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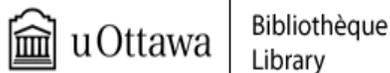
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## **THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SELF-EFFICACY CONCERNING ORAL PRESENTATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

The qualitative study presented in this paper investigates the influence of self-efficacy on oral presentations. Self-efficacy relates to one's beliefs about completing a task successfully and refers to actions, effort, and achievements involved in this process. The current research focuses on two major steps towards understanding oral presentations delivered by international students in Budapest: the first step involves identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the preparation process while the second step defines strengths and weaknesses in the actual delivery of oral presentations. Thirty seven international students from an English-medium program at a University were asked to write a short one-paragraph essay of 120 words in English answering two questions. The dominant emerging themes are examined with the help of qualitative content analysis. The results indicate that student's self-efficacy beliefs successfully impact their oral performance. Basic elements of presentations such as organization, content, accuracy, appropriateness of language, body language, and engagement with the audience characterize the self-efficacy beliefs of university students concerning the delivery of oral presentations. Overall, results showed that students use learned skills to increase self-efficacy levels in both the preparation and the delivery of oral presentation.

### **Keywords**

Self-efficacy – Presentation – Strengths and weaknesses – Oral performance

### **Para Citar este Artículo:**

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## Introduction

In the last few decades, research interest in self-efficacy has grown in the field of foreign language learning. According to Lenz and Shortridge-Baggett, Self-efficacy is the most important predictor of change in behavior. Self-efficacy is a relevant in the field of applied linguistics due to its impact on the communication behavior and learning outcomes of students. Oral communication skills play an important role in the academic setting, and it should be noted that practicing language use in diverse situations are crucial for successful oral communication. One way to practice oral communication is the through delivery of oral presentations; however, there are few studies exploring self-efficacy in relation to oral communication and speaking ability, especially among students. The aim of the present research is to investigate the effect that self-efficacy beliefs have on oral presentations. This aim is reflected in the following research question: What characterizes university students' self-efficacy beliefs about giving oral presentations?

According to Bandura, self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required producing given attainments. The works of Bandura and Schunk demonstrate that individuals' beliefs in their abilities act as stronger predictors of future performance than their prior skills or knowledge. Thus, self-efficacy can have an impact on everything from psychological states to behavior and motivation. There is a tendency for students with high self-efficacy to exhibit lower levels of anxiety when faced with obstacles, exert greater effort, show more flexible use learning strategies, and display higher levels of intrinsic interest in academic tasks. Students with lower levels of self-efficacy apply minimum effort and strategy use, and show more signs of anxiety in the face of obstacles. Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani find that self-efficacy is a good predictor of human behavior and actions. The beliefs, people hold about their abilities, have both emotional and behavioral aspects. It is striking how these two aspects exert an impact on students' self-efficacy beliefs in oral performance.

## Methods

The research methodology for this study was a qualitative research design which took place in a natural setting, without any attempts to manipulate the situation under study. A wide range of data in the form of essays was examined to investigate the views of the students in regard to the ability to execute successful oral presentations. Emerging themes present in the essay were taken as the basis for the qualitative analysis carried out in this study.

## Participants

The current study involved 37 students from Hungarian universities. The selection of these students was based on non-probability sampling. They ranged in age from 19 to 32. 27 males and 10 females representing 22 nationalities took part in the research. All participants came from a variety of majors, and described their English abilities as intermediate (2.7%), upper intermediate (16.2%), advanced (32.4%), and mastery (48.6%). Levels of education represented in the sample included BA, MA, and PhD degrees.

## Instruments

The first version of the task was pilot-tested with 13 participants. The students' participation was voluntary, and their anonymity was ensured throughout the project with the help of assigned codes. They wrote a short one-paragraph essay of 120 words based on the question "What are your strengths and weaknesses concerning oral presentations that you have had to do in classes during your study?" and provided examples of positive and negative experiences and aspects in regards to oral presentations they had delivered in the past.

The final version of the task with open-ended questions was posted online with the help of Google Docs. It was designed to gain deeper understanding of students' views on their self-efficacy beliefs related to the delivery of oral presentations. The following two questions were used in the final task: 1) What are your strengths and weaknesses when preparing oral presentations in English? 2) What are your strengths and weaknesses when delivering your presentations in English?

### Data analysis

37 answers from 40 participants were chosen for analysis. Most of the participants clearly understood the questions, and were very explicit and direct in their answers. The remaining three students provided incomplete answers which were not used in the current research. With the help of qualitative content analysis, the collected data was coded manually through the use of line-by-line scrutiny. The key-words were examined in context, and the texts were systematically scrutinized to find all words which had similar meaning. Through an iterative process, common concepts emerged that gave rise to dominant emerging themes. On the basis of the aim of this research, all the relevant information from the data was codified and used to build the categories. In a final step, themes were grouped into two relevant categories which are detailed below.

## Results and discussion

Two main categories were derived from the 37 coded texts. The first main category represents students' strengths and weaknesses during the preparation of oral presentations, which contains 10 emerging themes (see Figure 1). These themes were drawn from the coded quotes of the texts. The participants described their views of self-efficacy through their educational experiences.

The results in Figure 1 show that students have difficulty finding a theme and choosing a relevant topic for their presentations. They have similar features of weaknesses such as "finding detailed information for the audience which can make the reader bored", "preparing complex mathematical material" and "including information which is not important". It means that they feel excited before starting the presentation. These findings are supported by Mills who claims that self-efficacy beliefs predict performance over and above feeling of anxiety.

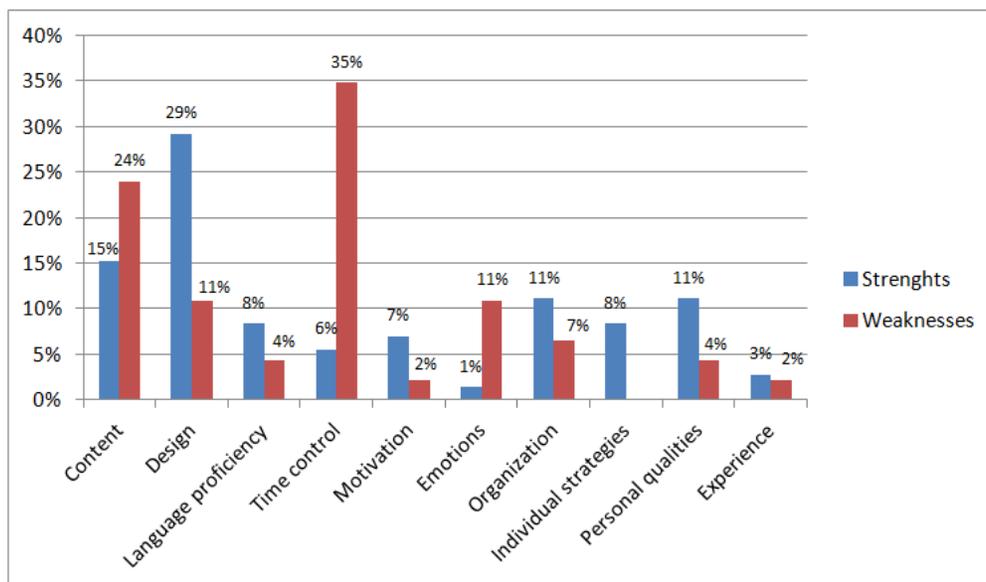


Figure 1  
Students' strengths and weaknesses when preparing oral presentations

Thus, individuals experience anxiety during oral performance when they are unable to exercise control over the potentially challenging content of their presentations or when they feel less effective in their oral presentation skills.

The data also shows that the most common weakness among students in the preparation of oral presentations is time control. Participants reported that "I usually prepare the presentation two or three days before the deadline", "I make usually a presentation in last minutes", "it takes much time for me to prepare the presentation" or "the main problem I have is the constant procrastination". These points may endanger the chance of success which leads to increased fear and to self-debilitating effects. This finding is also consistent with the study by Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent, and Larivee in which students with a higher sense of efficacy were shown to manage their time better, be more persistent, be less likely to prematurely reject solutions, and show more success in problem solving.

Figure 1 also shows students' views regarding their strengths related to the preparation of oral presentations. Data shows that students focus their attention on design and visual aids in order to construct a creative presentation. The following responses indicate this: "I choose the slides with pictures, graphs or photos, and avoid using too much text", "I try to use different tools" and "I create 70% of images and 30% of written material". They consider that creativity is the individual ability which distinguishes them from other presenters and leads to the successful completion of the task.

Some of the participants consider that they have strong abilities in oral communication such as rich vocabulary knowledge, fluent speech, clear accent, and the use of sophisticated expressions. The results of the study suggest a positive relationship between students' self-efficacy and language proficiency. The participants point out the following: "I speak English fluently and I always try to communicate for mutual understanding", "I use a set of useful expressions from news in my speech", "I can express myself using a set of useful expressions from BBC news in my speech". These findings

are consistent with that of Hairuzila and Subarna's study on self-efficacy regarding oral communication ability [10]. They claimed that students who are more confident in their ability perform better in oral communication tasks than those who have a low level of self-efficacy.

Special attention should be given to the emerging theme of "Motivation". During the content analysis, certain phrases related to inspiration were identified. These reflected the motives of the respondents: "I feel passionate about the subject, so I have many ideas", "I have a strong desire to share my point of view and my specific opinion so I can forget to be worried", "I repeated to myself that I can do it and I have to do it ... I try to encourage myself". According to Schunk, self-efficacy sustains motivation and maintains performance. Thus, it can be said that if the participants have strong motives towards the activity, then this indicates a high level of self-efficacy which leads the student to set relatively high goals for themselves.

The second category of themes derived from the data includes students' strengths and weaknesses during the delivery of presentations, which contains 10 emerging themes (see Figure 2).

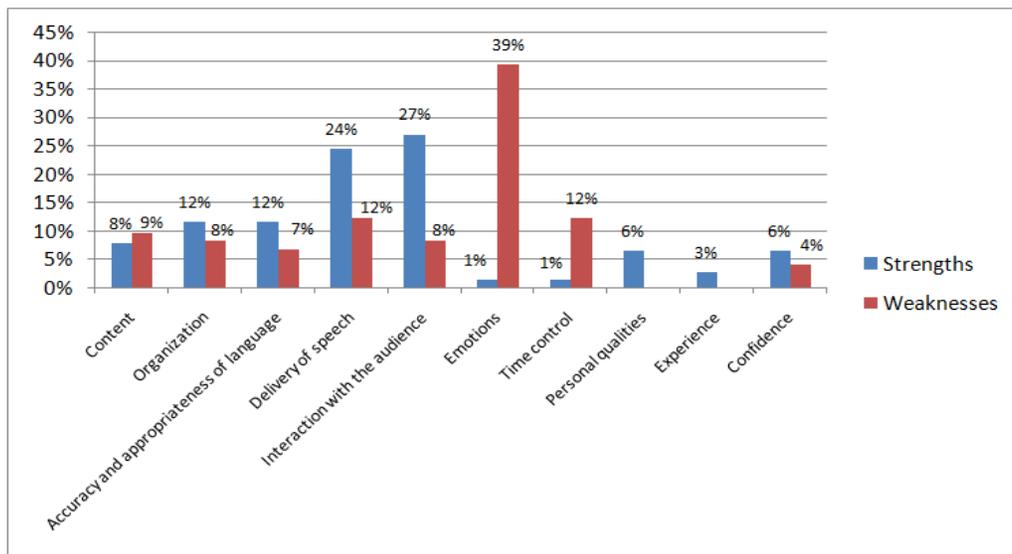


Figure 2  
Students' strengths and weaknesses when delivering oral presentations

In terms of strengths, interaction with the audience appeared most frequently in the data. The students revealed that the evaluation of the audience is important for them. This can be seen in a number of responses: "I keep the presentation interactive and have an intellectual discussion with audience", "I am able to provide some light humor to keep audience hooked", "I try to engage all the audience into the presentation using gestures, activities and games". During the presentations, they interact with the audience through the use of strategies meant to draw attention; for example, a presenter might start with a humorous anecdote or introduce a real-life story, use dynamic style to avoid monotony, or maintain engaging eye contact. Some of the students mentioned that they feel that their enthusiasm is transmitted to the audience while delivering their presentations. According to Girard and Trapp, the ability to hold the attention of the audience is one of the potential benefits of students' oral presentations which include greater class interaction and

participation. Thus, under positive feedback, self-efficacy beliefs related to presentation abilities can be increased. Consequently, the stronger a student's self-efficacy is, the more likely they are to attain successful performance.

Pajares and Schunk claim that confidence is a central element of academic success in one's academic capabilities. It should be noted that confidence is considered one of the most influential motivators. Some of the participants reported that they are able to confidently deliver their presentations: "I smile and project an image of confidence", "I talk with confidence, I am sure about what I am saying 100%". Based on studies regarding confidence, some researchers contend that students with high self-efficacy generally work hard because they are confident that their efforts will be successful. Students with low self-efficacy may exert less effort because they are not sure that the effort will lead to the successful performance of complex tasks.

It was found that the most of the students' weaknesses were related to emotions and time control. The students who have low self-efficacy beliefs are affected by their negative emotional states when they must deal with challenging tasks. This can be seen in the following excerpts from the data: "I feel too nervous and start stuttering when I do not remember a specific detail from my notes", "nervousness leads to forget some part or to confuse terms or proper words to explain an event", "I am always stressed and I have a high level of anxiety whenever I deliver a presentation". It can be noted that students feel stress, anxiety, and depression both during the preparation and delivery of presentations, which can cause them to lose control over the assigned time limits. This leads students to experience fears and negative thoughts that they will not finish the task in time. Thus, high levels of anxiety, stress, or fatigue can weaken a student's self-efficacy beliefs. This can cause stress and agitation which enhances feelings of poor performance.

## Summary

Returning to the research question posed at the beginning of the study: "What characterizes university students' self-efficacy beliefs about giving oral presentations?", the data shows that the levels of self-efficacy beliefs held by students influence oral performance. The results show that while preparing their presentations, participants paid attention to basic presentation elements such as organization, design and visual aids, overall quality of content, accuracy and appropriateness of language, body language, and engagement of the audience. Participants demonstrating self-efficacy about learning show competent task performance and participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and eventually achieve a higher level of performance. However, the participants also recognized weaknesses in delivering oral presentations. Students who demonstrate lower levels of self-efficacy doubt their capabilities to execute the task successfully. Finally, some students use their learned skills to increase self-efficacy levels in both the preparation and delivery of oral presentations.

## Conclusions

There are some limitations to this research study. In this study, information is only provided about self-efficacy beliefs in regards to one specific activity: oral presentations. Future research could explore more diverse tasks in order to understand how they are affected by self-efficacy beliefs. The current study also did not make any distinction between the students' majors, which limits information about how specific areas of study are related to self-efficacy beliefs.

In addition, the results found in this study could be useful for further research in order to establish similarities or differences with future data drawn in relation to self-efficacy. Future research could also include investigations into differences between gender, ethnicity, or cultural background that can provide a deeper understanding into the study of self-efficacy beliefs and their impacts on task performance.

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## **CUADERNOS DE SOFÍA EDITORIAL**

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