions, I usually tried to finish the online mock exams at home. But, I have to admit that I have missed some of the tests and homework. [Amanda, Interview 3]

I know I have to do my best to come to all the remedial sessions. I really thought I would. But, I had too much homework to do. I did not do some of the assignments from the remedial classes because I did not do well on my own. Then, I just started to lose patience...I did not like to listen to things that I don't understand. And, I had no one to turn to when I did the test and readings on my own. [Nora, Interview 3]

In analyzing the data from Phase 2 interviews, three categories emerged: (1) “I am responsible for myself”; (2) “I need to be determined”; (3) a more positive attitude toward themselves. Beginning in Phase 2, the instructor aggressively intervened the remedial teaching sessions. Now that they were being directly supervised, Amanda and Nora appeared to be more attached to their own study plan. Similar to many students, strict supervision enhanced students' self-discipline.

I know that I did not follow my study plan last semester, which is definitely my own problem. I am the one who needs help. Of course, I need to be willing to make a change. There are so many other students who can do well, and I shouldn't complain...I need to be willing to. Otherwise, no one can make me do things that I don't want to do. [Amanda, Interview 5]

So far, I have been following the schedules. I did my work and came to the remedial sessions as we had planned. It is lots of work, but I am glad that I have been able to make it. I am still not sure how much progress I will be able to make. But, at least I am doing what I can. [Amanda, Interview 7]

I did not know that I had missed so many key things in my study. I had always thought that English is all about memorizing new words and phrases. I guess I really have a lot to catch up with. But, it is never too late. I am sure that I can handle the test [TOEIC exam] better. [Amanda, Interview 9]

Even though grades are not everything, the grades, to a certain degree, show how much you have missed or don't understand. I guess I really have room for improvement. It is not that the teachers have been unfair to me. It is just that I need to find my own way of studying. Everyone is different, and I am sure that what works for others might not necessarily work for me. The problem is what works for me. I just haven't found mine. [Nora, Interview 5]

I am half way through. I have been telling myself that I am approaching the end of the semester. If I can make it to the end, I shall be able to show some progress no matter what. I am really looking forward to taking the next TOEIC exam and seeing the result myself. In the end, it is all about what I have done to achieve what I have planned. [Nora, Interview 7]

Now I am more focused on developing strategic skills for taking tests. Skills are important in terms of comprehension. I need to grasp key words. And, of course, I need to have patience, too...I have also learned about my own weakness. It is important to know what I need to improve. [Nora, Interview 9]

Both participants believed that they were accountable for their learning outcomes. Amanda and Nora were convinced that they would have to work harder toward the established goals they set during Phase 2. Frequent student-teacher interactions with both participants made them participate more aggressively in their studies. Amanda and Nora's responses reflected a highly positive attitude toward their goals. It was obvious that both Amanda and Nora showed a higher level of confidence in themselves and believed that they had higher level of self-efficacy to achieve the goals they had set for themselves. Compared with the interviews in Phase 1, both Amanda and Nora developed higher levels of emotional and academic self-efficacy in Phase 2.

5.2.2 Question 2: What difficulties have you encountered learning English?

Three themes emerged in the Phase 1 interviews regarding the difficulties encountered when learning English: (1) English was easy; (2) "I do not appear to have control of my learning in English"; (3) an absence of self-discipline, patience, and initiative.

Both participants favorably reported on their previous experiences learning English, as shown in the following comments:

I majored in Applied English because English was my strength in high school. I usually did not have to spend too much time preparing for the English tests, and I usually did quite well. And, it had been like that ever since I started learning English. To me, English WAS (emphasis) easy. [Amanda, Interview 2]

I believed that English was easy. It was not like this until I attended college. I had done so much on almost all of my English tests, but I felt helpless when I received my grades. I had never handed in late homework. I was always well prepared. [Nora, Interview 2]

It was apparent that both Amanda and Nora had high level of self-confidence in their academic performances in the subject of English in high school. However, learning English appeared to become more difficult while attending college. When asked to identify their difficulties in learning English, Amanda and Nora's responses generally centered on their inability to integrate into the college learning environment. Unlike the high school curriculum, college courses require a large amount of self-discipline.

My TOEIC score shows that I really need to work harder on reading. I know that I need to work harder on this part. Unlike my high school textbooks, the reading passages in college are long and complicated. It takes time and patience to comprehend those articles...the vocabulary is new, and memorization is difficult. [Amanda, Interview 3]

In high school, tests and exams were scheduled on a regular basis. Students have tests almost every week, which is good and structured for students in terms of monitoring their own progress. But, in college things are quite different. We usually have just one mid-term and one final. In addition to that, you are basically on your own. College teachers don't closely supervise your progress because they believe that you need to learn to be independent for everything you do. I start to find that hard. [Nora, Interview 3]

Both students agreed that English was easier in high school. With the shift away from a highly-structured curriculum, Amanda and Nora realized that they appeared to lose control of learning English because of their inability to adjust to a highly autonomous learning environment.

Attending only four sessions of remedial teaching class in Phase 1, the students admitted that they were not as aggressive as they had expected. Furthermore, the absence of initiative and patience led Amanda and Nora to

lose motivation and interest in learning English. The more advanced and autonomous study required in college had directed Amanda and Nora to an unexpected path, which hindered their progress.

Moving into the Phase 2 remedial sessions, the two students were strictly supervised in their learning progress. With the direct and frequent supervision of the instructor, the students' difficulties were more easily identified. When interviewed for learning difficulties in English, three themes were observed: (1) an insufficient fundamental knowledge of English; (2) the absence of a support system and self confidence; (3) the students were dependent learners. Amanda and Nora described the following:

Before attending the remedial teaching sessions (Phase 2), I did not even realize that I lack lots of basic and fundamental knowledge of English and new vocabulary. I really think if I continue what I did, I shall be fine. But, the test result shows that I am far from the standard...I am now starting to pick up things that I should have learned or known from high school. [Amanda, Interview 6]

I really thought that I should be able to handle my studies here at college. My high school grades show that I did a lot better than most of my peers. But, the challenges at college show me that I still have so much to catch up. I did not even do well on most of my classes here at college. I feel disoriented and did not know how to prepare for my tests. Since I have so many problems, I sometimes wonder what I should do to catch up. I believe that the basic and fundamental knowledge is still the most important. Without the solid ground, it is hard to build up. [Nora, Interview 5]

The students indicated that they felt helpless regarding their college learning outcomes. The absence of a support system and self confidence had become apparent.

Whenever I needed help, I really did not know who I could turn to. Of course, I could ask the teachers at school. But, I sometimes did not even know where to start and how to start because one question always led to another. It seemed that I had so many problems to take care of...college is not like high school. Students don't just ask questions in class. Teachers are not always there. [Amanda, Interview 4]

I had tried to ask my teachers about the questions that I had from the mock TOEIC exams. But, I felt bad always bothering my teachers for that. And, teachers did not have that much of time for me...TAs [Teaching Assistants] were not as helpful as the teachers. [Amanda, Interview 5]

The teachers always said that we had to learn to depend on ourselves. But, I really didn't know what they really meant by that. I did what I had to do in the classes. I was waiting for my teachers to tell me how exactly. [Nora, Interview 5]

I seldom asked my classmates if I had questions because everyone had his own business to take care of. I tried not to bother my friends too much. Sometimes, it was embarrassing to let others know that I still hadn't passed the bar [TOEIC score at 650 points or above] yet. I think studying is personal. [Nora, Interview 5]

These comments suggest that Amanda and Nora were not aggressive, motivated, or independent learners. Furthermore, the participants' descriptions demonstrated that these students did not possess the ability or initiative to address their negative emotions when challenges and difficulties were encountered. It was shown that their emotional and academic self-efficacy were low.

5.2.3 Question 3: How has remedial teaching affected your learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?

For both students, the assistance during Phase 1 was not as helpful as expected. Without aggressively participating in the remedial teaching sessions in Phase 1, it was difficult for Amanda and Nora to make progress. The post-test showed that more progress was observed in the Phase 2 sessions compared to the post-test result

after the Phase 1 sessions. When further interviewed to identify contributing factors to progress, two themes were identified: (1) time pressure; and (2) a higher level of emotional self-efficacy: direct supervision and guidance of the teacher, and teamwork and a support system.

Intensive remedial teaching sessions with the instructor played a key role in the students' transformation and progress. For both participants, the frequent interaction with the instructor dramatically influenced how and what they learned.

The teacher is very clear about what we do not know. Since this is not included in our regular classes, I am not stressed or embarrassed to ask questions. Plus, there are only two students. I am comfortable simply talking about my problems and difficulties...I asked stupid question, such as I did not know how to identify a verb within a complete sentence structure. On the other hand, I am stressed because I need to push myself and really make things happen. It is more like the deal that I make with the teacher. I would feel bad if I break my own promise...the teacher checked on us all the time. We basically see each other almost every week. Sometimes we talk about things that we want to do after finishing the school. I really think that the teacher has played a few different roles in the process. [Amanda, Interview 18]

I am more disciplined in Phase 2 because instructions are clear. I review things that I have with the teacher and do what I am assigned. Things are structured and scheduled. I feel more secure and know that my teacher will let me know if I am behind schedule right away. But, I have to admit that I have so much more work to do this semester, compared with the previous one. Since this is my last semester, I know I just need to put all my efforts into this. Otherwise, I would have to spend an extra month or two here at school. [Nora, Interview 18]

I am now more aware of what I have missed. With the instructions and guidance from the teacher, I now know more about what to do on my own. I used to read the translation first when I study English articles. Now I learn that I have to learn to comprehend articles, not just understand the translation. I have changed the way that I learn English. I no longer consider the Chinese translation important. I also learned to be patient to develop my comprehension from reading contexts. [Amanda, Interview 18]

Unlike in Phase 1, both participants immediately felt stressed with direct supervision from the instructor in Phase 2.

I now cannot find any more excuses for not attending the remedial classes because the classes are taught by the teacher. I guess I feel bad to miss any of the classes. The teacher has devoted so much time and efforts into this. I really have to do my best as well. I take my teacher, Nora, and me as a team. It is only us. The teacher focused on just two of us. I can ask any questions at any time. I don't need to worry about asking silly and stupid questions. I feel more secure, but yet stressed. [Amanda, interview 18]

With the teacher's instructions, I am clearer about my own problems. And, practice makes perfect as my teacher has constantly emphasized. I cannot do well because I do not have enough practice and I do not know how to tackle my weaknesses. If I want to have progress, I need to make efforts, too. I guess it is right that there is no free lunch in the world. And, just sitting there in front of my desk will not solve my problems as well. I need to understand what my problems are before I know how to deal with my own problems. [Nora, Interview 18]

In addition to stress coming from the instructor, the students also revealed that time pressure contributed to their progress. With only five months left before graduation, Amanda and Nora were eager to reach their established goals. Furthermore, Amanda and Nora completely understood the consequences for failing their goal (a TOEIC score of 650 points or higher). Delaying graduation was not an option for either participant. To fulfill the graduation requirement, Amanda and Nora realized that they had to be determined.

Time is running out. If I want to graduate in June, I would have to take this chance. I need to be determined

enough. Unlike my sophomore and junior years, I did not have much time to simply try. I just need to make it happen. I want to finish my school on time and get ready to find a nice job for myself. [Amanda, Interview 17]

Even though this semester was tough, I think it was a great timing. I am kind of doing my job at the last minute. I guess I was NOT (emphasis) aggressive enough because I used to think that I still had time. Now at the last semester, it was like that you did it or you failed. I was so worried. But, as my teacher had said, I had nothing to lose if I tried. [Nora, interview 17]

Therefore, it appears that both participants became more motivated to learn using a teacher and team support system. Amanda and Nora expressed a stronger desire to participate, particularly in the Phase 2 remedial teaching sessions. In addition, it was obvious that the two students appeared to develop a strong bond between one another and with the instructor.

I was glad that Nora was also in our class. At least, that showed that I was not alone. Someone out there was same as me. I had company, which really made me feel better...we started to plan our study together and made sure that each of us followed the plan we had come up with. [Amanda, Interview 17]

I was not so familiar with Amanda until we came to the remedial classes. Now I know that we have so many things in common. We got along well, and we both knew what we wanted to do for this. I think that is very important to get me through this. Knowing that someone is in the same situation as you is somehow comforting. [Nora, Interview 17]

The interviews that I had with the teacher were very helpful because she helped me find what I was capable of and taught me ways to gain control of my studies. Outsiders are sometimes more clear about what insiders do not see or understand. The suggestions from the teacher help me restructure and reshape what I should have done. [Amanda, Interview 18]

...the teacher was always there for us. As soon as we were behind our schedule, she would let us know right away. It was stressful, but good. At least, I would not be too far behind and was constantly right on track. [Nora, Interview 18]

A higher level of emotional self-efficacy was observed in Phase 2 as Amanda and Nora had revealed in the interviews.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The present preliminary study investigated the effect of remedial teaching on low-achievers' learning outcomes. Based on the interview results, the students revealed that they were aware of their low performance at school. However, their difficulties appeared to lie at their inability to gain control of their studies, low in motivation and self-discipline, and under preparedness. Furthermore, they had low level of overall self-efficacy. They did not believe that they had the ability to conquer the difficulties presented to them, which was especially obvious in Phase 1.

One major result was that the effect of remedial teaching could be observed in the process of transformation for the students, especially from Phase 2. As indicated by the students, one of the contributing factors is with the assist of remedial teaching. The results further indicated that remedial teaching was beneficial to the students' perceived self-efficacy, especially emotional self-efficacy. Overall, the results appeared that the direct supervision from the instructor, strong support system and time pressure compensated the difficulties that the students had identified. It can be reasoned that the individualized remedial teaching sessions provided the students with

guidance and support and demonstrated strategies and skills for learning English. Through the process, their perceived self-efficacy improved as they had revealed. Therefore, it appeared that the students were more strongly motivated to learn English and had both instrumental and integrative reasons to learn during Phase 2. The environmental factors played by the teachers and the influence of an appropriate support system on the students' personal transformation helped contribute to their improvement in academic and emotional self-efficacy as indicated by Bandura (1986 & 1997), Kiany and Shayestefar (2011), Tse (2000), and William and Burden (1999). It was observed that emotional self-efficacy played a crucial role in the process of transformation and contributed to their increasing academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Research (Ellickson, 1997) indicates that social skills training in early adolescence has proved an effective strategy for preventing academic failure. Therefore, it could be reasoned that the absence of social self-efficacy might be part of the reason that led to the students' overall low perceived self-efficacy in the previous years.

In general, the results demonstrated that individualized remedial teaching can be practically implemented and provide adequate improvement to low-achievers. Similar to the results of MaLaughlin and Vacha (1992) and Slavin (1989), personalized remedial teaching was thought to be effective in providing adequate results to low-achievers. Research (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004) indicates that the "personalization" of education (p. 38) is essential when it comes to effective intervention programs to provide learners individualized services that are designed to overcome their academic, social and personal difficulties. The results also suggested that learning outcomes did not solely rely on academic self-efficacy, but also on emotional self-efficacy. With a strong instructor and team support system, both participants were encouraged to work toward their goals. The emotional transformation was key to their learning outcomes and progress because emotional self-efficacy is believed to support an individual's learning over time as indicated by Bandura (1993). Unlike most students, low-achievers are usually low in self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy, and they are usually faced with multiple challenges. The impacts of those challenges and hardships can extend into the actual classroom setting, especially when teachers are unable or unwilling to adopt an ideology that can overcome these barriers to success. Therefore, how to motivate low-achievers has become a challenging task to most teachers, which is especially true for higher education instructors when higher education provides faculty and students more freedom in terms of overall learning.

The present study enhanced the previous studies' results by providing a more detailed understanding of the learners' inner transformation. Furthermore, the results of this noted the critical role that teachers play (Bandura, 1993; Covill, 2011; Kiany & Shayestefar, 2011; Kuzborska, 2011; William & burden, 1999). Effective teachers are the ones who can help students overcome their obstacles and lead them to reach personal, social and academic success. It is a teacher's greatest responsibilities to develop in a student's positive attitude toward learning a foreign language. Through constant and frequent student-teacher interaction and adequate emotional support from teachers and peers, it is believed that students can be gradually encouraged and motivated. Hopefully, motivation leads to behavioral changes and improves an individual's performance (Csizer, Kormos & Sarkadi, 2010; Eslami-Rasekh, Rezaei, & Davoudi, 2012; Hsiao, Tu, & Chung, 2012; Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006). If teaching is to be more effective, we must be sympathetic and encouraging as language teachers, which is especially critical for low-achievers. Eslami-Rasekh, Rezaei, and Davoudi (2012) emphasized that it is critical to focus on how learners "perceive themselves as language learners, what effects their personal views have on their learning processes, and how teachers can help them with making sense of their learning that is particular to them" (p. 35). Further, as a substantial amount of research has pointed out (Tse, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1999), most

foreign language learners attributed their success to the role teacher plays in the process of foreign language acquisition. The role teacher plays is undoubtedly crucial in foreign language learners' development.

The results emphasized the importance of recognizing learners' individual differences (McLaughlin & Vacha, 1992; Slavin, 1989), which is especially critical when there is no one-size-fit-all solution to those who struggle to keep pace with their classes. Low-achievers perform lower than average level with various reasons. More importantly, the study demonstrated the significant role of motivation and perceived self-efficacy on learning. In general, the results will be useful to improve the existing remedial teaching systems and in particular to meet the needs of the low-achievers outside of normal class settings. More specifically, the research could serve to reinforce and identify the need for individualized remedial teaching for those who struggle to progress in their classes.

Based on accounts from the students, the under-preparedness might signify a disconnection between high school curricula and the expectations and the requirements of college study. Research has suggested that dual enrollment programs may help bridge the gap between high school students' preparedness and expectations and requirements of college studies (Bailey, 2008; Howell, 2011), particularly for students with characteristics similar to those of the participants in this study.

The present results contribute to the understanding in the field of the various forces acting on low-achievers as they struggle to progress with their peers in terms of learning outcomes. Therefore, it is thus suggested that a more strategic and individualized approach to remedial teaching could be implemented in the university context. This approach could promote practices that focus on increasing an individual's perceived self-efficacy through the role of teachers, thus enabling students to develop into a motivated learner. Furthermore, earlier interventions are recommended as one of the most powerful strategies to prevent further disengagement from learners (Stegelin, 2002).

7. Recommendation

This study necessitates additional research on low-achievers' perceptions and beliefs in the area of foreign language learning to deepen our understanding of how we, as foreign language teachers, can better facilitate students' learning outside of normal class settings. Future research should investigate how remedial teaching could be more efficiently designed to correspond with low achievers' learning styles and characteristics in higher education context. This kind of instruction is still very much in the experimental stage and much more has yet to be achieved to know regarding what exactly can be done to motivate learners.

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Appendix 1 Demographic and Language Background Information

Pseudonym:

Age:

Please answer the following questions.

(1) Please fill out the following information.

Name of your senior high school:

Major taken in your senior high school if there is any:

(2) How long have been studying English?

(3) What made you decide to major in the Department of Applied English?

(4) Have you ever taken any English-related examination for any certificates?

If yes, please name the certificate.

When did you take the exam?

What was your score?

(5) Have you ever attended any English cramming school outside of your regular school schedule? If yes, please specify how long you have attended the English cramming school.

(6) Before attending the remedial program, how often do you study English out of classes to prepare for a TOEIC exam? (hours per week)

(7) What materials do you use to prepare for a TOEIC exam?

(8) What is your favorite subject at school now? Why?

Appendix 2 The Interview Protocols for the Participating Teachers

- (1) What are the participating students' learning difficulties in learning English?
- (2) What are the primary factors that contribute to the participating students' low achievement?
- (3) How could you better facilitate their learning in English?
- (4) What changes have you observed from the participating students during the time of taking remedial teaching classes?

Appendix 3 The Interview Protocols for the Participating Students

Phase 1 and Phase 2

- (1) How do college EFL low-achievers perceive their learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?
- (2) What difficulties have you encountered in learning English?
- (3) Have you been following your study plan? Why or why not?
- (4) What have stopped you from participating in the remedial teaching sessions?
- (5) How has remedial teaching affected your learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?

Post-remedial-teaching

- (1) What were the contributing factors to your low achievement?
- (2) What were the contributing factors to your progress?
- (3) How has remedial teaching affected your learning outcomes and self-efficacy in learning English?

Table 1 The TOEIC Scores of the Students

	Amanda	Nora
Pre-remedial-teaching TOEIC score	495 (300 points for listening section; 195 points for the reading)	505 (195 points for listening section; 315 for the reading)
Mid-point TOEIC score	510 (300 points for listening section; 210 points for the reading)	515 (220 points for listening section; 295 points for the reading)
Post-remedial-teaching TOEIC score	660 (350 points for listening section; 310 points for the reading)	675 (300 points for listening section; 375 for the reading)

Note: Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the participating students.

Table 2 Teachers' Background Information

Teacher \ Teacher experience	Gender	Teaching years	Field of study	Degree/country
The instructor	F	10	Language Education	MA/U.S.A
The class mentor	F	12	Curriculum and Instruction	Ph.D/U.S.A