

## The Role of Teacher Support, Classmate Support, and Self-efficacy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety among University Students Using English as a Foreign Language

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### Abstract

The role of teacher support and student support in reducing speaking anxiety was explored in this research. The contribution of self-efficacy on the impact of teacher and classmate support in reducing speaking anxiety also was investigated among students at an international university in Thailand. The survey data were gathered from 345 students from the first to the fourth year. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was employed for data analysis. The results showed a positive association between teacher support and self-efficacy. Furthermore, classmate support had a positive linkage with self-efficacy. The results revealed that the higher self-efficacy of the student the lower the degree of speaking anxiety they experienced during oral presentations.

**Keywords:** *Teacher support, classmate support, self-efficacy, speaking anxiety*

### Introduction

In this age of globalization, collaboration among the nations of the world becomes desirable. This international collaboration is supported primarily by the English language (Anyadubalu, 2010). While important, there are many places where English as a foreign language (EFL), such as in Thailand, has limited access to real English environments. This leads to a lack of opportunities for verbal exchange and oral presentation—which are important for the development of students' speaking skills. Having access to such opportunities not only improves students' speaking proficiency, but it also can enhance students' self-efficacy to lower their speaking anxiety. This leads to a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Asakereh & Dehghannezhad, 2015; Jackson et al., 2017; Mede & Karaimak, 2017). While positive correlations have been shown by various studies, there still remains minimal literature on the relationship between affective variables, such as teacher support, classmate support, and self-efficacy towards the reduction of speaking anxiety, particularly during an oral presentation in the classroom. This research sought to bring these variables together and determine the extent to which such variables contributed to reducing speaking anxiety in an EFL classroom oral presentation setting. The guiding questions for this research were:

1. Does teacher and classmate support boost the self-efficacy of a student during the oral presentation in the classroom? and
2. Is the student's self-efficacy the predictor in reducing speaking anxiety during an oral presentation in the classroom?

### Literature Review

#### *Teacher and Classmate Support*

Teacher support can be shown by appraisals in which students receive evaluation and feedback to enhance performances during conversations. Feedback and comments of the teacher may influence students' self-efficacy (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Feedback should be given with empathy by including recommendations dealing with strategies for improvement, instead of providing only corrective feedback. Besides having empathy, the teacher could also organize classroom tasks that can be implemented to decrease anxiety, such as doing projects, establishing a learning community, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. Providing indirect correction, accepting the need for self-growth protection, employing teacher immediacy, and praising are also effective strategies to reduce students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Teacher

support can also include providing comfort and helping students cultivate a sense of personal efficacy, which can alleviate academic anxiety (Bandura, 2001). Teacher support is best considered a constituent of the classroom context that interacts with other aspects that bear influence on student engagement. Other contextual features are classroom goal structure (Hughes & Kwok, 2007), academic initiative (Danielsen et al., 2011), and teacher characteristics (Sakiz et al., 2012). Furthermore, teacher support is crucial for students to be self-motivated in doing their school work (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Teachers' support also upholds positive developmental results, such as having a positive relation toward academic performance (Ho et al., 2017), and encourages students to use help-seeking and help-giving styles in learning that enhances their engagement (Ansorg et al., 2017).

### ***Classmate Support***

Research posited that speaking in front of their peers provokes anxiety in foreign language learners, as they are frightened of making errors and being laughed at (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). However, with appropriate support, the extent of anxiety may be mitigated. When classmate support is evident, it leads individuals to believe that they are cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, or belong to a network of communication and mutual obligation (Torsheim et al., 2000). For classmate support, it may refer to emotional support and caring behaviors student show during a presentation (Malecki & Demaray, 2006). Classmates offer informal support, and they interact directly with their peers in many informal settings, particularly when they interact in the school situation (Ansorg et al., 2017). Furthermore, research claimed that perceived classmate support has a positive association with academic adjustment (Wang et al., 2011). In the same vein, there is evidence that classmate support is positively linked to academic adjustment. For example, it was found that perceived school environment, which encompasses support for autonomy and competence, is predictive of later academic achievement (Wang et al., 2011). Additionally, the main function of perceived classmate support is the provision of social acceptance and a sense of belonging (Torsheim et al., 2000).

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy is defined as the person's belief in their ability to act, and their behavior in the learning process. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) describe the key components of a student's engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and motivation) as being related to self-efficacy. In past decades, self-efficacy has been studied extensively in educational research, specifically in the area of academic performance, motivation, and self-regulation (Bandura et al., 1985; Bradley et al., 2017; Dogan, 2015; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Skaalvik et al., 2015). In EFL contexts, studies on self-efficacy were centered on variables such as language learning strategies, language anxiety, motivation, and language achievement. It has been shown that there is a strong correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety (Mede & Karairmak, 2017). Research posited that self-efficacy can help students control their anxiety in the class (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). For example, an individual with a high level of self-efficacy tends to have lower anxiety in an EFL setting (Cryder et al., 2006). EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs are also correlated with their listening achievement (Chen, 2007) and writing performance (Fatemi & Vahidnia, 2013). With regards to oral presentation, research by Charoensukmongkol (2019) reported that students with low anxiety also obtained higher scores on their presentations than did those who reported high levels of anxiety.

### ***Speaking Anxiety***

Speaking in public is one of the biggest fears among people from different walks of life (Pryor et al., 2005). Even professional speakers sometimes cannot avoid feeling anxious when speaking in front of a group of people. A survey from Chapman University conducted in 2014, ranks 'fear of public speaking' as one of the top fears among American adults. Brogan et al. (2008) posited that speech anxiety is a combination of internal and external factors including the environment that arouses anxiety in a speaker, inhibiting their ability to effectively communicate verbally. Neither the word anxiety nor the word fear had positive connotations for them, but in small doses, they are necessary

to boost energy levels and the critical thinking abilities of the speaker (Kankam & Boateng, 2017). For students, speaking anxiety may stem from other learning difficulties. It is often difficult to recognize compared with other learning difficulties, as everyone tends to feel anxious sometimes.

A growing body of research has recognized the factors that can reduce anxiety in speaking English in the classroom (Akkakoson, 2016; Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Kasbi & Shirvan, 2017; Mede & Karaırmak, 2017; Shorna & Suchona, 2019; Woodrow, 2006). Considering these observations, foreign language anxiety has been studied extensively by researchers in the field of education. One study revealed that EFL anxiety has a negative effect on the willingness of students to communicate in classrooms (Liu & Jackson, 2008).

## **Hypotheses Development**

### ***Teacher and Classmate Support and EFL Speaking Anxiety***

In the current research it was proposed that teacher support and classmate support was positively associated with self-efficacy among students in an international university in Thailand. A growing body of research on perceived teacher support tends to correlate with student self-efficacy, which is in turn linked with their academic achievements, career decision-making, and student wellness (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Suldo et al., 2009).

In the current study it was predicted that students with a higher level of self-efficacy would tend to show lower speaking anxiety. A body of research has predicted that self-efficacy is a significant factor that can alleviate speaking anxiety in an EFL classroom environment (Akkakoson, 2016; Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Kasbi & Shirvan, 2017; Mede & Karaırmak, 2017; Shorna & Suchona, 2019; Woodrow, 2006). Considering these observations, therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*H1: Teacher Support has a positive association with self-efficacy among students.*

*H2: Classmate Support has a positive influence on self-efficacy among students.*

*H3: Students with a higher level of self-efficacy will demonstrate lower speaking anxiety.*

## **Methods**

### ***Participants and Context***

The participants were made up of 16 nationalities, with a majority of them Thais, who were in the first to fourth year of their undergraduate studies at a private international university in Thailand. The participants were selected on a convenience sampling basis during the 2019 academic year. Their language proficiency level was at an intermediate level, according to the IELTS Test.

The student sample was chosen from two management subjects, namely, Introduction to Business and Business Communication. All who presented in the class were asked to answer the survey questions. The team chose these particular subjects because they demanded a lot of classroom participation and interaction. Students were required to do an oral presentation before the end of the term. In their presentation, they were expected to present professionally in an extemporaneous manner. They were expected to rehearse by themselves before making their own presentation. The score for this oral presentation represented 10% of the final grade. Therefore, reading from notes was highly discouraged, and students were supposed to maintain good eye contact with their classmates and lecturer. The students were expected to participate and interact with the lecturers and make sure they could answer the questions posed by their lecturer and classmates after the presentation. The actual scores given by the lecturer were measured based on the five criteria: language clarity of presentation, ability to handle instructor's questions, understanding of content, physical delivery including eye contact, and vocal qualities. The measure was a revised version adopted from Ammons and Mills (2005).

### **Data Collection Method**

An online questionnaire survey was employed for data collection because it allowed students to deal with the survey at their most convenient time. A survey also guarantees anonymity. The online survey was shared via a link and a QR code with 500 students. They were informed about the objectives of the research, along with that assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. The data collection duration took about a month. At the end of the data collection, a total of 345 usable responses were gathered, which represented a 69% response rate.

To support the survey findings, the researchers conducted informal interviews with 10 teachers handling these two subjects, which were done via Microsoft Teams Platform to observe the social distancing protocol due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The responses of the teachers were collected and summarized based on the researchers' impression. The result of the interview was used to integrate the quantitative data to support the research findings. We believed that our interviews may provide insights regarding the effects of teachers' and classmates' support in enhancing self-efficacy during the oral presentation.

### **Measurement**

The survey contained three categories of measurements. First, *Teacher and Classmate support* was measured using the scale developed by Torsheim et al. (2000). The scale contains eight questions: four for *Teacher support* and four for *Classmate support*. For *teacher support*, the items were: "Our teachers treat us fairly," "When I need extra help, I can get it," "My teachers are interested in me as a person," and "Our teachers are nice and friendly". For *classmate support*, the items were: "The student in my class enjoy being together," "Most of the students in my class are kind and helpful," "Other students accept me as I am," and "When a classmate is upset, other students comfort him or her." All questions in the original scale were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Second, there were items on *Self-efficacy*, adopted from Chen et al., (2001). This scale consists of eight questions. Example items were: "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself," "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them," "In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me," and "I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind." All the items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

*EFL Speaking Anxiety* was measured using the modified version of the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS), developed and validated by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012). The scale was chosen because it evaluates speaking anxiety in an EFL public speaking class, such as that observed in this study's context. Example items were "I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English," "I start to panic when I have to speak English without preparation in advance," "In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know," "I feel confident while I am speaking English," "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English." The scale contained seventeen questions that were measured on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Aside from the main variables in the hypotheses that were predicted to explain EFL oral presentation in reducing speaking anxiety, some personal characteristics that may be related were also included as control variables in the analysis of the data. These included age, gender, GPA, faculty, language, and education level.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The authors used Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression to analyze the collected data. PLS is a combination of principal component analysis, path coefficient analysis and regressions to generate the estimated standardized regression coefficients for the model paths and factor loadings for the items measured. This analysis was selected for two reasons: first, PLS is flexible as it does not require the data to be normally distributed compared to others; next, in this research, the variables were not distributed normally, therefore it fits. PSL estimation was performed using the latest version of WrapPLS (version 6.0).

## Results and Discussion

The demographic and academic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Gender	Nationality	Percentage
Male: 206	Thai: 240	69.6
Female: 139	Chinese: 63*	18.2
<b>Age (yr)</b>	Korean: 12	3.5
Minimum	Burmese: 11	3.2
Maximum	Cambodian: 1	0.3
Mean & S.D.	Indian: 2	0.6
	Nepalese: 1	0.3
<b>Education Level</b>	Taiwanese: 6	1.7
First year college: 55	Vietnamese: 2	0.6
Second year college: 134	Filipino: 1	0.3
Third year college: 59	Japanese: 2	0.6
Fourth year college: 97	Pakistani: 1	0.3
<b>Cumulative GPA</b>	Laos: 2	0.6
Minimum	American: 1	0.3
Maximum	Dutch: 1	0.3
Mean & S.D.		

\*Includes a Cantonese speaker

### Measurement Model

Both convergent and discriminant validity and reliability of the constructs, which were multi-items, were estimated. Convergent validity was evaluated by checking the factor loadings. The criteria adopted indicated that the values must be higher than .50 to support sufficient convergent validity measures (Hair et al., 2017). Four items of speaking anxiety construct were deleted as they were below the factor loading requirement. Discriminant validity was evaluated by the (AVE) average variance extracted to the squared correlation coefficient. Fornell and Larker (1981) mentioned that the square root of the AVE must be greater than the correlation between the constructs to enable confirmation of discriminant validity. Table 2 shows that all AVEs met the requirements, Next Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients were checked. Coefficients' requirements must be higher than .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 2.** Correlations among Variables and Convergent Validity

Var.	Cronbach's Alpha		Composite									
	Reliability	e	TS	CS	SE	ANX	AGE			FAC	LAN	EDU
TS	.82	.88	(.81)	.60**	.31**	.17*	-.03	-.05	-.02	-.14	.07	-.02
	.86	.90		(.84)	.25**	.25**	.00	-.11	-.14	—	.09	.04
CS							4			.19**		
SE	.92	.94			(.81)	.21**	.08	-.05	-.01	-.07	-.01	.10
ANX	.95	.96				(.79)	.32	-.04	-.25**	-.09	.25**	.06
AGE	—	—					(1)	-.10	-.20**	-.11	-.09	.60**
GEN	—	—					(1)	.21**	—	.001	.11	.04
	—	—							(1)	—		
GPA										.03**	-.15	-.13
FAC	—	—								(1)	.07	.24**
LAN	—	—									(1)	-.06
EDU	—	—										(1)

Notes. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . Average variances extracted from latent variables are shown in the parentheses.  
 Var. = Variables, TS = Teacher support, CS = Classmate support, SE = Self-efficacy, ANX = Speaking anxiety, AGE = age, GEN = Gender, GPA = Grade point average, FAC = Faculty, LAN = Language, and EDU = Educational level.

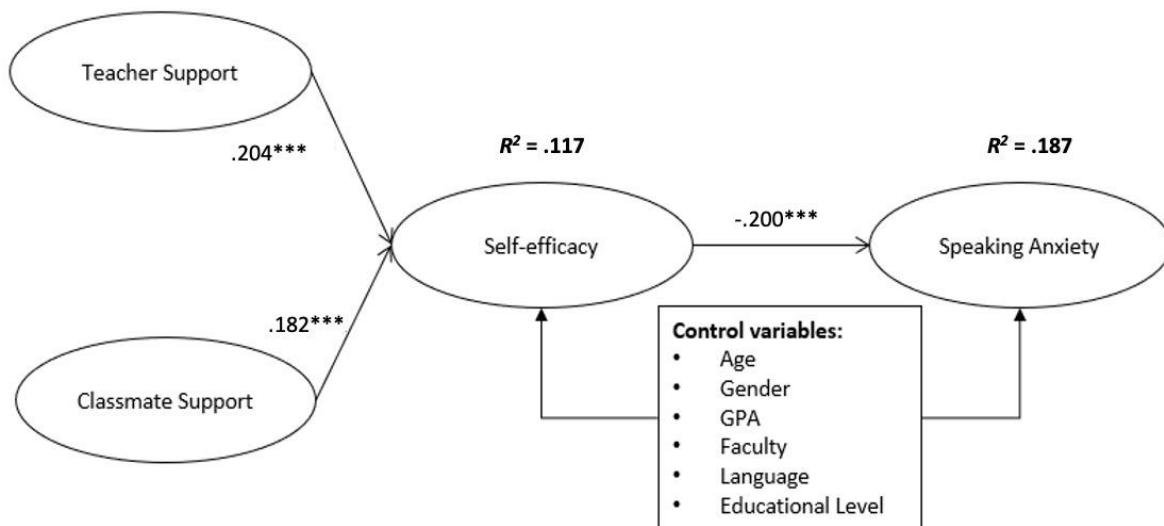
### Hypotheses Testing

The results from the PLS regression analysis are shown in Figure 1. Standardized path coefficients and  $p$ -values were estimated using a bootstrap resampling technique with 100 subsamples. The findings are presented as follows. Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between teacher support and self-efficacy. The result revealed that the association was positive and it was also significant ( $\beta = .20$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported. This is consistent with the previous research that claimed teacher support is an effective strategy in reducing students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that classmate support has a positive relationship with self-efficacy. Our results supported a positive relation, which was also statistically significant ( $\beta = .18$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported. This result is consistent with prior research which found that classmate support increases self-esteem so students are driven to feel they belong to the group (Torsheim et al., 2000).

Hypothesis 3 predicted a negative relation between self-efficacy and speaking anxiety. The result supported a negative relation, which was statistically significant ( $\beta = .22$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported. The result is also consistent with previous research, which claimed that self-efficacy helps students control their feeling of anxiety in the class (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Mede & Karaimak, 2017).

As for the control variables, the results were as follows. Speaking anxiety was negatively related with age ( $\beta = -.08$ ;  $p = .06$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.02$ ;  $p = .03$ ), GPA ( $\beta = -.16$ ;  $p = .001$ ), Faculty ( $\beta = -.08$ ;  $p = .07$ ), but positively related with Language ( $\beta = .19$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and Educational Level ( $\beta = 0.10$ ;  $p = .03$ ). In other words, only the association between GPA and language was highly significant. This implies that, regardless of their year of stay in the university, students will not be anxious if they are doing well academically and possess a good proficiency level. Furthermore, it could be implied that 4<sup>th</sup>-year students were less anxious when it comes to giving presentations as they had a lot of experience in their three years of stay in the university. The researchers also tested the student's characteristics toward self-efficacy. However, none of the interaction terms were statistically significant. Self-efficacy was positively related with age ( $\beta = .20$ ;  $p < .05$ ), gender ( $\beta = .05$ ;  $p = .13$ ), GPA ( $\beta = -.13$ ;  $p = .06$ ), Faculty ( $\beta = .05$ ;  $p = .09$ ); Language ( $\beta = .06$ ;  $p = .06$ ) and Educational Level ( $\beta = .11$ ;  $p = .06$ ).



Notes: \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ;  
Standardized coefficients are reported;  
Solid lines represent statistically significant paths.

**Figure 1.** The Relationship among Variables Established by Partial Least Squares Regression Analysis

The main objective of this research was to investigate the role of teacher support, classmate support and self-efficacy in reducing speaking anxiety. The data were positively significant with the association of these variables. These findings suggest that students who received support from teachers and classmates possessed a high level of self-efficacy, particularly during the oral presentation using the English language, thereby, delivering their scripts well. Finally, for the third research objective, regarding self-efficacy lowering speaking anxiety particularly in the classroom presentation, the result was also significant. This implies that when a student possessed higher levels of self-efficacy, they tended to be more confident and they had more control of their anxiety. These findings are also consistent with the findings of previous researchers who claimed students with a high level of self-efficacy tended to have lower anxiety (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Crysder et al., 2006; Fatimi & Vahidnia, 2013 & Charoensukmongkol, 2009).

The present researchers gathered qualitative data by doing informal interviews with the 10 teachers who were teaching Introduction to Business and Business Communication in order to support the findings from the data collected using the survey. The majority of the responses from the informal interviews mentioned that the teacher should complement and give constructive feedback, and when students felt that their teacher and their classmates were supportive during the presentation, they felt comfortable and confident and would yield good performances. Furthermore, teachers should set high expectations and encouraged the students to achieve higher standards observed that the students eventually performed well. Along the way, teachers should offer lots of praise, show care to every student, and be transparent and ready to extend help. They should provide a conducive friendly class climate, non-hostile environment, and correct students' pronunciation after the presentation. Moreover, the teachers create social and intellectual climates, where collaboration and cooperation are encouraged. There should be opportunities for students to interact with their classmates and with their teacher as well. The teacher and classmates can also give prompt feedback about the presentation in a friendly manner for future improvements. Additionally, when students perceived that teachers and classmates are concerned and sympathetic, their self-efficacy tends to be higher. To sum up, having teacher and classmate support would allow students to develop a certain level of self-efficacy; these factors explain why students with higher levels of self-efficacy tended to experience lower speaking anxiety during oral presentation in the classroom.

Moreover, this current research offered further evidence to supplement the findings of previous studies. The teachers in this reported study encouraged the students to rehearse before the presentation at their own pace. They were welcome to ask questions privately for more clarification about the presentation. Teachers should be able to provide detailed guidelines, organize appropriate groupings, help students pick the best topic for a presentation, guide them on how to use suitable visual aids, provide prompt and detailed feedback, and evaluate students' performance (King, 2002). In the management of a presentation task, teachers need to remember to empathize. When the focus is student-centered, it can encourage cooperation and support, which are crucial for oral presentations.

### **Conclusions and Limitations**

This study contributed additional understanding to the role of self-efficacy by showing that students with a higher level of self-confidence tended to have a more satisfactory performance during the oral presentation. Nevertheless, it is recommended that future research projects consider mediators that might affect the relationship between student's self-efficacy toward their oral presentation performance outcomes. For instance, students who are still developing their language proficiency have added issues to work on. These challenges can be overcome through adopting self-efficacy strategies, such as seeing people speak English everyday inside and outside the classroom, which research has shown to help students enhance the quality of their oral presentation. For example, in Business Communication class, students are not allowed to speak any other languages. In the same class, they are also engaged in English role-play and debating activities to boost their self-efficacy. Against the background of evidence from previous research supporting the benefits of self-efficacy.

efficacy and the capability of modeling experiences to improve the quality of oral presentation, this research concluded that self-efficacy modeling can be used as another intervention that may help students improve English speaking performance and increase their ability to be successful in learning English.

Even though this current study offered contributions that expanded the researchers' understanding of the contribution of teacher and classmate support and self-efficacy towards speaking anxiety, there are still limitations that should be recognized. First, the current study collected data from a small group of university students in Thailand alone. Second, the analysis was based on the survey data that were collected on a cross-sectional basis. Using cross-sectional data makes the direction of causality difficult to infer. Third, the qualitative interview involved just 10 people. There should be more respondents to enable more reliable conclusions to be drawn.

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