

# Developing Speaking Efficacy Beliefs in Japanese University Students with Repetitive Information Exchange Tasks

反復される英語の情報交換練習が日本人大学生の「自己効力感」の開発に貢献

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# Developing Speaking Efficacy Beliefs in Japanese University Students with Repetitive Information Exchange Tasks

反復される英語の情報交換練習が日本人大学生の「自己効力感」の開発に貢献

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## 抄録：

この研究は、与えられた課題を基にした英語体験学習が、学生の「自己効力感」にどの程度、影響を与えるのかを調査するものである。日本人大学生は、三人組のグループに分けられ、共通の目的を達成するために情報交換を行った。そして、五つの質問項目のアンケート調査が、英語体験学習の前と後の2回行われた。日本人大学生のコミュニケーションの自己効力感に関する回答は、間隔をあけて比較された。オープン・エンドの質問に対する回答から、自己効力感の兆候がみられた。この当初の結果から、与えられた課題を基にした英語体験学習は、日本人大学生の自己効力感を促進することが示唆された。

## Abstract：

This study investigates the degree to which a task-based communicative activity can influence the self-efficacy of students. Japanese university students were grouped in triads and required to exchange information to accomplish a common goal. A five-item questionnaire survey was conducted at two intervals (pre-and post-activity). The students' communicative self-efficacy responses for both the intervals were then compared. Moreover, comments from an open-ended question indicated signs of self-efficacy. The initial findings suggest that task-based communicative activities can promote self-efficacy in Japanese university students.

キーワード：EFL、自己効力感、日本の大学生、代行体験、奨励、リラックス出来るような環境、習熟経験

**Keywords** : EFL, self-efficacy, Japanese university students, vicarious experience, encouragement, relaxed environment, mastery experience

## 1. Introduction

The goal of many second language learners is to speak the target language with a degree of functionality and fluency so as to be understood by an interlocuter using that language. And though the other three skills; listening, reading and writing are invaluable in their own right, in the Japanese EFL context, oral skills in English are arguably the less proficient, yet the most desirable of the four skills. This is particularly true for Japanese English language learners at the university level who would have spent the better part of six years studying English in a formal setting. Results of studying in such an atmosphere are varied when it comes to oral fluency. One factor which invariably affects these learners fluency is the lack of self-efficacy, and in general self-confidence. Many Japanese university students express the desire to speak English, but many also bring a self-deprecating attitude to university with regards to their English abilities, especially speaking. This attitude may stem from the lack of opportunities to actually speak the language in junior and senior high school because of testing-oriented curriculums and syllabi. Leeming (2018)

Self-efficacy (SE) is the belief an individual has in themselves to perform a task, Bandura (1986) and is a central part of social cognitive psychology which theorizes that humans have the capacity to shape their environment rather than be react passively to it. Bandura (1999) Though sometimes used interchangeably, self-efficacy differs from self-confidence in that it focuses on an individual's belief in one self to successfully complete a specific task rather than a general positive outlook in one's ability. Moreno & Kilpatrick (2018) With this in mind, the following research aimed to examine whether repeated interdependent speaking tasks would aid in increasing the self-efficacy in 1st-year Japanese university students on a particular task where information was exchanged by speaking.

## 2. Self-efficacy theory

Henry Ford, the automobile pioneer is once quoted as saying that whether we believe we can or not, we are usually right. This statement is indicative of one component of social cognitive theory which proposes that a person's self-beliefs allow a person to control one's own thoughts, feelings, and actions, and that persons who believe they can do well on a task will try harder and master skills faster than those with lower self-efficacy beliefs. What one thinks, believes, and feels affects how they will behave. Mills (2014).

Bandura (1977) categorizes the four sources of self-efficacy to be; (1) *mastery experience*, (2) *vicarious experiences*, (3) *social persuasion*, and (4) *physiological states*. Performance

accomplishments or mastery experiences are the most influential of the four aspects, because the more a person successfully masters a particular task, the more efficacious they will feel about that task. These positive or negative past experiences are highly influential in shaping efficacy beliefs. Pintrich & Schunk (2002) Vicarious experiences happen when a learner witnesses peers successfully perform a task which in consequence help that learner shape efficacy beliefs by comparing their performance with those similar to them. Social or verbal persuasion can come in the positive form of encouragement or negative form of critique, and can affect the self-efficacy beliefs of an individual. Physiological or affective states refer mainly to the anxiety level of the learner when presented with a particular task. People understand their anxiety, tension, and depression as a sign of deficiency. Bandura (2004) It is predicted that the lower the anxiety level the learner has about a certain task, the higher self-efficacious beliefs they possess.

### **2.1 Self-efficacy and foreign language learning**

There have been numerous studies documenting the correlation between self-efficacy and increased second language learning proficiency. SE was found to have a direct relationship with the reading and listening proficiency of female college students of French as a foreign language. Mills, Pajares, and Heron (2006) Subsequently, in Mills, Pajares, and Heron (2007) SE was also found to have a direct relationship with college students' beliefs in their ability to study for a course and that their favorable performances were due to those self-efficacious beliefs rather than ability. Hsieh & Schallert (2008) also make the distinction that students studying Spanish in an area of the United States where it was frequently spoken increased students' comfortability with the language and therefore made them feel more efficacious. The largest influence on SE is task-related proficiency and the more a learner interacts and participates in the foreign language the greater their self-efficacy Bandura (1997) In Hsieh & Kang (2010) also found that Korean high school students studying English attributed their ability to perform well on English tests to their efficacious feelings whereas those with lower scores reasoned outside influences which indicated they felt they had less control over their outcomes. In a year-long study, Leeming, (2018) also investigates the relationship between increased self-efficacy and second language proficiency and concludes that if given the opportunity to practice in the classroom, self-efficacy in speaking will increase in Japanese university students. Since research has revealed that positive self-efficacy beliefs can be attributed to increased proficiency it is necessary for instructors to provide syllabi that allow for increased opportunities for students to engage in challenging activities where students can experience success, witness the success of peers, be encouraged, and feel comfortable.

### **3. Research Question**

Considering the four sources of self-efficacy, can repeated information exchange tasks aid in increasing students' speaking self-efficacy?

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Participants

The participants for the study, (n=20, 11 female, 9 male) were first-year students in the department of social studies at a private university in the *kansai* region of Japan. All students spoke Japanese as a first language and had six years of formal English education at their junior and senior high schools. Students were streamed for the compulsory English course and were at the highest of three levels with estimated TOEIC scores ranging between 400 and 500. The oral skills course ran for 15 weeks with 90-minute lessons, five of which were devoted to the activity used in this study. On the first day of the course, students were briefed on the course syllabus and then were introduced to the task which would be conducted on that first day, and four more times throughout the semester.

### 4.2 Task description

The directions for the activity were written in Japanese to ensure there were no misunderstandings concerning of the task. In addition to the written explanation, participants were given time to consult with one another as well as pose questions to the instructor to clear up any uncertainties. Once all queries were clarified, participants were given an article which served as a primer for the pre-questionnaire, (Appendix).

This primer article was given so that participants would understand the level and nature of subsequent readings. Without understanding the level and nature of this model article, they would have no way to judge the items on the questionnaire. The level of the model article, as well as the subsequent readings were chosen for vocabulary level and length. Short Articles for Reading Comprehension 1, the first level of a 3-level series of readers was chosen for its variety of topics, level of vocabulary, and short glossary of words at the bottom of each reading.

Along with the model reading, a *Helpful Word Sheet* was distributed and participants were required to write 10 words from the article that would be later used to aid them in relaying the information in the article to two partners. Once the pre-questionnaire was completed, the first of 5 tasks was assigned.

Throughout the 15-week semester, 5 identical tasks were completed every two to three weeks. Only the theme of the articles changed. For each task, 3 necessary handouts were distributed; *a blank sheet numbered 1 to 10 (10 Helpful Word List)*, *a 10-item answer sheet*, and *1 of 5 readings for each 3 groups*. With a total of 20 participants, 6 groups of 3, and 1 group of 4 were randomly situated each day the activity was conducted.

On the instructor's signal, participants began reading 3 separate articles; *a, b, and c*. Any participant with questions concerning his or her reading received direct clarification from the instructor during the allocated 10 minutes. This was necessary on only a few occasions throughout the whole of the semester as the level of the readings chosen was purposefully easy in regards to the participants' vocabulary level.

Respectively, the second and third group members were also given 10 minutes to complete their articles and record 10 words to be used for explanations. When all three participants had completed their explanations, *readings a, b, and c* were collected by the instructor to ensure no one was able to consult with them during the explanation period. Each of the three participants were allocated 7 minutes to explain their particular reading while the other two partners took notes. When all three members had finished explaining their particular reading, a 10-question quiz covering all three readings was given orally with participants writing their answers on the answer sheets provided. The quiz questions were straightforward, purposefully not complex, or requiring inference, in hopes of building confidence in 'task mastery', one necessary component of building self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) To aid in the self-efficacy building, the participants were told that if they had scored 4 out of 10 or above on the quiz, it was deemed satisfactory. This encouragement from the instructor related to another requirement to build self-efficacy, '*verbal persuasion*' as well as '*vicarious experiences*', that being witnessing their peers score similar marks. Bandura (1997)

## 5. Results

### Pre and post questionnaire

All questionnaire items were written in Japanese to help ensure no misunderstanding of what was being asked. Back-translated English has been inserted for reference in the Appendix by a Japanese language researcher familiar with the project. Participants were asked to rank themselves on a six-point Likert scale. 1 (not true at all), 2 (slightly true), 3 (somewhat true), 4 (quite true), 5 (true), 6 (very true).

Questions 1 through 4 were 'can do' type questions and specific to the task, which Bandura (2006) notes is a necessity for proper assessment. Two of the four 'can do' questions were concerned with speaking and the other two with reading and the ability to select important words from the article to use in later explanations. Questions 5, 6 and 7 were concerned with the participants' feelings about speaking English.

Raofi, Tan, & Chan (2012) In their extensive review of self-efficacy and second language learning research point to the fact that most of the studies reviewed relied on questionnaires with results dependent on the honesty of participants and that interviews with learners is the only way to provide deep insight into learners' beliefs. With this in mind, the free comment section was distributed with the post-questionnaire to more precisely gauge the feelings and thoughts of the participants with regards to their self-efficacy beliefs.

Participants were given 25 minutes to write freely any thoughts they had concerning the 3-way activities done throughout the semester. This open-ended form of questioning allowed respondents to offer candid information that would otherwise not be recognized in an itemized questionnaire. Their feelings, attitudes, and opinions were expressed in detail and revealed several positive outcomes related to language learning; including recognition of their own weaknesses with regards to English proficiency, motivation to do better, and overall satisfaction with the activity.

**Table 1**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire concerning the perceived ability to choose 10 Helpful Words. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	0%	0%	10%	25%	40%	25%
post-questionnaire	0%	5%	10%	40%	45%	0%

Though participants had the activity explained to them in detail and were given a sample article to read and practice taking down 10 helpful words, without much experience in doing this, they may still not have been aware of the importance of having to choose words which would aid them in their explanations. This can best be explained by the fact that most participants had little to no experience in giving logical explanations. Until this point, most students may have experienced teaching methods which required them to read, memorize, and or translate, but not to connect meanings, or explain logical chronologies. The percentages in Table 1 show a slight rise in percentages for ‘quite true’ and ‘true’ responses. Free comments listed below are indicative of participants’ feelings.

- Participant #2** *It is difficult to explain a reading paper using just 10 words. However, I think we’re able to improve the ability to summarize the paper when we choose important words to explain the article.*
- Participant #3** *At the beginning of the activity, it was difficult to choose just 10 words and explain the article using these words. However, after I got used to do them, I really enjoyed this activity.*
- Participant #17** *It was hard to choose 10 words and I wasn’t able to tell my part orderly.*

**Table 2**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire concerning the perceived ability to adequately understand the text provided to them. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	0%	20%	50%	25%	5%	0%
post-questionnaire	0%	5%	35%	45%	45%	0%

There was a significant increase in both ‘quite true’ and ‘true’ with regards to understanding the text. Participants were purposely supplied with readings known to be below their levels. Therefore, responses reflect their positive assumptions of being able to read and understand the texts without difficulty. The increased values are mirrored by the following participant’s comment.

- Participant #6** *At the beginning of the activity, it was hard to understand a reading paper, remember the content and choose 10 words. But after I did a few times, I got used to this activity.*

**Table 3**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire concerning the perceived ability to adequately explain the text provided to partners. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	0%	20%	45%	30%	5%	0%
post-questionnaire	0%	10%	45%	45%	0%	0%

Participants responded with a slightly positive increase in perceived ability to communicate their texts to partners. Importantly, percentages did not fall. Given the difficulty of the task, it is encouraging that nearly half of the 20 participants felt that they were in fact able communicate adequately to partners after participating in the activity throughout the semester. Participants' comments reflecting this are listed below.

- Participant #1** *In the activity I think we improve two abilities to choose important things from information and tell them in English to other people.*
- Participant #5** *Every time this activity gave me a feeling of tension but, I think that I improved my English speaking ability a little through this activity.*
- Participant #7** *If I continue to do this activity I will not be embarrassed to speak something in English when I travel to foreign countries.*
- Participant #9** *Before I started this class I was not good at speaking and listening. However, through this activity I improved some abilities to speak and listen.*
- Participant #12** *As I do this activity, I was getting used to read faster and speak better than before.*
- Participant #14** *Before this class, I really didn't want to speak much because I wasn't good at English. But right now I feel that I'm good at English at little bit. I improved my English abilities to read, speak, and listen through this activity.*

**Table 4**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire concerning the perceived ability to answer questions from partners if necessary. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	0%	15%	45%	40%	0%	0%
post-questionnaire	5%	0%	35%	35%	20%	5%

The number of participants believing in their ability to responded to a partner's questions concerning the text rose slightly over the two intervals. Through observation, it was found necessary to provide participants with a set of useful sentences to encourage clarification among each group. The participants were encouraged to use the following: *'Could you spell that, please?; Could you repeat that?;* and make questions beginning with, *Who, What, Where, Why, and How.* After supplying these sentences and phrases to participants, the amount of clarification within a group increased noticeably.

Questions 5, 6, and 7 results are reflected in Tables 5-7 and were concerned specifically about participants' feelings when speaking English. Creating an atmosphere where students can feel at ease is

a necessary component to helping them develop self-efficacious beliefs. Though many felt the activity challenging and invariably difficult, yet useful for their language development, almost all 20 participants expressed that they had fun with it. The comments below lay claim to this.

- Participant #20** *I felt that it was really good to have group discussion with 3-way activity.*
- Participant #16** *This activity was really great because the topics were so familiar and interesting for me.*
- Participant #13** *In this activity, I always use my brain and need to focus. That's why this activity is really good. It was a good opportunity to speak English.*
- Participant #11** *This activity was really good because it was connected to improving my English.*
- Participant #8** *I'm not sure if I improved, but this activity was really fun.*

**Table 5**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire indicating whether the participant likes English. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	5%	15%	35%	30%	10%	5%
post-questionnaire	0%	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%

There were no participants who seemed to dislike English. There are many factors outside this particular activity which influence how a participant might have responded to this question but, it was used as gauge to understand whether participants brought negative feelings toward the activity beforehand.

**Table 6**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire indicating whether the participant didn't mind making errors when speaking English. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	0%	10%	45%	20%	15%	10%
post-questionnaire	5%	25%	60%	10%	30%	15%

It was hoped that the relaxed atmosphere created in the classroom would elicit more responses for 'not at all true', 'slightly true', and 'somewhat true' in the post-questionnaire. The increase in the percentages for these categories though can be seen as a reflection of the participants' feelings toward being less concerned about making errors when speaking.

**Table 7**  
**Percentages of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire indicating whether the participant felt nervous when speaking English. (n=20)**

	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very True
pre-questionnaire	0%	10%	10%	15%	55%	10%
post-questionnaire	0%	35%	10%	25%	25%	5%

It is not surprising that many students are nervous when speaking English as many second language speakers tend to be. As also indicated in Table 6, it was expected that the relaxed atmosphere of the class, coupled with the absence of pressure due to not being graded on the activity would move a majority of the percentages towards 'very true'.

## 6. Conclusion

The 3-way communicative activity used in this project aimed to increase the self-efficacy beliefs of its participants by addressing the four components necessary for its development; mastery of experience, vicarious experience, encouragement, and reduced anxiety. The pedagogical implications of this study are that teachers need to create activities that are enjoyable, yet challenging. This means that students' levels need to be carefully monitored so that activities can be gauged to ensure there can be a feeling of accomplishment with incremental difficulty. Activities also need to be offered frequent enough to allow self-efficacious beliefs to grow. Informing the participants that the quiz at the end of each activity would have no bearing on their grade was intended to help lower tension, yet the atmosphere during this particular activity was seemingly not stress free. Tension was created as each participant struggled to convey their stories to partners and recognized their strengths and weaknesses in speaking. With a comfortable environment, constant encouragement, incremental difficulty to promote a feeling of accomplishment, and the vicarious experience of watching other participants go through similar struggles when communicating in a second language, it is possible to foster self-efficacious beliefs in Japanese university students.

## Appendix

### A Questionnaire on a 3-way Communicative Activity for Japanese University Students' Ability to Complete the Communicative Task

1) 10分以内で文章について理解して10単語選ぶことができます。 Within 10 minutes, I can understand the reading and choose 10 words.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true
2) 与えられた文章をパートナーが十分に理解するように英語で説明出来ます。 In English, I can adequately explain my reading to my partner.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true
3) パートナーに質問をされたら十分説明できます。 If I receive a question from a partner, I can adequately explain my answer.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true
4) 必要ならパートナーに確認のため質問できます。 If necessary I can ask for clarification.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true
5) 英語を話すことが好きです。 I like speaking English.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true
6) 英語で話すとき、間違えても気にしません。 When I speak English, I am not concerned with making mistakes.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true
7) 英語で話すとき緊張します。 I am nervous when I speak English.	Not at all true	Slightly true	Somewhat true	Quite true	True	Very true

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