

The Correlation Between Self-Efficacy and English-Speaking Ability Among Vocational High School Students

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Abstract: Speaking ability is essential in vocational education and may be influenced by psychological factors such as self-efficacy. This study investigated the correlation between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability among vocational high school students in Lumajang. A quantitative correlational design was employed with 70 Office Management students. Self-efficacy data were collected using an adapted questionnaire, and speaking ability was assessed using a speaking rubric. Instrument validity was reviewed by an expert, and reliability testing indicated acceptable internal consistency. Because one variable was not normally distributed, Spearman correlation was used as the main analysis. The findings revealed a very strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and speaking ability (Spearman $\rho = .871$, $p < .05$). Students with stronger beliefs in their speaking ability tended to perform better in speaking. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing psychological dimensions in English learning, particularly in vocational contexts where communicative competence is required for future professional settings.

Keywords: correlation, self-efficacy, speaking ability, vocational high school students

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and emotions effectively. According to Turk (2003), speaking not only functions as a means of communication but also contributes to the development of social correlation, emotional intelligence, and academic achievement. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking ability is particularly important because it reflects learners' communicative competence and their ability to use language in real-life situations. However, speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging language skills to master. Brown (2004) explains that effective speaking requires integrating multiple linguistic components, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

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Speaking is often regarded as the most visible indicator of language proficiency because it requires learners to use language spontaneously and interactively in real time. Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, speaking demands immediate language production and active participation in communication. Therefore, learners must simultaneously process linguistic knowledge and convey meaning effectively during interaction (Bygate, 1987; Richards, 2008).

In vocational education, speaking ability is especially important because students are prepared not only for academic achievement but also for future professional responsibilities. Vocational high school students are expected to communicate effectively in workplace settings, including delivering presentations, providing information, responding to clients, participating in meetings, and handling professional interactions. Consequently, oral communication competence is considered an essential skill for employability and workplace readiness. This perspective aligns with the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes language learning tailored to learners' academic and occupational needs. According to Hutchinson & Waters (1987), ESP focuses on equipping learners with language skills directly applicable to their future professional contexts. In Office Management programs, English serves not only as a school subject but also as a practical communication tool for workplace activities such as customer service, business correspondence, and professional presentations.

Besides linguistic competence, psychological factors also influence speaking ability. One of the most influential psychological constructs is self-efficacy. Chang et al. (2024) highlighted that learners' speaking performance is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by task-specific psychological factors, particularly self-efficacy and enjoyment, which play important roles in supporting oral language development. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific goals. Self-efficacy has been identified as one of the strongest motivational determinants of academic performance because it influences learners' goal-setting, self-regulation, persistence, and achievement behaviors (Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000). In language learning, self-efficacy affects students' willingness to participate, their persistence when facing difficulties, and the amount of effort they invest in learning activities. Haidara (2016) argues that difficulties in speaking are not solely caused by limited linguistic knowledge but are also associated with learners' beliefs about their own abilities. Students with high self-efficacy tend to participate more actively in speaking activities and demonstrate greater confidence. In contrast, students with low self-efficacy are more likely to experience anxiety and avoid oral communication.

Previous studies have consistently reported a positive correlation between self-efficacy and speaking ability. Istiqoomah (2021), Darojah & Aminin (2023), and Hibatullah (2024) all found that students with higher levels of self-efficacy tended to demonstrate better speaking performance. The consistency of these findings across different educational contexts indicates that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of speaking success among EFL learners. In particular, students with stronger self-beliefs are generally more willing to engage in speaking activities, take risks in communication, and persist when facing difficulties. These characteristics may lead to greater opportunities for language practice and,

consequently, better speaking achievement. Thus, previous studies collectively support the view that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in enhancing students' speaking ability. The urgency of the current study lies in the fact that speaking ability has become an essential competency for vocational high school students who are expected to communicate effectively in academic and professional environments. Despite its importance, many vocational students continue to experience difficulties in speaking English, particularly due to psychological barriers such as low confidence and limited belief in their own abilities. Understanding the correlation between self-efficacy and speaking ability is therefore necessary to support the development of effective teaching strategies that address both linguistic and psychological aspects of language learning.

Although previous studies have consistently reported a positive correlation between self-efficacy and speaking ability, several gaps remain. First, most studies were conducted in general secondary school settings, while vocational high school students have different learning objectives and communication demands related to workplace readiness. Second, previous studies have rarely examined self-efficacy in relation to speaking ability, assessed using a comprehensive speaking rubric that covers pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Third, empirical evidence from vocational high schools in Lumajang regency remains limited. Therefore, unlike previous studies, the present study focuses on vocational high school students in Lumajang and investigates the correlation between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability within a vocational education context.

Based on the background, urgency, and research gaps identified above, the objective of this study is to examine the correlation between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability among vocational high school students. Specifically, this study seeks to determine whether a significant correlation exists between students' self-efficacy and their English-speaking ability, and to assess its strength.

METHOD

A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the correlation between students' self-efficacy and their English-speaking ability. A correlational design was selected because the study aimed to determine the strength and direction of the correlation between the two variables without manipulating any conditions or treatments. The study was conducted at a public vocational high school (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) in Lumajang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Lumajang was chosen because Utama (2025) finds that the Regency of Lumajang tends to face many difficulties, such as a lack of educational facilities, deficiencies in infrastructure, and unequal teacher competence, all of which could negatively affect students' academic performance. Furthermore, Raharjo et al. (2021) claim that vocational schools in Lumajang Regency also face many problems related to instructional quality, including poor facilities and infrastructure, insufficient teaching time, and inconsistencies in the learning process. Thus, these conditions could prevent students from achieving their potential in developing their self-efficacy and productive language competencies, such as speaking abilities.

B. Sample and Participants

The participants consisted of 70 eleventh-grade students enrolled in the Office Management program. Since the population was relatively small and accessible, a census sampling technique was employed, in which all members of the population were included as research participants.

The selection of Office Management students was considered appropriate because communication skills constitute an important component of their vocational competencies. Students in this program are expected to develop professional communication abilities that support future workplace responsibilities, including interacting with clients, delivering presentations, and participating in office-related communication. Therefore, both self-efficacy and speaking ability are highly relevant constructs within this educational context.

C. Research Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect the data. The first instrument was a self-efficacy questionnaire adapted from the EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale (EFL-SSES) developed by Wang & Sun (2024) and the Self-Efficacy for EFL Speaking Scale (SEESS) proposed by Gan et al. (2022). The questionnaire consisted of 20 items categorized into three domains: performance self-efficacy, self-regulatory self-efficacy, and linguistic self-efficacy. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The second instrument was a speaking ability assessment. The speaking ability data were obtained from a video podcast assignment previously assigned by the English teacher as part of classroom learning activities. Students worked in groups of four to five members and created role-play podcast videos based on daily-life topics. Although the task was completed collaboratively, each student was assigned a specific role and speaking segment, allowing the researcher to assess each student's speaking ability. This approach was considered beneficial because it reflected authentic speaking behavior in a communicative setting rather than performance produced solely for research. The rubric was based on an analytic speaking rubric adapted from Hughes (2002). This analytic speaking rubric was selected because it allows multiple dimensions of speaking ability to be assessed separately, providing a more detailed evaluation of learners' oral proficiency. Analytic scoring is particularly useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses across different speaking components such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Brown, 2004).

Before data collection, the instruments were reviewed by a lecturer in English Language Education at Universitas Negeri Surabaya using expert judgment to ensure content relevance, clarity, and suitability for the participants. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS. The self-efficacy questionnaire obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.866, while the speaking assessment rubric obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.847. Both coefficients indicated good internal consistency and demonstrated that the instruments were suitable for data collection.

D. Technique of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using two techniques. First, students completed the self-efficacy questionnaire through Google Forms. Participants were instructed to respond honestly based on their confidence in performing English-speaking activities.

Second, students' speaking ability was assessed using video podcast assignments previously assigned by the English teacher. Students completed the task in groups of four to five members and performed role-play conversations based on daily-life topics. Although the task was completed in groups, each student's speaking ability was assessed individually using the speaking rubric.

E. Technique of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the participants' self-efficacy and speaking ability scores.

Prior to correlation analysis, assumption testing was conducted through normality and linearity tests. The normality test indicated that one variable did not meet the assumption of normality. Therefore, Spearman's Rank Correlation was used to determine the strength and significance of the correlation between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of statistical analyses examining the correlation between students' self-efficacy and English-speaking ability. The findings include descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and correlation analyses.

A. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Efficacy and Speaking Ability Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' Self-Efficacy Score	70	35.00	96.00	63.4000	11.16075
Students' Speaking Score	70	5.00	19.00	12.7286	2.89888
Valid N (listwise)	70				

Descriptive statistics revealed that self-efficacy scores ranged from 35 to 96 ($M = 63.40$, $SD = 11.16$), indicating moderate overall self-efficacy with considerable variation. Since the self-efficacy questionnaire consisted of 20 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, speaking ability scores ranged from 5 to 19 ($M = 12.73$, $SD = 2.90$), indicating a moderate level of variation across students. The speaking test was assessed on five components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, each rated on a four-point scale.

B. Assumption Testing

Table 2. Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic	df	Sig.
Students' Self-Efficacy Score	.079	70	.200
Students' Speaking Score	.137	70	.002

The normality test showed that self-efficacy data were normally distributed ($KS = 0.079$, $p = 0.200 > 0.05$), while speaking ability data were not ($KS = 0.137$, $p = 0.002 < 0.05$). Also, the linearity test revealed a significant linear relationship between students' self-efficacy and speaking ability ($p = .000 < .05$). Furthermore, the deviation from linearity was not significant ($p = .235 > .05$), indicating that the relationship between the two variables is linear.

C. Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Spearman Rank Correlation Result

	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Self-Efficacy & Speaking Ability (Spearman)	.871	.000	70

The Spearman analysis produced a correlation coefficient of 0.871 with a significance value of 0.000. This indicates a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between students' self-efficacy and their speaking ability. In other words, students with higher self-efficacy tended to perform better in speaking.

DISCUSSION

A. Relationship between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability

The present study found a very strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability among vocational high school students, as indicated by a Spearman correlation coefficient ($\rho = 0.871$). This finding suggests that students who possess stronger beliefs in their ability to perform speaking tasks tend to demonstrate higher levels of speaking. The results support Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which posits that self-efficacy influences individuals' choices, effort, persistence, and resilience when facing challenging tasks. In English-speaking activities, students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to participate actively in communication, persist despite linguistic difficulties, and interpret mistakes as part of the learning process rather than as indicators of failure. Such behaviors may increase opportunities to contribute better in speaking.

Another explanation for the strong correlation identified in this study can be found in Bandura's concept of mastery experience. According to Bandura (1997), successful performance is the most influential source of self-efficacy because it provides direct evidence of an individual's capability to accomplish a task. Students who have experienced

success in speaking activities are likely to develop stronger beliefs in their speaking abilities. These positive experiences increase confidence, encourage further participation, and strengthen persistence when facing communication difficulties. As a result, students become more willing to engage in future speaking activities, creating a positive cycle in which successful performance enhances self-efficacy and stronger self-efficacy subsequently supports better performance.

In addition to mastery experiences, Bandura also highlights vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states as important sources of self-efficacy. Students may strengthen their self-beliefs when they observe peers completing speaking tasks, receive positive encouragement from teachers, or experience lower anxiety during communication activities. Conversely, repeated failure experiences and negative emotional reactions may reduce self-efficacy and discourage participation. These mechanisms help explain why psychological factors play a substantial role in speaking ability and further support the interpretation of the strong correlation observed in the present study. Recent evidence from Leeming et al. (2024) also suggests that speaking self-efficacy influences learners' willingness to communicate, which in turn contributes to better speaking performance. Learners with stronger confidence in their speaking ability are more likely to participate actively in oral tasks and produce greater spoken language output.

The findings are also consistent with social cognitive perspectives that view self-efficacy as a key mechanism influencing learners' motivation and self-regulated learning behaviors. Students who believe in their capabilities are generally more willing to invest effort, set challenging goals, and persist when encountering difficulties. Consequently, self-efficacy contributes not only to learners' performance outcomes but also to the learning processes that support achievement (Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000).

B. Comparison with previous studies

The findings are consistent with previous studies that reported a positive correlation between self-efficacy and speaking ability (Andriana, 2021; Darojah & Aminin, 2023; Devi et al., 2021; Hibatullah, 2024; Istiqoomah, 2021). This similarity indicates that self-efficacy is consistently associated with speaking performance across different EFL learning contexts. However, the strength of the correlation identified in the present study appears to be substantially higher than that reported in many earlier studies, which generally found moderate to strong correlations. While previous researchers concluded that self-efficacy contributed significantly to speaking achievement, the present findings suggest an even stronger relationship between the two variables. This difference may be attributed to variations in participant characteristics, educational settings, and measurement instruments used across studies. One possible explanation is that the present study employed a speaking-specific self-efficacy instrument rather than a more general measure of academic self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy beliefs are domain-specific and tend to predict performance more accurately when measured within the same domain. Therefore, the strong correlation observed in this study may reflect a closer alignment between the measured construct and the target performance.

Another possible explanation concerns the vocational education context. Unlike students in general academic programs, vocational students are expected to develop practical communication skills that support future workplace demands. Within such contexts, speaking ability may be perceived as directly relevant to future professional success. This aligns with the findings of a study by Simanjuntak et al. (2024), which states that learning English, particularly speaking, is a key requirement for vocational high school students to communicate effectively in professional settings. Consequently, students' beliefs about their speaking capabilities may exert a stronger influence on their willingness to engage in communication-related tasks. This interpretation extends previous findings by suggesting that the correlation between self-efficacy and speaking ability may be particularly salient in educational environments where communication skills have clear occupational value.

The findings may also be interpreted through Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1982) argues that affective factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation influence the extent to which learners can process and use language input. Students with higher self-efficacy are likely to experience lower levels of anxiety and greater confidence when engaging in speaking activities. As a result, they may be more willing to interact in English and take advantage of language-learning opportunities. From this perspective, self-efficacy does not merely accompany speaking ability but may function as a psychological mechanism that facilitates language development by reducing affective barriers.

C. Alternative interpretation and study limitations

Nevertheless, alternative interpretations should also be considered. While the findings demonstrate a strong association between self-efficacy and speaking ability, the correlational nature of the study does not permit causal conclusions. Although it is plausible that higher self-efficacy contributes to better speaking ability, it is equally possible that successful speaking experiences strengthen students' self-efficacy. This interpretation is consistent with Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism, which emphasizes the dynamic interaction among personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. Therefore, the correlation identified in this study may be reciprocal rather than unidirectional.

Furthermore, the exceptionally high correlation observed in this study suggests that additional factors may have influenced the results. Variables such as speaking anxiety, learning motivation, classroom climate, teacher support, and prior language-learning experiences were not included in the analysis. Previous studies have demonstrated that these factors can influence both self-efficacy and language performance. Consequently, part of the correlation observed in the present study may reflect the combined influence of these variables rather than the independent effect of self-efficacy alone. Future studies should therefore employ more comprehensive models that examine multiple psychological and contextual factors simultaneously.

D. Theoretical and pedagogical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the proposition that self-efficacy is a central psychological construct in second- and foreign-language learning. More specifically, the results suggest that self-efficacy may play an especially important role in productive

language skills such as speaking, where learners must perform publicly and respond in real time. This study therefore contributes to the growing body of literature supporting the application of social cognitive theory in language-learning contexts, particularly within vocational education settings.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings imply that improving students' speaking ability requires attention not only to linguistic competence but also to learners' psychological readiness. Teachers may strengthen students' self-efficacy by providing constructive feedback, creating supportive learning environments, offering graduated speaking tasks, and ensuring opportunities for successful speaking experiences. Such practices may encourage greater participation, reduce communication anxiety, and enhance students' confidence in using English. Consequently, the development of self-efficacy should be considered an integral component of speaking instruction in vocational high schools.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the correlation between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability among vocational high school students in Lumajang. The results of Spearman correlation analyses revealed a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables. This finding indicates that students with higher self-efficacy tend to demonstrate better English-speaking ability, thereby answering the research objective of determining whether a significant correlation exists between self-efficacy and speaking ability.

The findings contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a vocational high school context, which has received relatively limited attention in previous research. The exceptionally strong correlation observed in this study suggests that self-efficacy may play an especially important role in vocational education, where English-speaking competence is closely related to future workplace communication. Thus, this study reinforces the application of social cognitive theory in English language learning, particularly in vocational education settings.

In practical terms, the findings imply that improving students' speaking ability should involve not only developing linguistic competence but also enhancing learners' self-efficacy. Teachers are therefore encouraged to provide constructive feedback, create supportive classroom environments, and design speaking activities that promote successful speaking experiences and strengthen students' confidence.

This study has several limitations. First, the participants were drawn from a single vocational high school in Lumajang, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study employed a correlational design; therefore, no causal relationship between self-efficacy and speaking ability can be established. In addition, other psychological and contextual variables, such as speaking anxiety, learning motivation, and teacher support, were not examined.

Future research is recommended to involve larger, more diverse samples from different educational contexts, include additional psychological and contextual variables, and employ longitudinal or experimental research designs to further examine the relationship between self-efficacy and English-speaking ability.

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