

ORAL COMMUNICATION SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS AMONG STUDENTS OF POLITEKNIK SULTAN SALAHUDDIN ABDUL AZIZ SHAH

Wan Nooraini Wan Kamaruddin*¹, Rabiatul Adawiyah Abdullah Zawawi ²

¹Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Shah Alam, Malaysia
wnoorainiwk@psa.edu.my

² Rabiatul Adawiyah Abdullah Zawawi
rabiatul@psa.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study attempted to explore the oral communication self-efficacy beliefs of senior Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah students. 246 engineering students and 146 non-engineering students were chosen for the study. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires measuring oral communication self-efficacy beliefs on aptitude, attitude and aspiration. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings indicated that the students had high self-efficacy beliefs in their aptitude, attitude and aspiration towards their communication skills. The highest self-efficacy beliefs identified was aspiration, followed by attitude and aspiration. Engineering students showed higher self-efficacy beliefs compared to the non-engineering students. Findings also indicated that there were significant differences between engineering and non-engineering students in their aptitude and attitude regarding their communication efficacy beliefs. There was also a significant, positive relationship among the three oral communication self-efficacy constructs. Further research should be extended to investigating factors that contribute towards oral communication self-efficacy beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

One major impact of globalization on education is evident by the growing need to use English as a medium of instruction to enhance English-speaking capacities. Yet, if the students do not have a strong belief that they can be good learners of the language, the process of learning can be seen as a difficult task. The literature indicates that the inner process students go through and the beliefs they hold about their capabilities should be appropriately addressed [5,8,20]. This is necessary as the understanding on self-efficacy and how it relates to language capabilities will enable educators to develop strategies in improving students' self-efficacy. What determines how people behave is often the beliefs they have regarding their capabilities rather than what they are actually capable of doing. This is because these self-efficacy perceptions determine what people do with the knowledge and skills they possess [16]. Meanwhile, Firoozi and Aghdam [7] suggested that the increase in communication skills will lead to higher levels of self-efficacy.

Problem Statement

Communication skills are of crucial importance in today's globalized scenario. Teaching practices and strategies must meld with and adapt to the changing world system. Through an understanding of the diverse components and cultures of the world, the interconnectedness of globalization could be better understood and prepared [12, 21]. The current labour market demands professional workers who are able to communicate well and display the appropriate competence in oral and business correspondence. This is to ensure that they are able to react accordingly to the demands of globalization and rapid technological change [13, 15]. One of the obstacles of communicating in English is the lack of self-confidence in using the language, and findings showed that the problem is most serious with Asian students [10].

Studies have indicated that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of performance in different language skills and tasks [10, 18, 22]. A strong self-efficacy in respective language skills provides an indication that the individual would have a strong sense of confidence in the skills concerned [18]. Researchers have suggested that one's self-efficacy can affect all aspects of life, nevertheless the study of self-efficacy in academic settings and its significance on communication skills is relatively limited. This is particularly so among the polytechnic students. An exploration on self-efficacy beliefs and English oral communication skills among polytechnic students are still limited. Thus this study attempted to look into the oral communication self-efficacy beliefs of senior students of Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah based on three elements (aptitude, attitude and aspiration).

The objectives of the study were to :

- i. determine the level of oral communication self-efficacy beliefs (aptitude, attitude and aspiration] of senior Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah students with regard to their oral communication skills
- ii. determine the difference in the oral communication self-efficacy beliefs (aptitude, attitude and aspiration) of senior engineering and non-engineering students of Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah
- iii. determine the relationship between the three elements of oral communication self-efficacy beliefs (aptitude, attitude and aspiration) of senior Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah students

Literature Review Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs regarding his or her ability to perform a given task, and the ability to perform the task successfully. The self-efficacy theory was introduced by Bandura [1] based on the social cognitive theory. Perceived self-efficacy refers to how a person believes and judges his ability to organize and execute types of performance given [2]. There is a great body of knowledge based on studies to determine how self-perception plays vital role in human performance [4, 23].

Communication Skills

Among the highly sought after skills that employer look for are communication skills. Kim [14] posits that English communication ability is considered a crucial qualification for a job applicant to be hired. The literature indicates that even students with excellent results failed to be hired due to lack of English communication skills [14, 24]]. Studies also indicated that 75% of long term job success depends on soft skills while only 25% depends on technical knowledge [9]. Polytechnic students are most likely to enter the workplace that practise the use of English in daily transactions. Thus, the students should possess the necessary communication skills, such as oral skills, to facilitate them at the workplace. As such, there is a need to ensure that the students have good English oral communication ability when they are ready to enter the job market.

Self-Efficacy and Oral Communication Skills

Researchers have explored self-efficacy within different areas of learning focus, nevertheless less research was conducted on self-efficacy beliefs in the context of foreign language learning. Self-efficacy does not only refer to an individual's capabilities or skills, but more so on the belief that he or she is capable of achieving a given task [1, 17]]. Studies on foreign language learning have investigated a limited number of language variables, such as learning strategies, performance and language anxiety. Bandura [2] posits that self-efficacy is influenced by personal factors, thus in this study three elements will be explored; aptitude, attitude and aspiration towards communication skills.

Within the social cognitive theory, perceptions of self-efficacy are among the most central mechanisms of self-reflection. Self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" [2] or, more simply, an individual's beliefs in his/her ability to perform a designated task or complete an activity. Bandura [2] suggests that self-efficacy beliefs can influence students' decisions, their expended effort and perseverance, resilience to adversity, thought processes, affective states and accomplishments. For these reasons, it is suggested that self-efficacy beliefs affect almost everything people do; how they think, motivate themselves, feel, and behave. There is a considerable body of knowledge on individual differences in foreign language learning, which may include learning styles, personality traits and learners' beliefs [20]. These differences contribute to success in language learning [21].

Studies on self-efficacy beliefs and the correlation with reading and listening performance were conducted by Dodds [6] amongst college students. Findings indicated that not all language components correlate with self-efficacy beliefs. The study proposed that a more thorough study is necessary to understand the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and language learning outcomes. Another study on self-efficacy focused on ESL learners writing skills [18]. The researchers concluded that respondents exhibited a medium level of self-efficacy in writing. They also established that there was a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and writing performance.

According to Raoofi et al. [20], the most consistent findings on this area of concern revealed that self-efficacy does have an effect on different types of language domains. This falls back to Bandura's social cognitive theory on the suggestion that self-efficacy acts as a central element of human agency which mediates aptitude, past achievement and subsequence performance [3]. As language learning differs from other types of learning, more focus should be put towards how learners develop self-efficacy and the factors that affect self-efficacy beliefs in the context of foreign language [20]. Since self-efficacy plays a significant role in foreign language learning, it is vital that instructors introduce strategies to enhance students' self-efficacy. Past research revealed that accomplishment of tasks may lead to higher self-efficacy among learners [19].

Oral communication skills refer to presentation of information and ideas through verbal interactions [10]. Hairuzila & Rohani [11] explored self-efficacy of ESL engineering and technology students on their speaking ability using the dimensions of ability, aspiration and activity. Findings revealed that the students self-efficacy levels on all dimensions were found to be high. Another study also indicated that engineering students showed high self-efficacy beliefs with regard to their oral communication ability in English [8].

Aptitude, Attitude and Aspiration

The three constructs of interest in the study were aptitude, attitude and aspiration. Aptitude concerns with the belief about the nature of one's ability and the role it plays in achievement [8]. This is in line with Bandura's theory that those with high self-efficacy perform better than those with low self-efficacy. Based on the construct in this study, aptitude is regard as students' beliefs about the nature of their ability and effort to speak in English. The next construct, attitude refers to students' attitudes towards the activities conducted in enhancing their oral communication skills ability. Among the activities were group discussion, individual and group presentations. The third construct, aspiration refers to students' desire and motivation to communicate well in English.

Methodology

A total of 392 respondents participated in the survey. 146 of them were senior students from the engineering students while 246 non-engineering senior students represented the commerce department. All the students were in their final year of their study program. 212 (54%) were female while 180 (46%) were male students. The students were chosen for the study since they were already in their senior year and had gone through a longer period of English language learning in the polytechnic compared to the other students. Thus the responses from the students would be more justified for the study.

The instrument consisted of two sections. The first part consisted of demographic questions while the second part focused on three self-efficacy elements to measure English oral communication skills. The instrument which was adopted from a study by Hairuzila et al. [8] consisted of 32 items that represented three constructs; aptitude (14 items), attitude (6 items) and aspiration (3 items). A 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) was utilized in the study. The instrument registered a cronbach alpha of 0.94, 0.89 and 0.90 for aptitude, attitude and aspiration respectively.

Statistical Treatment

Weighted mean was applied to consolidate the data gathered from the determinants of self-efficacy perception. Composite mean was used to determine the level of perceptions for each of the elements in the study. Also, Likert scale was used with corresponding values from 1 to 5, one being the lowest while five being the highest. To derive the highest and lowest points of weighted mean from the items, ranking will be used.

Results

Table 1 shows the composite mean for aptitude, attitude and aspiration. The results revealed that the highest mean was aspiration [M = 4.32, SD = 0.75], followed by attitude [M = 3.83, SD = 0.82] and aptitude [M = 3.56, SD = 0.82]. This indicates that while medical electronics students perceived that they had a very high self-efficacy level on aspiration and attitude towards oral communication skills, nevertheless their aptitude level was moderate. The overall mean for the three factors was 3.90(SD =0.79).

Table 1: Composite mean for Aptitude, Attitude and Inspiration

	n	Mean	S.D
Aptitude	392	3.56	0.82
Attitude	392	3.83	0.82
Aspiration	392	4.32	0.75
Total mean score		3.90	0.79

Results in table 2 show the mean score and standard deviation for all 14 items for aptitude. The total mean score of 3.56 (SD = 0.82) implies that the students were in agreement that they have a moderate ability to communicate well in English. As indicated in Table 2, most of the responses given indicate that students did not really face problems using the language. The highest mean was for item 1 (M = 3.90, SD = 0.71), which gives an indication that the students could do well in class discussion conducted in English. On the other hand, students were not confident speaking to foreigners as this item had the lowest mean of 3.26 (SD = 0.86).

Table 2. Aptitude: Mean score and standard deviation

Items		Mean	S.D	Rank
1.	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in English	3.90	0.71	1
2.	I am good at learning speaking skills.	3.66	0.75	5
3.	I have no problem learning speaking skills.	3.72	0.84	4
4.	I do not have any problem speaking in English when I should.	3.52	0.80	7
5.	I always think I am good at speaking in English.	3.30	0.87	12
6.	I feel confident about my ability to speak clearly.	3.41	0.84	9
7.	I can motivate myself to speak in English.	3.83	0.79	2
8.	I can speak fully in English well with my Malay lecturers.	3.29	0.86	13
9.	I am good at communicating with foreigners.	3.26	0.86	14

10.	I can learn and use new English words in my conversation easily.	3.55	0.84	8
11.	My speaking ability does not worry me.	3.36	0.85	11
12.	My ability to keep speaking in English even when my friends tease me.	3.37	0.84	10
13.	When I decide to say something in English, I go ahead and do it.	3.77	0.81	3
14.	It is not difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in English with others.	3.61	0.82	6
Total mean score		3.56	0.82	

Table 3 shows that the students have high perceived self-efficacy in their attitude towards oral communication skills, having a total mean score of 3.83 (SD = 0.82). Students strongly agreed that they enjoyed group presentations, as this item has the highest mean of 3.91, while the mean indicating activity on individual presentation was the lowest (M = 3.71, S.D. = 0.85).

Table 3. Attitude: Mean score and standard deviation

Items	Mean	S.D	Rank
1. I enjoy having group discussions in class when they are done fully in English.	4.02	0.80	1
2. I do not find oral presentations hard to do.	3.72	0.77	4
3. I enjoy communicating with others in English.	3.87	0.80	3
4. I enjoy speaking in English with anybody.	3.73	0.83	5
5. Doing individual oral presentations in class is enjoyable.	3.71	0.85	6
6. Doing group oral presentations in class is enjoyable.	3.91	0.83	2
Total mean score		3.83	0.82

As shown in Table 4, the total mean score for aspiration was 4.32 (S.D = 0.76). This indicates that the students strongly agreed that have very high self-efficacy level in their aspiration to become good communicators in English. This is reflected in item 3, which has the highest mean of 4.39 (*I would like to speak good English just like other students who are good speaker*). The lowest mean for aspiration was item 2 (M = 4.28, SD = 0.77) which reflected that the students did not consider speaking well in English to be one of their main goals in life.

Table 4. Aspiration: Mean score and standard deviation

Items	Mean	S.D	Rank
1. One of my main goals is to be much better at speaking in English by next year.	4.31	0.75	2
2. Speaking well in English is one of my main goals in life.	4.28	0.77	3
3. I would like to speak good English just like other students who are good speakers.	4.39	0.75	1
Total mean score		4.32	0.76

Table 5 compares the composite mean for the three factors for engineering and non-engineering students. For engineering students, the composite mean for aspiration was the highest (M = 4.34, SD = 0.70), followed by attitude (M = 3.95, SD = 0.61) and the lowest mean was aptitude (M = 3.64, SD = 0.59). Results for non-engineering students indicated a similar pattern, but it is interesting to note that the composite mean for all three factors were lower than those of engineering students. Aspiration had a mean of 4.28 (SD = 0.70), followed by attitude (M = 3.57, SD = 0.68) and aptitude had the lowest mean (M = 3.35, SD = 0.63).

Table 5. Engineering & non-engineering students: mean score and standard deviation

	Engineering [n=146]		Non- engineering [n=246]	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Aptitude	3.64	0.59	3.35	0.63
Attitude	3.95	0.61	3.57	0.68
Aspiration	4.34	0.68	4.28	0.70

Total mean score	3.98	0.63	3.73	0.67
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Further test was carried out to determine whether there was a significant difference between the self-efficacy beliefs of engineering and non-engineering students. Based on table 6 and 7, it was found that the two categories of students were different in terms of their aptitude and attitude towards communication skills ($p < 0.05$). A Post Hoc test carried out further determined that there was a significant difference between the engineering and non-engineering students in their efficacy beliefs towards communication skills in both elements of aptitude and attitude.

Table 6 ANOVA test: comparison on aptitude of engineering & non-engineering students

	n	Mean	DF	Sig [2-tail]
Engineering	246	3.95	4	0.00*
Non-engineering	146	3.57	7	

* $p < 0.05$

Table 7 ANOVA test: comparison on attitude of engineering & non-engineering students

	n	Mean	DF	Sig [2-tail]
Engineering	246	3.64	4	0.00*
Non-engineering	146	3.35	7	

* $p < 0.05$

The study also determined whether there was a correlation between the three elements of interest. Table 8 shows the relationship between aptitude, attitude and aspiration. There was a positive significant relation between the three factors ($r = 0.33$ to $r = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$). This shows that all the three factors were interrelated.

Table 8 Correlations between aptitude, attitude and aspiration

		Aptitude	Attitude	Aspiration	
Aptitude	67	-	0.69*	0.33*	
Attitude			-	0.48*	
Aspiration				-	

* $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Discussion

The findings revealed that the both category of polytechnic students (engineering and non-engineering) have high self-efficacy in their oral communication scales with regard to the three elements; aptitude, attitude and aspiration. The findings concurred with by Hairuzila et al. [8] and as they too found that the respondents possessed high efficacy beliefs in the three elements. Interestingly, this study revealed that engineering students have higher self-efficacy beliefs compared to the non-engineering students. For both categories of students, the highest level of self-efficacy beliefs was aspiration, indicating the students were very much motivated in improving their communication skills. The students perceived that their communications skills ability to be moderate, nevertheless this show of efficacy in their aptitude resulted in positive attitude towards learning and improving their oral communication skills.

A correlational study conducted showed that there was a positive relationship among the three elements; aptitude, attitude and aspiration. The interrelation among the factors showed that students' high self-efficacy in their aptitude positively affected their self-efficacy in attitude and thus positively aspired to become better in their oral communication. The findings were also in agreement with the study conducted by Hairuzila et al. [8]. Since the constructs have significance and rely on one another, teaching strategies to improve students' self-efficacy in their oral communication ability should incorporate all the three elements if desired results were to be achieved.

The study concurred with other findings [10], indicating that self-efficacy plays a vital role in predicting students' efforts and performance in oral communication. Other studies also show that students' achievement in language learning depends on their judgment and believe of their own ability, taking into account their perceived confidence to perform a given task [6, 18, 22]. On a similar note, the study is in agreement with Raoofi et al. [20], who noted that self-efficacy does have an effect on different types of language domains. Thus, to improve and enhance language learning, educators should focus on enhancing students' efficacy beliefs with regard to their aptitude, attitude and aspiration.

As language learning differs from other types of learning, more focus should be put towards how learners develop self-efficacy and the factors that affect self-efficacy beliefs in the context of foreign language [20]. Since self-efficacy plays a significant role in foreign language learning, it is vital that instructors introduce strategies to enhance students' self-efficacy.

Implication for Further Research

The study only looked into the efficacy beliefs with regard to students oral communication skills. The same study could be extended to a larger population in the polytechnic system to validate the study. In addition, the study should also consider junior polytechnic students to see whether there is a difference in efficacy beliefs on the three elements between junior and senior students. As such, the institution would be enlightened on whether the English language curriculum has prepared the students adequately so much so that it gives an impact on the students' efficacy beliefs. Another perspective that needs to be addressed is to explore factors that may help to improve the efficacy beliefs of students in language learning.

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