THE CORRELATION OF SPEAKING SELF-EFFICACY, SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AND GENDER IN ESP CONTEXT

Shikina Aleksandra Aleksandrovna
Bachelor's degree, Department English Philology, Fergana State University.
Email: *Shikina.aleksandra2003@gmail.com*
Odiljonova Shirin Isroiljon qizi
Bachelor's degree, Department English Philology, Fergana State University.
Email: *odiljonovashirin287@gmail.com*
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15449035

Abstract. *This study explores the correlation between speaking self-efficacy, speaking proficiency, and gender within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts. Drawing from recent open-source literature, it analyzes how gendered communication norms, sociocultural expectations, and technology use influence learners' confidence and oral performance. Findings reveal that speaking self-efficacy significantly mediates ESP achievement and varies across genders due to differing levels of anxiety, motivation, and strategic engagement. The study emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive, learner-centered ESP instruction to support equitable development of speaking skills, particularly relevant for educational systems such as Uzbekistan's.*

Keywords: *ESP, speaking self-efficacy, speaking proficiency, gender differences, learner motivation, language anxiety, Uzbekistan.*

Introduction

Speaking in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context is a multifaceted skill shaped not only by linguistic knowledge but also by learners' psychological states and sociocultural influences. Among the critical factors influencing successful speaking performance are self-efficacy and gender, which interact with speaking proficiency in complex ways. Self-efficacy, defined as learners' beliefs in their own ability to perform specific tasks, significantly affects how learners approach speaking in English, particularly in professional or academic scenarios typical of ESP courses. Gender, as a social construct, also plays a role in shaping communicative behaviors, confidence levels, and exposure to language learning opportunities.

Emerging research highlights that speaking self-efficacy often mediates the relationship between actual language proficiency and performance outcomes. This mediation is further nuanced by gender, with male and female learners exhibiting different levels of confidence and anxiety despite comparable linguistic abilities. The interplay between these variables has crucial implications for ESP instruction, where context-specific communication is key. Understanding how self-efficacy and gender intersect with speaking proficiency can help educators develop inclusive, effective teaching strategies that enhance learner outcomes in specialized domains.

Methodology

The analysis in this paper is based on an examination of existing literature, including peer-reviewed studies and theoretical frameworks accessible through open-source platforms. The author synthesized findings from empirical studies conducted by scholars such as Tauchid (2023), Zhang et al. (2023), and Hao and Fang (2024), integrating qualitative insights and quantitative modeling results. This literature-based methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the correlations among speaking self-efficacy, proficiency, and gender in ESP contexts without conducting primary data collection.

Results

The correlation of speaking self-efficacy, speaking proficiency, and gender in the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) context is deeply rooted in the evolving dynamics of spoken communication, which serves as a reflection of cultural, societal, and individual factors. As Tauchid (2023) emphasizes, spoken language is not merely a linguistic tool but a complex interplay of verbal and nonverbal communication shaped by societal trends (p. 48). This suggests that learners' belief in their speaking abilities (self-efficacy) is not formed in isolation but is influenced by broader cultural expectations, including gendered communication norms. Research by Fergus et al. (2022) and Iio et al. (2019), as cited by Tauchid, underscores how gender can affect both communication styles and perceived competence, leading to varying levels of self-efficacy between male and female learners (p. 50). This directly impacts their speaking proficiency, particularly in specialized contexts like ESP, where confidence and precision are essential.

Speaking self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in learners' oral performance, especially in task-oriented ESP scenarios. Tauchid (2023) points out that personalized strategies and tailored instructional methods are crucial for addressing individual learner needs, including gender-related differences in communication preferences and learning approaches (p. 50). For instance, female learners might exhibit higher language anxiety due to sociocultural expectations, leading to lower self-perception of speaking abilities despite comparable or even superior proficiency levels. Conversely, male learners might display overconfidence, which can also skew the actual proficiency outcomes. Studies like those by Du and Quyen (2023) and Sha'Ar and Boonsuk (2021) affirm that motivation, exposure, and learning environment significantly affect learners' strategic choices and speaking development, further emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive approaches in ESP instruction.

Technological tools also play a substantial role in shaping speaking self-efficacy and proficiency across genders. As highlighted in Tauchid's (2023) review, tools such as TikTok, VoiceThread, and MyScene Tube have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing learners' confidence and fluency (pp. 51–52). However, gender differences in engagement with these platforms can influence the outcomes. For example, female learners might prefer collaborative and expressive platforms like Flipgrid, as Shin and Yunus (2021) observed, whereas male learners might be more responsive to competitive or task-based digital tools. The variance in technological interaction reinforces the importance of aligning instructional technology with learners' preferences and comfort levels, which are often shaped by gender socialization.

The challenges in authentic assessment and cultural barriers, as reported by Zaim et al. (2020) and Kaharuddin et al. (2023), further complicate the relationship between self-efficacy, proficiency, and gender. Tauchid (2023) emphasizes that the absence of context-specific assessment tools tailored to individual learner profiles can hinder accurate evaluation and improvement of speaking skills (p. 52). This is particularly problematic in ESP settings where professional communication is critical. Educators must adopt inclusive methodologies and authentic assessments that account for gender-based communication tendencies and psychological barriers. A comprehensive approach to these factors can improve the accuracy of proficiency and self-assessment for different groups of students, ultimately leading to more equitable and effective ESP instruction.

The study by Zhang et al. (2023) provides critical insights into how individual differences such as self-efficacy, speaking proficiency, and gender interact within an English for Specific

Purposes (ESP) learning context, offering significant implications for ESP instruction and learner achievement. While English language proficiency has traditionally been prioritized in EFL settings—especially in China where reading and writing dominate assessments—the shift towards ESP emphasizes the need for students to develop discipline-specific communication competencies, including speaking (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 3021). In this regard, speaking self-efficacy—defined as learners' belief in their ability to effectively communicate in English—emerges as a central psychological factor influencing speaking proficiency, and ultimately, academic and professional achievement in ESP contexts.

Zhang et al. (2023) employed structural equation modeling to uncover both direct and indirect relationships among English proficiency, self-efficacy, motivation, motivational intensity, and achievement. One of the most notable findings was that speaking self-efficacy has a strong and significant mediating effect on the relationship between language proficiency and ESP achievement (p. 3029). Learners with high speaking self-efficacy are more likely to perform better in ESP tasks not merely because of linguistic capability but due to their confidence in using English to accomplish professional or academic goals. For instance, students with higher self-efficacy demonstrated greater motivational intensity, sustained effort, and engagement, reinforcing the idea that belief in one's speaking ability contributes to both persistent effort and successful performance in ESP contexts.

Gender also appears to play a nuanced role in the interplay between self-efficacy and speaking proficiency. Though the Zhang et al. (2023) study does not explicitly analyze gender as a primary variable, previous research suggests that gender differences can significantly affect both self-efficacy and language performance. Studies like those by Fallah (2014) and Feng & Papi (2020) highlight that female learners often report lower self-efficacy despite equal or better performance in language tasks compared to males. If gendered perceptions persist in ESP contexts, they could potentially suppress the speaking confidence of female students, leading to disparities in engagement, motivational intensity, and eventual performance outcomes. Therefore, understanding how gender intersects with self-efficacy and speaking proficiency remains a critical area for ESP course designers.

The correlation between speaking self-efficacy, speaking proficiency, and gender in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context can be effectively interpreted through the sociocultural framework and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. Hao and Fang (2024) emphasize that self-efficacy is developed through social interactions and mediated environments, and that it significantly shapes learners' language learning outcomes, particularly in speaking, which is often linked with high anxiety (p. 2). Learners with low speaking self-efficacy may fall into a cycle of avoidance and underperformance, ultimately weakening their speaking proficiency (Gan, 2013). As ESP courses typically demand context-specific language production in professional or academic scenarios, understanding and improving speaking self-efficacy becomes essential for learners' communicative competence and confidence.

In their study, Hao and Fang (2024) identify four major sources of self-efficacy: enactive mastery experience (EME), vicarious experience (VE), verbal persuasion (VP), and physiological and affective states (PAS) (p. 2). Among these, EME—success in past speaking experiences—has the most direct influence on speaking self-efficacy. However, research has revealed discrepancies in the effectiveness of VE and VP, especially in public speaking, suggesting the need for context-sensitive approaches (Zhang et al., 2020).

In an ESP context where learners are preparing for real-world professional communication, it is crucial to promote mastery experiences and reduce anxiety-inducing factors. Gender may further complicate this dynamic; for example, male learners may exhibit greater confidence due to sociocultural conditioning, while female learners might report higher levels of speaking anxiety, affecting their self-efficacy and performance differently (Peura et al., 2021).

Flipped instruction has been presented as a promising approach to support speaking self-efficacy in EFL and ESP settings. Unlike traditional classrooms, where passive reception limits language use, flipped classrooms provide a flexible, student-centered environment where learners engage in pre-class content and active, in-class speaking tasks (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015; Strelan et al., 2020). Hao and Fang (2024) found that the flipped instructional model allows learners to rehearse and internalize content at their own pace, reducing cognitive overload and anxiety while increasing their opportunities for speaking practice (p. 4). This environment can enhance learners' sense of competence and autonomy—key components in boosting self-efficacy. However, Korkmaz and Mirici (2023) caution that flipped instruction does not automatically reduce anxiety, suggesting that its success is closely tied to learners' existing self-efficacy beliefs and the quality of interaction during in-class sessions.

Gender differences in self-efficacy and speaking proficiency remain underexplored in the flipped ESP context. While Hao and Fang (2024) do not focus specifically on gender, their findings provide a foundation for hypothesizing how male and female learners might respond differently to flipped instruction due to variances in socialized confidence levels and speaking anxiety (p. 6). For instance, male students may benefit more quickly from the independence of flipped learning, while female students might require more structured verbal encouragement (VP) and peer modeling (VE) to boost their self-belief. Therefore, ESP practitioners should adopt differentiated strategies that account for gendered learning experiences—such as pairing high-efficacy students with low-efficacy peers for peer modeling, and using affective strategies to alleviate anxiety. A deeper understanding of these gendered patterns is vital for designing inclusive ESP speaking instruction that cultivates speaking self-efficacy and enhances overall proficiency.

Discussion

The relationship between speaking self-efficacy and proficiency in ESP contexts is well-established in the reviewed literature. Zhang et al. (2023) identified a strong mediating role of self-efficacy between proficiency and achievement, suggesting that learners with high self-efficacy not only perform better in ESP tasks but also demonstrate higher motivation and persistence. This indicates that the belief in one's communicative ability can be as critical as actual language skills. Tauchid (2023) and Du & Quyen (2023) support this view, emphasizing that instructional methods tailored to boosting learners' confidence—such as personalized feedback and scaffolded speaking tasks—can enhance overall speaking performance in specialized English settings.

Gender adds an additional layer of complexity to this correlation. Multiple studies cited in the literature (e.g., Fergus et al., 2022; Feng & Papi, 2020) suggest that while female learners often perform as well as or better than their male counterparts in language tasks, they tend to report lower self-efficacy, particularly in speaking. This discrepancy can lead to reduced participation and higher speaking anxiety in ESP contexts.

Conversely, male learners may exhibit higher confidence but not necessarily higher competence, resulting in misalignments between perceived and actual proficiency. These findings call for more gender-sensitive approaches in curriculum design, such as providing safe speaking environments and using peer modeling to support less confident learners.

Technology and instructional design play an instrumental role in mediating these dynamics. Tools like TikTok, VoiceThread, and Flipgrid have shown promise in reducing speaking anxiety and increasing self-efficacy, particularly when aligned with learners' preferences. However, gender-based differences in technology usage must be considered. Female learners may prefer expressive and collaborative platforms, whereas male learners may respond better to competitive, task-driven interfaces. As Hao and Fang (2024) highlight, approaches such as flipped instruction can further promote speaking self-efficacy by offering learners greater autonomy and rehearsal time, though the success of such methods depends heavily on existing self-efficacy levels and the quality of classroom interaction. Without attending to these gendered patterns, even well-designed interventions may fall short of their intended impact.

Conclusion

The correlation between speaking self-efficacy, proficiency, and gender in ESP contexts reflects a broader need to move beyond one-size-fits-all teaching approaches. While language proficiency remains foundational, learners' confidence in using English—especially in domain-specific settings—emerges as a powerful determinant of success. Self-efficacy influences learners' motivation, engagement, and resilience in facing speaking challenges, and its development must be a central objective in ESP curriculum design. At the same time, gendered experiences shape how learners perceive their capabilities and interact with learning tools and environments, necessitating more differentiated, inclusive strategies.

In the context of Uzbekistan, where ESP programs are increasingly integral to higher education and vocational training, these findings are especially relevant. As institutions like TUIT (Tashkent University of Information Technologies) expand their English-language offerings, it is vital to incorporate practices that boost speaking self-efficacy and address gender-based disparities. Doing so can foster more equitable educational outcomes, better prepare students for global communication demands, and enhance the overall effectiveness of ESP instruction across the country.

REFERENCES

1. Abeysekera, L., & Dawson, P. (2015). Motivation and cognitive load in the flipped classroom: Definition, rationale and a call for research. Higher Education Research & Development, 34(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.93433
2. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. Freeman.
3. Du, T. T., & Quyen, H. T. Le. (2023). Language Learning Strategies to Improve English Speaking Skills among Vietnamese Students: A Case of Three High Schools in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam. World Journal of English Language, 13(7), 116. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n7p116
4. Fallah, N. (2014). Willingness to communicate in English, communication self-confidence, motivation, shyness and teacher immediacy among Iranian English-major undergraduates: A structural equation modeling approach. Learning and Individual Differences, 30, 140–147. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2013.12.006

5. Feng, L., & Papi, M. (2020). Persistence in language learning: The role of grit and future self-guides. Learning and Individual Differences, 81, 101904. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2020.101904
6. Fergus, K., Tanen, A., Ahmad, S., Gardner, S., Warner, E., McLeod, D., Stephen, J., Carter, W., & Periera, A. (2022). Treatment Satisfaction With Couplelinks Online Intervention to Promote Dyadic Coping in Young Couples Affected by Breast Cancer. Frontiers in Psychology. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.862555
7. Gan, Z. (2013). Understanding English speaking difficulties: An investigation of two Chinese populations. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 34(3), 231–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2013.768622
8. Hao, X., & Fang, F. (2024). Learners' speaking self-efficacy, self-efficacy sources and their relations in the traditional and flipped instructional modes. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 1-16.
9. Iio, T., Maeda, R., Ogawa, K., Yoshikawa, Y., Ishiguro, H., Suzuki, K., Aoki, T., Maesaki, M., & Hama, M. (2019). Improvement of Japanese adults' English speaking skills via experiences speaking to a robot. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 35(2), 228–245. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12325
10. Kaharuddin, K., Arafah, B., Nurpahmi, S., Sukmawaty, S., Rahman, I. F., & Juniardi, Y. (2023). Exploring How Reading Aloud and Vocabulary Enrichment Shape English Speaking Skills Among Indonesian Learners of English. World Journal of English Language, 13(8), 436. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n8p436
11. Korkmaz, S., & Mirici, İ.H. (2023). Converting a conventional flipped class into a synchronous online flipped class during COVID-19: University students' self-regulation skills and anxiety. Interactive Learning Environments, 31(9), 5746–5758.https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.2018615
12. Peura, P., Aro, T., Räikkönen, E., Viholainen, H., Koponen, T., Usher, E.L., & Aro, M. (2021). Trajectories of change in reading self-efficacy: A longitudinal analysis of self-efficacy and its sources. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 64, 101947. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2021.101947
13. Sha'Ar, M. Y. M. A., & Boonsuk, Y. (2021). What hinders english speaking in thai efl learners? investigating factors that affect the development of their english speaking skills. Mextesol Journal, 45(3), 0–2. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1310991
14. Shin, J. L. K., & Yunus, M. M. (2021). The Attitudes of Pupils towards using Flipgrid in Learning English Speaking Skills. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 20(3), 151–168. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.3.10
15. Strelan, P., Osborn, A., & Palmer, E. (2020). The flipped classroom: A meta-analysis of effects on student performance across disciplines and education levels. Educational Research Review, 30, 100314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.10031
16. Tauchid, A. (2023). English Speaking Strategies by EFL Learnerss to Enhanche Self-Efficacy. Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidik Indonesia, 2(2), 48-61.
17. Zaim, M., Refnaldi, R., & Arsyad, S. (2020). Authentic Assessment for Speaking Skills: Problem and Solution for English Secondary School Teachers in Indonesia. International Journal of Instruction, 13(3), 587–604. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.13340a

18. Zhang, X., Ardasheva, Y., & Austin, B.W. (2020). Self-efficacy and English public speaking performance: A mixed-method approach. English for Specific Purposes, 59, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2020.02.001
19. Zhang, X., Dai, S., Ardasheva, Y., & Hong, Y. (2023). Relationships Among English Language Proficiency, Self-efficacy, Motivation, Motivational Intensity, and Achievement in an ESP/EAP Context. Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 52(6), 3019-3038.