



The Relationship between Self-Efficacy Perception of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Speaking and Oral Ability

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between self-efficacy perception of oral ability and speaking ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The purpose of this study was to see whether there was any significant relationship between self-efficacy and speaking ability of learners or not. This study has been conducted to investigate differences, if any, in self-efficacy in speaking English among 20 learners from Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas, Iran based on gender during two different semesters. Research was conducted using a questionnaire adapted from previous research. The students perceived self-efficacy of speaking ability was measured using three constructs, namely ability, activity perception and aspiration. In general, the findings have shown that female students and male students tended to possess high levels of self-efficacy. The results also show that the students who have high self-efficacy tend to get higher score in oral performance test than those who have low self-efficacy. All in all, the students' level of self-efficacy can influence their speaking ability or oral performance in the English language class. This study has some implications for syllabus designers to incorporate into the pedagogical language courses. This study has implications for both EFL as to the implications of the study for L2 research and pedagogy, it is suggested that, given the documented intricate reciprocity between the two levels of pragmatics research should attempt to approach pragmatic variability on the two pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic planes of language use in context.

Keywords: self-efficacy, oral ability, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Speaking, among the four basic language skill is of an exclusive importance in daily life and it is a vital complementary tool in communication (Darcy, Ewert and Lidster, 2001; Derwing, Munro and Wiebe, 1998; Morley, 1991; Praton, 1971). Moreover, Bailey and Savage (1994, p.7) cited by Lê (2011, p.1) say that speaking is seen as the center skill and the most demanding of the four skills. However, it is not easy to master English speaking skill, as well as using it to communicate. Some people, especially students, find difficulties in using English when they are trying to interact with others. They still look hesitate to interact with their friends and their teachers by using English. The same issues can also be found in English language learning at non-speaking English schools, where most

learners often seem passive, and reluctant in speaking English in the classroom (Hamouda, 2012).

For people especially students to be able to speak English, they must first want to learn and believe that they can learn. Thus, they must have not only the motivation to learn but also the confidence in performing those practices and tasks. Hamouda (2012) highlights some factors that make students feel reluctant to speak English as a foreign language, namely anxiety, lack of interest in English class, shyness, low self-belief and confidence on their speaking capability.

Since one of the most important factors to control students in speaking English is their belief and confidence on their capability, or the so called self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1995, p.2) which said that self-efficacy is “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations”. In other words, self-efficacy can be seen as the confidence that people have in their ability to do the things they try to do, accomplish the goal and perform task competently (Dornyei, 2005). It is believed that self-efficacy can determine what people think or behave, as well as the choices they make in particular situation (Bandura, 1994). Thus, the belief that students have about their ability to speak can either encourage or make them hesitate to speak English in front of others in the classroom.

Self-efficacy refers to a person’s beliefs concerning his or her completion of a task and perceived competency level in performing the task (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is believed to play a key role in the learning process by helping or hindering a learner’s progress (Bandura, 1984). Bandura further proposed that a person’s attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills comprise what is known as a ‘self-system’. This system plays a major role in how one perceives situations and how one behaves in response to demanding situations. A person’s belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation forms an essential part in this self-system. Thus, self-efficacy can have an impact on everything from psychological states to behavior and motivation. This study seeks to find out whether there is any significant relationship between self-efficacy and speaking ability of learners.

In this research, we attempt to answer the following questions:

- Is there any difference in self-efficacy in speaking English between intermediate learners?

Hypothesis is a temporary prediction that can be proved. It can also give some direction in conducting research and how to solve the problems. In this research it assumes an alternative one that there is a significant relationship between students’ self-efficacy and their speaking ability.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the writer used correlational research model, one of the quantitative research methods. Moreover, correlational study describes the degree to which two or more quantitative variables are related (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2010, in Gurler, 2015, p.16).

Participants

The participants of the study comprised 20 learners from Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas. They are chosen through purposive sampling. A total of 10 male and 10 female students are randomly chosen in this study.

Instruments

The collected using a 23-item 5 point Likert scale questionnaire designed by Hairuzila and Subarna (2007) which was adapted from Bandura (1990) and Mikulecky, Lloyd and Huang (1996). The questionnaire comprised four sections. Section A contains demographic information of the respondents such as gender, level of education, age and level of study. While Section B on group ability consisted of 14 items that focus on students' perception of their ability to speak in English. Items in this group measure attributes such as ability to participate in discussions conducted fully in English, ability to communicate with lecturers and international students and ability to speak in English with peers. Section C measures grouped activity perception comprising 6 items which address students' perceptions on activity that require them to speak in English such as group discussion, role play and oral presentations. The final part of the questionnaire, Section D, consisted of 3 items that measures student's aspiration with respect to speaking in English. Students responded to a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'.

RESULTS

This section highlights the findings of the study. In this study, the mean score of 3.0 and below represents high self-efficacy while a mean of 3.1 to 5.0 signifies low self-efficacy.

The first objective is on a comparison of self-efficacy between male and female students. Table 1 shows the mean score for male and female students on three dimensions: ability, attitude and aspiration. It revealed that the students in the present study possess low self-efficacy beliefs on all three dimensions. The results indicated that self-efficacy of female students (mean =3.32) was significantly higher than male students (mean=3.75) in terms of ability.

Table 1. Mean scores for male and female students by self-efficacy domains

| Dimension | Female | Male | Mean |
|------------|--------|------|------|
| Ability | 3.32 | 3.75 | 3.53 |
| Attitude | 3.30 | 3.41 | 3.35 |
| Aspiration | 3.52 | 3.66 | 3.59 |

This finding on gender differences is similar to a number of previous studies on the relationship between gender and self-efficacy. Pajares (1996) found that female students exhibit higher self-efficacy in areas related to language.

In his study, students were asked to provide confidence judgment on their academic skills and female students reported that they judged themselves to be better writers than the boys. This finding is also consistent with a study by Idrus and Rohani (2008) where

female students showed higher self-efficacy levels compared to male students by ability dimension. This shows that female students are more confident than male students in speaking in English.

Meanwhile, the findings showed that there were slight differences in term of attitude and aspiration perception for both groups. This might be because the activities conducted such as group discussion and role-play are part of their course assessment. Therefore, the students found the activities relevant because these activities contribute some weight on their grades.

Table 2. Speaking and Self-efficacy Scores

| Participants | Speaking Scores (X) | Self-efficacy Scores (Y) |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Student 1 | 73 | 89 |
| Student 2 | 81 | 97 |
| Student 3 | 85 | 77 |
| Student 4 | 85 | 77 |
| Student 5 | 68 | 74 |
| Student 6 | 60 | 70 |
| Student 7 | 78 | 71 |
| Student 8 | 85 | 90 |
| Student 9 | 82 | 76 |
| Student 10 | 80 | 81 |
| Student 11 | 75 | 71 |
| Student 12 | 80 | 81 |
| Student 13 | 64 | 72 |
| Student 14 | 71 | 86 |
| Student 15 | 73 | 70 |
| Student 16 | 84 | 88 |
| Student 17 | 75 | 80 |
| Student 18 | 60 | 62 |
| Student 19 | 85 | 72 |
| Student 20 | 80 | 80 |

According to table 2, the average score of the students' self-efficacy questionnaire is 76,09. The median score is 75,50. The mode is 70. The highest score of self-efficacy is 97 while the lowest score is 62.

DISCUSSION

In general, the findings have indicated that female students and male students tended to possess high levels of self-efficacy. Language educators must be aware of factors that would contribute to the perceived speaking ability of these students and the reasons behind them so that they can be helped in facing any problems in the future. By increasing students' self-efficacy beliefs may help them to achieve more in the English language learning process. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help language educators with a better understanding in order to guide students to be better speakers of the English language.

Thus, as Dodds (2011) has explained before, the students' self-efficacy can give positive impact on their speaking test and performance, as proved by the findings above. In line with this, Bandura explained that "what people think, believe and feel affects how they behave" (p.19). Thus, it is true that students' psychological factor such as self-efficacy or self-confidence will influence how they behave and perform.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this present study provide several pedagogical implications for lecturers wishing to produce confident speakers of English language. Increasing students' self-efficacy might be useful as it involves a complex interface of behaviors, cognitions, and affect. According to Idrus and Saleh (2008), if lower levels of self-efficacy are identified among students, appropriate actions should be carried out to help boost students' self-efficacy levels through verbal persuasion and encouragement. Persuasion is one of the four sources of self-efficacy listed by Bandura (1990). Therefore, it is important for teachers to give positive feedback and encouragement to enhance students' self-efficacy in oral communication.

Students who show low self-efficacy tend to struggle to complete a task. They will find it hard to do, leading to frustration. Thus, having lectures and discussions in class helps them understand the nature of working in a group. In addition, students should be exposed to successful role models such as peers and lecturers. According to Schunk and Swartz (1991), students will learn more by watching successful peer role modeling than teacher role modeling, because students can identify more readily with their peers. Using their peers as a role model will make them more comfortable. Therefore, students should be given chances to observe their friends perform a task successfully, as these will help learners to foster positive beliefs about themselves (Nair et al., 2012).

Moreover, lecturers should be aware that all three elements, namely ability, activity perception, and aspiration must be taken into consideration in enhancing students' self-efficacy level in speaking English. These three elements may be integrated with teaching and assessing students.

It should be noted that as this study is small-scale research; therefore, it may be unfair to provide generalizations regarding gender differences in self-efficacy and length of exposure to the English language. Even so, it may be a good indication of perceived self-efficacy in speaking English among technical students in Malaysian polytechnics. This study also adopted a quantitative approach in order to collect data from a large sample of the population. It would be desirable for future research to conduct a research using combination of quantitative and qualitative method to get a more in-depth view on this topic. Further research to fill the gaps would be a useful way forward.

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