

**Understanding Undergraduate EFL Learners’
English Speaking Self-efficacy Link with their Attitude to the Skill**

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Abstract

‘Social Cognitive Theory’ or the ‘Theory of Self-efficacy’ (*Albert Bandura*) talks about the perceived self-efficacy of one’s own capability of performing a task. Self-efficacy will determine whether or not coping behaviour will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and adverse circumstances” (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). Attitude (behaviour) is determined by the beliefs about the outcomes of performance (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008, p.71). Therefore, one’s attitude to a task is primarily determined by his or her self-efficacy about the task performance. Though, there have been a lot of studies on self-efficacy sources and other variables, it lacks clarity, particularly with reference to foreign language learning, about whether the self-efficacy sources strongly correlate to different aspects of attitude towards language learning. With an assumption that they do so, the current study was proposed.

The current study investigated the correlation between the learners’ English speaking self-efficacy and their attitude towards the skill. The study is the pilot survey of a doctoral project, currently in progress by the same author. In total, 38 students of pre-university level students participated in the study. A questionnaire covering four major aspects of self-efficacy and three major aspects of attitude concerning five different criteria of speaking measurement was served. Correlation procedures were used to analyse the obtained data. The results indicated positive relationship between the samples’ English speaking self-efficacy and the kind of attitude they have towards the learning and practice of the skill. The researcher hopes that the final outcome of this study will establish the unrevealed facts concerning the inclusion of strategies for self-efficacy enhancement in the pedagogical care to be taken for the teaching of EFL Speaking.

Key words: *English Speaking, Self-Efficacy, Attitude, correlation*

1. Introduction:

Some eminent views about self-efficacy:-

- A. **‘They are able who think they are able.’** – *Virgil, Ancient Roman Poem*
- B. **‘If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it in the beginning.’** – *Mahatma Gandhi*
- C. **‘Where you think you can or you can’t, you’re usually right.’** – *Henry Ford, Ford Motors*
- D. **‘Clearly it is not simply a matter of how capable one is, but of how capable one believes oneself to be,’** – *Frank Pajares*

‘To speak a new language is to take on a new world, a new culture’ (:- Frantz Fanon). Specially, while interacting with others in a new language; it can be no less than an adventurous task of diving into the open air from a high altitude. Any adventurous task warrants the performer’s psychology to it. Therefore, it is said there is no better way to understand a foreign language speaker’s mind than to study their attitude to the language task and factors influencing the attitude.

Attitude is said to be influenced by several social, environmental and psychological factors. Of all, the first and foremost thing that determines one’s attitude to a given task is the person’s personal belief in his/her capability to sustain, survive and succeed in the task. Hence, the primary question that one asks is “Can I do this?”. The answer to this question further determines whether s/he would accept or reject the task for performance.

Three things are apparent out of this context. They are (i) the answer to the question “Can I do this?”-(*the level of self-efficacy*) , (ii) acceptance or rejection of the task (*attitude to the task*) and (iii) level of achievement/success (*performance*). This develops an idea that , in the contexts of performing tasks, one’s attitude to the task is determined by his/her self-efficacy. This study therefore is conceived with the assumption that there is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and attitude.

1.1. Research objective:

The study, as mentioned, is a part of a doctoral project. So the objective in this part of the study is very specific and limited which might contribute to the final study. Therefore, the only objective is to correlate the level of English speaking self-efficacy with the kind of attitude the learners (pilot group) have towards the skill.

1.2. Research question:

Is there any significant correlation between the subjects' English speaking self-efficacy and their attitude towards the skill?

2. Literature review :

Since Albert Bandura has hit the ground with self-efficacy theory; it has been a subject of rigorous research in various fields concerning human psychology in all aspects of life. Many studies have been conducted, especially in the field of educational psychology. Research has also been carried out concerning the English as foreign language (EFL) learners' self-efficacy, attitude, willingness, and strategies and so on and so forth. However, there is a dearth of information in the existing literature about the comparative study between the EFL learners' self-efficacy and their attitude to specific English language skills. Ermine Erdem (Hacettepe University, Turkey) says that, in the literature, when the studies about self-efficacy are examined, it is mostly encountered to the studies about general self-efficacy and reliability and validity of self-efficacy scales (Bikmaz, 2002; Enochs, Riggs, 1990, Gun and Yildiz, 2014; Sari, Yenigun , Altninci & Ozturk,2011) . The current pilot study is an attempt in the direction of correlating self-efficacy with specific reference to English Speaking skill.

2.1. Self-efficacy and its major aspects:

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's self-judgement of his/her capability of doing a given task to reach a certain level of attainment /achievement/performance (Bandura, 1997).The given task is either performed instantly or the performer has the liberty to go through a process of preparation (learning & practice) before the final performance. In either of these cases, the performer sets certain *attitude* (whether prepare well, be casual, just ignore etc.) towards the task which is based on his/her personal judgement of his capability (*self-efficacy*) of doing the task.

According to theory and research (Bandura, 1995), self-efficacy makes a difference in how people feel, think to decide, and act towards a task. In terms of feeling, a low sense of self-efficacy for a particular task or thing in life is associated with helplessness leading to negative attitude to that task or learning the process of accomplishing the task. The source of self-efficacy is manifold. Since self-efficacy is one's personal judgment of his/her capability, the judgment is based on the personal experience in different phenomena of life upon which the experience depends. If a non-native English language learner has mastered a set of language property (let's say certain grammar rules - passive voice sentence structure in this context)

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required to speak about the process of how to prepare a cup of tea, s/he would have a high level of self-efficacy to speak about the process of how to prepare a glass of fruit juice. The speaker's judgment of his/her self-efficacy in this context is dependent upon his/her personal experience of what language s/he has mastered for speaking about the process of making tea. According to Bandura, this is called '*Mastery Experience Self-efficacy*'. If a learner of English language has mastered some items of the language and has already used them in his/her speech successfully in one context, s/he will be more efficacious to use them in another similar yet different context. The source of self-efficacy here comes from what the speaker had experienced in the earlier attempt due to his/her mastery of language for that specific task.

'Most human behaviour is learned by observation through modelling' (:- Bandura 1986). One can build self-efficacy by watching others do a task which either s/he has never attempted before, or has attempted but achieved little success. '*If he can do, I can also do.*' '*I must try the way he does.*' These feelings start growing when one observes another person doing a task successfully. People judge their capabilities in relation to the capability of others (Bandura 1977, 1986, 1997; Wood & Bandura, 1989). In an English language class room context, a learner always finds his/her peers speaking the language so well and conveniently. When the learner attentively observes them speaking so well, s/he gains self-efficacy to make an attempt either his/her own way or the way the peers have done. Cognitive modelling (*Vicarious Experience*), the thought process behind the behaviour, increases self-efficacy (Gorrell & Capron, 1990). In another study (Chodhury et al., 2002; Wood & Bandura, 1989), it is found that observing similar people succeed with sustained efforts in a task raises self-efficacy, while observing similar people fail despite high effort decreases one's efficacy beliefs. Therefore it is believed that one of the effective ways to develop self-efficacy is to let the performer go through a vicarious experience.

Bandura (1997) says *Verbal Persuasion* can be another source of self-efficacy. There are instances of people being told that they are capable of doing a particular work and they do it either with success or failure to an extent. This is mostly based on the feedback. In a study (Yough, Michael S, 2011), it is noted that feedback that is specific (Schunk & Rice, 1987) and directed towards the progress students are making towards mastering strategies appears to be particularly effective (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). On the other hand, pushing for unachievable targets are quickly disconfirmed by disappointment of the results of one's efforts (Bandura, 1994). If an English language learner is told that he can anchor on a public platform, which requires much higher skills than what he can try out, and is put into the task and the learner

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finally fails to handle the task, he will not decide to take up such a challenge ever after. But English language learners, who are told that they lack capabilities for a task, are actually the ones who tend to avoid challenging language activities. Therefore, verbal persuasion shouldn't be an illusion either. It should be a balanced feedback/persuasion between the learner's original capability and the higher task challenge that the learner can handle, if faced.

An emotional arousal of feelings can either restrain a learner from a task or take you closer to the task. A learner's emotional state of mind can be detrimental to his/her attitude to the task. In such a state of mind, (when the learner feels offended for some reason) the learner will not feel confident to speak the target language any further. On the other hand, if the learner is excited (for any external or language performance related reason), s/he would certainly get involved in any further task given. Therefore, the emotional experience the learner goes through can decide the level of self-efficacy of the learner for a task.' Certain cognitive appraisals of one's psychological state might be energizing, whereas other appraisals of the same state might not (Weiner, 1972). As Albert Bandura mentions (*P-199, Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioural Change*), if the phobics are led to believe that the things they have previously feared no longer affect them internally, the cognitive re-evaluation alone will reduce avoidance behaviour (Valins & Nisbett, 1971).

2.2. Attitude and its major aspects:

Some eminent views about attitude:-

"Your motivation determines how much you want to do but your attitude determines how well you will do." :- Lou Moltz

"Knowledge comes with learning, skill comes with experience; but attitude never comes, developed." :- Vishaak

As Wikipedia describes, "Attitude is an expression of favour or disfavour toward a person, place or thing (*the attitude object*). Attitudes are associated beliefs and behaviours towards some object. They are not stable, and because of the communication and behaviour of other people, are subject to change by social influences. According to Truitt (1995) positive or negative attitudes do not develop accidentally but have some reasons for their emergence.

Allport (1935) defined an attitude as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (p. 810). Krech and Crutchfield (1948) argued, "An attitude can be defined as an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world" (p. 152). Some

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sociologists (*e.g., Fuson, 1942*) and psychologists (*e.g., Campbell, 1950*) presented attitudes simply in terms of the probability that a person will show a specified behaviour in a specified situation. However, the definition of attitudes as "likes and dislikes" (*Bem, 1970, p. 14*) equates attitudes with evaluative judgments.

Gardner (1985) says that attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent (attitude object). Attitude thus determines the choices made in all realms of human activity -formal, informal, academic or non-academic. With reference to language learning, *Visser (2008)* says attitude is considered an essential factor influencing language performance. Therefore, achievement in a target language relies not only on intellectual capacity, but also on the learner's attitudes towards language learning. Generally, it is believed that learners' attitudes, skills and strategies dictate whether or not they will be able to absorb the intricacies of language (*Oxford, 1990; Nunan, 2000*). Learning the intricacies of language connects to different aspects of learner's attitude.

Wenden (1991) classified the term "attitude" into three interrelated components namely, cognitive, affective and behavioural.

2.3. Cognitive Aspect of Attitude:

The cognitive component involves the beliefs, thoughts or viewpoints about the object of the attitude. Learners understand why a language skill is important for them and how it is important or how not.

2.4. Affective Aspect of Attitude:

The affective component refers to the individual's feelings and emotions towards an object, whether he/she corresponds to a language task in an emotional state of mind. This determines how a particular language aspect can be enhanced or affected in an emotional state of mind.

2.5. Behavioural Aspect of Attitude:

The behavioural component involves the tendency to adopt particular behaviours towards learning. This is, in fact, the actual course of action that a learner takes towards a language task or the whole process of learning a language skill. With this, a learner either accepts or rejects or unwillingly takes up a language task.

3. Method :

3.1. Research Design :

A correlation design was employed to find out the relationship between English speaking self-efficacy and attitude towards the learning and practice of the skill. The correlation study was carried out to investigate the existence, or non-existence of the relationship between the www.ijellh.com

different sources of self-efficacy and different aspects of attitude and between self-efficacy and attitude as a whole.

3.2. Participants (Target Group):

Data was collected during the last trimester in 2015-16 academic sessions. Forty (40) English language learners from the vocational foundation programme in one of the vocational training centres in Oman participated in the study. An Arabic-speaking female teacher served the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher and instructions were given to the participants by both the teachers (in Arabic and English). Participants were convinced that their responses wouldn't affect their academic performance and their identity would remain undisclosed.

3.3. Questionnaire:

In accordance with the purpose of the study, a questionnaire, covering four aspects of self-efficacy and three aspects of attitude with relation to five criteria of English speaking, was served. It consisted of 66 items and each item had its Arabic translation below it to avoid difficulty in understanding. The questionnaire was prepared according to the *Guide For Constructing Self-efficacy Scales* (p-307, *Self-efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents*, Bandura, 2006). The primary purpose of serving this questionnaire was to test the reliability and validity of its statements which were actually meant to draw data for the main study which is in progress.

3.4. Data Analysis :

The data collected was purely numerical representation of the participants' self-efficacy and attitude on a likert scale between 0 (zero) and 10 (ten); zero being the complete disagreement and ten being the complete agreement with the statements. The raw data was categorised and put in different columns on an excel spread sheet. Using the excel sheet statistics features, correlations between different aspects of Self-efficacy and attitude with reference to English speaking were calculated.

4. Results:

The results of the statistics of the learners' English speaking self-efficacy revealed that the mean score of the participants was 127.0789474 and participants' standard deviation was 27.6506992 (table -1).

Table-1 (Self-efficacy)

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
38	56	177	127.0789474	27.6506992

As found from the results in table (2), it is noted that the mean score of the participants on attitude scale was 130.4473684 and the standard deviation score was 18.21151606 .

Table-2(Attitude)

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
38	71	161	130.4473684	18.21151606

To examine the correlation between the two variables;(English speaking self-efficacy and attitude to practice and learning of the skill), each source of the self-efficacy with relation to five English speaking criteria was correlated with three different aspects of attitude. They are separately presented in Table-1 , Table-2 , Table-3 and Table-4.

The data analysis doesn't show a strong correlation between the Mastery Experience Self-efficacy and the three aspects of Attitude with relation to English language speaking. Self-efficacy (ME) and Cognitive aspect of attitude were moderately correlated on the positive side of the correlation scale. On the other hand, Self-efficacy (ME) and affective aspect of attitude show a nominal positive correlation whereas the correlation between the Self-efficacy (ME) and behavioural aspect of attitude is marked with a nominal but negative correlation.

Table-1(Mastery Experience & Attitude)

Self-efficacy through Mastery Experience Correlated with different aspects of Attitude	<i>Correlation</i>
Self-efficacy through <i>Mastery Experience</i> ⇔ <i>Cognitive</i> Aspect of Attitude	0.632274511
Self-efficacy through <i>Mastery Experience</i> ⇔ <i>Affective</i> Aspect of Attitude	0.146192794
Self-efficacy through <i>Mastery Experience</i> ⇔ <i>Behavioural</i> Aspect of Attitude	-0.06088305

Though the correlation found between Self-efficacy (VE) and the three aspects of attitude isn't negative at all, it is not strong enough either. Except the considerably moderate correlation found between vicarious experience self-efficacy and the cognitive aspect of attitude (0.4365824), correlations of the other two – Affective and Behavioural aspects – were found at nominal points on the scale.

Table-2(Vicarious Experience & Attitude)

Self-efficacy-through Vicarious Experience Correlated with different aspects of Attitude	<i>Correlation</i>
Self-efficacy-through Vicarious Experience ⇔ Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	0.4365824
Self-efficacy through Vicarious Experience ⇔ Affective Aspect of Attitude	0.102409051
Self-efficacy through Vicarious Experience ⇔ Behavioural Aspect of Attitude	0.076696576

Self-efficacy through Verbal persuasion proves to have been correlated with Cognitive aspect of attitude at a little higher point than vicarious experience of self-efficacy which is marked at 0.537555176. This is, in fact, considered to be a moderate level of correlation on the positive side of the scale. Verbal persuasion factor has a nominal positive correlation with the other two aspects of attitude.

Table-3(Verbal Persuasion & Attitude)

Self-efficacy through Verbal Persuasion correlated with different aspects of Attitude	<i>Correlation</i>
Self-efficacy through Verbal Persuasion ⇔ Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	0.537555176
Self-efficacy through Verbal Persuasion ⇔ Affective Aspect of Attitude	0.230883429
Self-efficacy through Verbal Persuasion ⇔ Behavioural Aspect of Attitude	0.01583019

The co-relationship between the emotional experience source of self-efficacy of English speaking and the cognitive aspect of attitude towards the skill is marked moderately at 0.590135211 on the positive side of the scale. In contrast, it correlates positively at a nominal point with the affective aspect of attitude whereas negatively at a nominal point with the behavioural aspect of the attitude.

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Table-4(Emotional Experience & Attitude)

Self-efficacy through Emotional Experience correlated with different aspects of Attitude	<i>Correlation</i>
Self-efficacy through Emotional Experience \rightleftarrows Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	0.590135211
Self-efficacy through Emotional Experience \rightleftarrows Affective Aspect of Attitude	0.107474526
Self-efficacy through Emotional Experience \rightleftarrows Behavioural Aspect of Attitude	-0.07405879

The findings above indicated that the participants' scores on the English speaking self-efficacy section has some relevant correlation with the subjects' attitude towards the learning and practice of speaking skill. This indication is noted from the observation that all the four sources of self-efficacy moderately correlated with only the cognitive aspect of attitude in this pilot study. Self-efficacy exhibits nominal or almost very nominal correlation with the other two attitudinal aspects. The highest of all, which the mastery experience self-efficacy moderately correlated with, was the Cognitive aspect of attitude (0.632274511). Table-5 clearly presents the level of the moderate correlation found.

Table-5 (Moderate Correlation)

<i>Different Aspects of Self-efficacy and Attitude Moderately Correlated</i>	<i>Correlation</i>
Self-efficacy through Mastery Experience \rightleftarrows Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	= 0.632274511
Self-efficacy through Vicarious Experience \rightleftarrows Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	= 0.4365824
Self-efficacy through Verbal Persuasion \rightleftarrows Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	= 0.537555176
Self-efficacy through Emotional Experience \rightleftarrows Cognitive Aspect of Attitude	= 0.590135211

The earlier tables show correlations between specific sources of the self-efficacy and specific aspects of attitude with relation to the subjects' English speaking. It is, therefore, necessary to see the correlation between the subjects' total score of self-efficacy (all four sources) and attitude (all three aspects). This correlation marked at the point 0.418621579 on the positive side of the scale which is positive and moderate correlation.

Table-6 (Subtotal Correlation)

<i>Correlation as a whole between Self-efficacy (all sources) & Attitude (all aspects)</i>	<i>Correlation</i>

Self-efficacy <i>in total</i> ⇔ Attitude <i>in total</i>	0.418621579
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5. Discussion and Conclusion:

The basic objective of this study was to find out the correlation between the English speaking self-efficacy and attitude towards the skill. The results of the correlation between specific sources of English speaking self-efficacy and specific aspects of the attitude towards the skill corresponds to one of the assumptions that there might be a dominant correlation between some source of self-efficacy and some aspect of attitude. The data confirms this assumption with the correlation result between the four sources of self-efficacy and the cognitive aspect of attitude (*all above 0.5*). Though the correlation found isn't dominant, it can be considered moderate.

Table-5 assertively determines that there is a relationship between English speaking self-efficacy and learners' attitude towards the learning and practice of the skill. In a study conducted in Spain (Valle et al. 2009, p. 101), it was found that when learners possessed a higher self-efficacy, they were more likely to put more effort into their Oral academic practice and performance. Putting more effort into a task is symbolic of sustained positive attitude to the task and it's pre-requisite. The current study has confirmed this is true, indicating the highest correlation to *0.632274511* between two different aspects of the variables studied and stating a conclusive sub-total correlation to the point at *0.418621579* between English speaking Self-efficacy and attitude to the practice and learning of the skill as whole.

Though, in this study, the higher rate of relationship is limited to the result between Self-efficacy and only the cognitive aspect of attitude, the researcher believes that the outcome of the study may be concluded with even a higher rate of correlation between English self-efficacy and learners' attitude towards the skill as a whole, provided the size of data is larger.

However, this pilot study confirms that there is a considerable relationship between the English speaking self-efficacy and the attitude towards the skill. The findings hypothesize that the EFL learners having a higher rate of self-efficacy show more positive attitude towards the learning and practice of the skill. This study also suggests making further investigation on this with a larger size of sample for better generalization.



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