The effect of self-efficacy on learning the speaking skill in English as a foreign language

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Abstract

The subject-matter of the present paper aims at probing into the effect of self-efficacy on the speaking skill of learners of EFL at the department of English in university of Mentouri Brothers-Constantine. A students' scale questionnaire is designed to back up the aim of this study. The data are analyzed, using descriptive statistics to check the relationship between self-efficacy and learning the speaking skill during the oral expression course. The findings thus show that there is a sound congruence between the students' self-efficacy perceptions and their speaking performance in English language learning.

Key words: Self-efficacy, speaking skill, EFL.

L'Effet de l'auto-efficacité sur l'apprentissage de la communication orale en anglais langue étrangère

Résumé

L'objet du présent article se propose d'étudier l'effet de l'auto-efficacité sur la compétence orale des apprenants de la langue anglaise, en tant que langue étrangère au département d'anglais à l'Université des Frères Mentouri - Constantine. Un questionnaire destiné aux étudiants rehausse l'objectif de la présente étude. Les données, fournies sous forme de statistiques descriptives, sont analysées dans le but de vérifier la relation entre l'auto-efficacité et l'apprentissage de l'expression orale en classe d'anglais. Les résultats montrent ainsi une grande similarité entre les perceptions que les étudiants ont de leur propre efficacité et leur habileté à parler en anglais.

Mots-clés: Auto-efficacité, expression verbale, Anglais langue étrangère.

تأثير الكفاءة الذاتية في تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الأنجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية

ملخص

يركز التحقيق في هذه الورقة على تبيان تأثير الكفاءة الذاتية في مهارة التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الأنجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية تدرّس في قسم اللغة الأنجليزية بجامعة الإخوة منتوري قسنطينة. تم تدعيم الدراسة بسلّم استبياني، وحُللت البيانات باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي لمعرفة العلاقة بين الكفاءة الذاتية ومهارة التحدث أثناء حصص التعبير الشفوي. وقد أظهرت النتائج، أن هناك تطابقا بين تصورات الكفاءة الذاتية للطلاب وبين مهارتهم في تعلّم التحدث باللغة الأنجليزية.

الكلمات المفاتيح: كفاءة ذاتية، مهارة التحدث، الأنجليزية لغة أجنبية.

Introduction:

Self-efficacy, as a belief, is an essential part of the self-structure central to the understanding of the way learners construct their own personal views on themselves in language learning situations. Because of the diversity and richness of self-efficacy, theoretical insights and practical evidence towards the positive prediction of EFL learners' performance, little attempt has been made to examine the variables of self-efficacy in learning the English speaking skill in second year EFL student classes. Hence, the focal point in the present study is to determine "*the relationship between the perception of self-efficacy by second year LMD EFL students and their learning of the English language speaking skill*".

This paper will start off with a review of the concepts of self-efficacy and speaking skill. Then, a study conducted at the department of English of Constantine University, investigates the students' attitudes towards their own perceptions of themselves (self-efficacy) in relation to the English language speaking skill. Finally, the results once analyzed would potentially lead to implications and suggestions.

1. The Construct of Self-efficacy:

Psychologist Albert Bandura (1986-1997) has painted a portrait of human behavior and motivation in which individuals' self-beliefs are critical elements. Of all the beliefs that people hold about themselves affecting their day-to-day behaviour, and that stand at the core of "Social Cognitive Theory", are self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy is thus a universal psychological construct that accounts for variance within various domains of human functioning. It is the belief in one's competence to tackle new tasks and to cope with diversity in a broad range of challenging encounters. Broadly speaking, self-efficacy refers to a belief about what one is capable of doing and achieving. According to Bandura[1] self-efficacy is a belief in one's capabilities or skill to attain a particular goal or execute a particular behavior. This means that "*what people feel about their capabilities can be good predictors of the behavior they produce.*" In fact, the best prediction of behavior in a specific domain stems from people's self perceptions within that domain. Self-efficacy is more concerned with "*the fundamental view that one has of one's actions.*" (Colin)[2]. This explains why self-efficacy is conceptualized as our expectations bred on our performance across a broad range of situations not only challenging but also requiring both effort and perseverance. Self-efficacy is not intention, in the sense that intention involves willingness to adopt a behavior. Instead, self-efficacy involves a belief that one can adopt a behavior. Self-efficacy is also different from outcome expectancy. As such, the former is founded on the judgments regarding our capabilities, whereas the latter is founded on the judgments regarding the consequences of our behavior. In other words, an outcome expectancy is the "*person's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes*" (Bandura)[3].

In Bandura's[4] and Pajares's[5] proposed models, perceptions of personal efficacy are derived from four principal sources of information being: "*Performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states*" .

"Mastery experience" or *Performance accomplishments* are the most effective ways of creating a strong sense of efficacy. People judge themselves according to their experiences; success strengthens self-efficacy whereas repeated failures undermine it.

Previous success induces a sense of confidence and serenity, whereas previous failure produces a sense of inhibition and stress. Therefore, "*past mastery experiences*" can play a vital role in developing self-efficacy beliefs as well.

Vicarious experience is a weaker source than the mastery experience but when individuals have little experience or are uncertain about their capabilities, they become sensitive to it. The vicarious experience "*produced by the actions of others*" (Schunk, in Pajares)**(6)** is a significant model in one's life that can help create self-beliefs which will influence the individual's directions of life. For instance, a student will raise his/her competence efficacy on seeing another model student accomplishing successfully a particular task or handling a certain situation and vice versa.

Verbal persuasion includes the verbal judgments that others provide when judging someone's behavior. Whether, they are verbal or non-verbal (like facial expression), persuasions are influential when they are conveyed by persons that are regarded as "*credible persuaders*" (Zimmerman)**(7)** and believable evaluators (Pajares)**(8)** in people's own environments such as: parents, teachers, peers, etc.

Physiological states are the "*somatic and emotional states*" (Bandura)**(9)** that people rely on in judging their capabilities such as anxiety, stress, fatigue, and mood states. A student for example, before starting to speak or even when speaking, generally elicits emotional arousal that provides "clues" about the anticipated success or failure of the outcome. If he/she feels at ease, he/she may anticipate positive speaking performance, but when he/she feels anxious, he/she may anticipate negative speaking performance. The majority of studies have found that task choice, effort, goal settings, persistence, engagement, performance, achievement, and other aspects related to academic learning, are strongly and positively related to self-efficacy or mediated by it. This is what Zimmerman and Schunk**(10)** agreed upon when saying that self-efficacy can be good predictor of "*people's style of thinking, level of motivation, emotional well-being, and performance accomplishment and well being in countless ways; they can be able to result in valuable effects at different levels of behavior, that of the cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection levels.*"

Self-efficacy is known to be *predictive*; students who trust their abilities predict positive outcomes and support for good oral performance, while those who mistrust their capacities visualize failure "scenarios" and are likely to suffer from what Bandura calls "*cognitive negativity.*" At *the motivational level*, efficacy beliefs determine how much efforts students will devote to an activity, what to do when facing obstacles and as a result, be (self-beliefs) good determinants and predictors of the accomplishments that students may finally attain.

In addition to that, people's perceptions can control their *psychological states* as well. According to Pajares, efficacy beliefs "*influence the amount of stress and anxiety individuals experience as they engage in a task and the level of accomplishment they realize.*" In oral classes for example, high self-efficacy students —when trying to participate— will show no stress or anxiety, whereas low self-estimation of capacity students might evoke high levels of nervousness and fear that will often lead to inhibition and feeling of academic ineffectiveness.

Usually, people avoid situations they believe themselves unable to manage. However, they undertake challenging activities and select situations they believe themselves to be capable of handling. This is what happens at *the selection level*.

2- Self-Efficacy and Foreign Language Learning:

Learners are not just language cognitive or machines, but rather whole persons who need to be taken into account by teachers of a foreign language (Oxford) [11].

For a long time, research has revealed that self-efficacy beliefs are major prepositional constructs that contribute to learners' academic achievement. Students' beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities, determine their "*aspirations, level of motivation, […], [and] academic accomplishment*" (Bandura)[12], and better performance than their real ability (Bandura, Schunk[13]). This view is supported by Pajares[14] who believes that students' judgments of their competence are good predictors of their success or failure in their academic settings. Self-efficacy, in relation to learning a foreign language, is task specific which is one of the characteristics that is mentioned by Bandura which needs to be given special attention. Research about language learning regarding self-efficacy is not large compared to other academic investigations about the role of self-efficacy in different areas of learning. It is only by the last ten years that research started turning the vision towards those beliefs (efficacy ones) within the foreign language learning field. In addition to theoretical statements, the literature about practical work holds similar evidences about the strong effect of self-efficacy on academic performances. Empirical research seems to support Bandura's claim like that of Wigfield who conducted an investigation on both Math and English tasks. The study showed that learners' positive perceptions of ability were the strongest predictors of subsequent success in English and Math. Another investigation was done by Magogwe and Oliver about the link between self-efficacy and learning strategies. They used a modified version of the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1989) for collecting information on self-efficacy. Results indicated that there is a positive significant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and students' language learning strategies.

Considering the crucial role of self-efficacy beliefs and perceptions, it is necessary to do more research on learners' efficacy in one of the language skills which is here, the speaking skill.

3- The construct of the speaking skill:

Speaking is a productive, natural, and developmental process that a person goes through since the earliest experiences. The child's ability to speak grows with age and time. But, growth does not lead automatically to perfection which requires effort and constant practice.

Speaking can be said to be the process of sharing with other persons one's knowledge, interest, opinions or ideas, or, in accordance with Cameron[15], it is: "*the active use of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them.*" In oral classroom settings, listening and speaking are thought to be the most important of the four skills. Because the ability to speak a second or foreign language is often equated with language competence and oral proficiency, students need to interact with their teachers and classmates and learn the different communicative forms of language. According to Donn Byrne[16], the intention of teaching/learning speaking is not to inform students about the language but "*to develop their ability to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes.*" This is what Brown and Yule [17] have admitted by saying that the students should be able to express their feelings in the target

language, to cope with basic interactive skills like exchanging greetings, formulating thanks and apologies, expressing need and request seeking information or service. Those who have a positive view about themselves and believe that they have the capacity to learn the foreign language, will work hard and persist more to reach their goals. However, those who undermine their capabilities and hold a negative view about themselves in relation to language learning, will retreat and let things go or maybe admit failure from the very start.

4- University students' attitudes about self-efficacy and learning the speaking skill of English as a foreign language:

The second year English classes at the department of English in the above-mentioned university, are made up of a total of 671 students (537 females, and 134 males) spread over 13 groups. Since it is practically difficult to include all the second year students in the present study, it has been decided to select 151 students on a random basis -as grouped by the administration of the said department- to make the sample population. The classes were normal class groupings, which mean that the students were randomly grouped, neither on their perceived ability, nor on their previous achievement performance.

The total of 151 student respondents; 20% males (30 boys), and 80% females (121 girls) have been selected according to the alphabetical listing provided by the English department administration (as mentioned before).

A questionnaire instrument was designed to measure the 32 interventions of the origin and effect of self-efficacy (16 items for the origin and 16 for the effect of self-efficacy). These interventions have been measured in relation to the learning of the speaking skill. In other words, the items in the survey were designed to assess the degree to which students value their efficacy perceptions and believe that they are capable of being successful in learning the speaking skill of English.

On the students' questionnaire, participants were supplied with four different metrics or measures for use in responding to the questionnaire items about the speaking skill of English as a foreign language in response to the affective side of the student (i.e. self-efficacy as mentioned before). For all the items that occur respectively in the questionnaire, the participants were simply asked to give their opinion that flows from "*strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.*" The measures to the values were marked 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively, and then, the total for each of all four items in each table was computed and entered into the database.

In reference to the research questions, the survey variables were measured using one metric which is "*Descriptive statistics*". The mean reliability of the self-efficacy questionnaire designed for this study was 560, 16 (85%).

The analysis of the first part of the questionnaire has revealed some interesting facts about the students' perceptions towards the origin of self-efficacy in relation to the speaking skill.

To begin with, the analysis of students' responses recorded in items 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 has shown that mastery experience is a strong source of self-efficacy with 86, 75% of agreements and 8, 25% of disagreements. Students judge themselves according to their experiences. This means that in oral classes, students develop their self-efficacy beliefs from personal experiences and accomplishments they have already made. So, once the

student feels satisfied about his/her oral speaking skill, he/she will strive towards doing well and achieving better.

The analysis of students' responses recorded in items 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 has shown that the vicarious experience is a weaker source of efficacy beliefs than the enactive accomplishments. With 85, 75% of agreements as opposed to 11, 75% of disagreements, students revealed that they like to make their own experiences rather than derived or based them to a high extent on others' experiences. This fact does not deny the role of vicarious experience whereby students observe others and make decisions about their efficacy perception.

Again, the analysis of students' responses recorded in items 1.9, 1.10 has shown that positive verbal persuasion is another source of efficacy perception. With 48% of agreements, students admit that positive judgements such as praise words and expression encourage them more and help them to speak and develop the oral skill. On the contrary, items 1.11, 1.12 have shown that negative verbal judgements are, according to them, a weaker source of self-efficacy perception with 46, 5% of disagreements.

At last, the analysis of students' responses recorded in items 1.13, 1.14, 1.15, 1.16 has shown that the emotional states are another source of efficacy perception. 71, 75% of agreements demonstrate that anxiety, stress, and other mood states influence the views the questionnaire participants hold about their speaking skill.

The second part of the questionnaire is linked to the effect of self-efficacy in relation to the speaking skill of English as a foreign language whereby students gauge their capacities and witness their accomplishments in this task (learning the speaking skill).

The analysis of students' responses recorded in items 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 has shown that self-efficacy has a strong influence on the students' affective level. With their 84, 25% of agreements, students show that their perceptions about their capacities can control their psychological states of comfort and relaxation instead of worry and anxiety. Hence, their sense of confidence and trust is enhanced and their motivation to speak and participate is increased.

The analysis of students' responses recorded in items 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 has shown that self-efficacy influences the cognitive level. With 83, 5% of agreements students said that through the beliefs they hold about themselves, they can overestimate their speaking capabilities and make future predictions about their accomplishments.

The analysis of students' responses recorded in items 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12 has shown that self-efficacy works like a motivator for students to expand on making effort and producing energy. 95, 75% of students' agreements revealed that at the motivational level, self-efficacy perceptions encourage students and push them to speak and participate.

At last, the analysis of students' responses recorded in items 2.13, 2.14, 2.15 2.16 has shown that self-efficacy has an effect on the selection level as well. With 70% of agreements, Students believed that their self opinions decide or help make decisions about what to do and what to avoid; i.e. when to speak and when to keep silent ; but one must notice that avoidance is not always due to lack of efficacy perception but might be caused by lack of confidence or insufficient knowledge.

On the one hand, the mean reliability of students' answers to the first part of self-efficacy sources is 541, 17 with standard deviation of 26, 01. On the other, the mean

reliability of students' answers to the second part of self-efficacy effects is 579, 16 with standard deviation of 1,01.

From the previous analysis, one can say that self-efficacy as a prior and significant variable contributes to a high extent to the academic achievement in general and learning how to speak in precise.

5- Limitations:

Despite the fact that the closest sample size to a normal distribution – according to Hatch and Ferhady (1982) **(18)** - is thirty two, we still consider that our sample is small regarding the whole population of English students with the three proficiency years. Of course, the focus of this investigation was set upon second year students though attention ought to be paid to all the population.

The instrument used in this study (questionnaire) has helped us to identify the different beliefs, students hold about themselves in relation to the process of learning the speaking skill in English, but it might need other instruments as well. Interview or classroom observation can be used to obtain more qualitative data for analysis too. Doing so, our findings will be certainly more accurate.

6- Pedagogical implications:

In spite of the above-mentioned limitations, the findings of this study can be of interest to both teachers and domain specific researchers. The information provided by the findings about the role of students' self-efficacy in their language academic achievement, makes it important for teachers to consider this affective factor and try, as much as possible, to enhance their students' beliefs about themselves while learning the target language.

Performance accomplishments are a key factor for developing self-efficacy. For this reason, tasks where students will feel able to make their own experiences need to be taken into account; what is successful will boost their efficacy belief and what is failure will diminish it. Here, again, teachers' intervene through positive approvals, will not let the incapability thought about self interference but rather make the student recover confidence and lead him / her to try again until he feels satisfied with his language speaking proficiency.

7- Further Studies:

Further research on students' self-efficacy could tackle the following tasks:
1- To investigate the role of self-efficacy in relation to other affective factors like, for instance, motivation, anxiety, and learning strategies. As a result, the impact of these factors on language learning will be determined.
2- To investigate whether self-efficacy or self-concept is the most influential factor on learning the foreign language.
3- Examine the role of self-efficacy in relation to other language tasks, such as writing. Another area of research would be to investigate the interaction of self-efficacy sources - especially those of mastery experience and vicarious experience - and find the most influential one among them on language learning.

Conclusion:

To conclude, we have managed to get some understanding about the state of English students at the University of Constantine 1, and to reach some reasonable

insights about their perceptions and attitudes towards the concept of self-efficacy in relation to their speaking skill.

Hence, the affective side can be considered to be one of the main determining factors of success in learning a second or foreign language. The students seem to have developed and learned the speaking skill as the result of self-efficacy. So, this study provides, in line with previous research findings, further evidence about the significant role of self-efficacy on both gender learners' academic achievement. Most importantly, thus, is the teachers' awareness of the necessity of establishing personal factors including efficacy and beliefs, while designing courses in order to help improve the students' achievements and boost their motivation in providing more efforts to successfully learn the speaking skill in the target language.

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Appendix Tables 1, 2, & 3
Table 1: Origin of self-efficacy

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 1.1	94%	6%
Item 1.2	82%	8%
Item 1.3	90%	10%
Item 1.4	81%	9%

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 1.5	82%	8%
Item 1.6	76%	24%
Item 1.7	92%	8%
Item 1.8	93%	7%

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 1.9	95%	5%
Item 1.10	97%	3%
Item 1.11	90%	10%
Item 1.12	96%	4%

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 1.13	62%	38%
Item 1.14	76%	24%
Item 1.15	84%	16%
Item 1.16	65%	35%

Table 2: Effect of self-efficacy

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 2.1	92%	8%
Item 2.2	85%	15%
Item 2.3	89%	11%
Item 2.4	71%	29%

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 2.5	96%	4%
Item 2.6	94%	6%
Item 2.7	65%	35%
Item 2.8	79%	21%

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 2.9	98%	2%
Item 2.10	97%	3%
Item 2.11	94%	6%
Item 2.12	94%	6%

Items	Agreements %	Disagreements %
Item 2.13	96%	4%
Item 2.14	66%	34%
Item 2.15	63%	37%
Item 2.16	55%	45%

Table 3: The Mean and Standard deviation of students 'answers to the construct of self-efficacy'

Self-efficacy parts	Mean	Standard deviation
Origin of self-efficacy	541,17	26,01
Effect of self-efficacy	579,16	1,01

Appendix 2: Students' questionnaire :
Student's questionnaire:

   Dear students, we would be so thankful if you could answer the following questions. Please, read the statements attentively and simply answer them by choosing the right answer that tells how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

1/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I speak voluntarily when I decide to do so.				
In oral discussions, I speak even if I make errors.				
My previous success in oral discussions boosts my trust in my abilities.				
My trust in my abilities remains the same even with my previous failure in oral discussions.				

2/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I participate without waiting for my classmates to participate.				
I participate without waiting for my classmates to succeed in their participation.				
I participate even if my classmates fail in their trials.				
I still trust my abilities even if my classmate of				

the same level failed in their discussion.				

3/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel more confident about my abilities when the teacher praises me.				
Praise words like "good, well done" raise my self-confidence				
My self-confidence remains high even when my classmates mistrust my abilities.				
I still feel able even when the teacher corrects my errors.				

4/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel unanxious when I take part in classroom discussions.				
I feel calm when I take part in classroom discussions.				
I feel comfortable when I take part in classroom discussions.				
I feel unperturbed when the teacher asks me to speak.				

5/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In oral expression classes, I feel confident when I participate.				
In oral expression classes, I feel at ease when I participate.				
In oral expression				

classes, I feel relaxed when I participate.			
In oral expression classes, I feel unworried of speaking inability.			

6/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I know that I will lose my words when I feel stressed before I speak.				
I predict positive performance of my speaking skill when I feel able.				
I still predict positive performance of my speaking skill even when I feel unable.				
My speaking skill will be worse when I am unsure about my abilities**.**				

7/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I will give more effort to improve my speaking skill once I trust my abilities.				
I like oral classroom participation because they develop my speaking skill.				
Once I believe in my abilities, I participate voluntarily.				
I keep on participating even if I make mistakes.				

8/

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I like participation when I feel able to do so.				
I like participation even when I feel unsatisfied with my speaking skill.				
I like participation even when I have lack of confidence.				
I like participation even when I have insufficient knowledge about the topic.				