

## Investigating Students' Academic Self-Efficacy in Play Performance Class

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### Abstract

Play Performance can be one of the subjects that is designed to introduce students to fundamental concepts of drama and elaborate underlying principles of drama performance that come into play. Play Performance can also encourage students to practice and perform their speaking and soft skills in dealing with various challenges in preparing the performances. This study focuses on finding out students' academic self-efficacy in dealing with diverse challenges in a Play Performance class by adopting a social-cognitive perspective. It employed a qualitative content analysis method. The data was taken from the students' progress test 1, progress test 2, and final test reflection to investigate the students' academic self-efficacy developments and factors contributing to the academic self-efficacy. The results showed that most students considered themselves not having self-efficacy at the beginning of the class. However, after facing several challenges, students' academic self-efficacy was growing. This study illuminates the positive impact of giving students challenges to foster self-efficacy while practicing their English skills. The findings imply that educators should provide students enough opportunities to grow from both successes and failures in the context of their academic journey and provide adequate support during the period.

**Keywords:** Academic self-efficacy, Play Performance, students' reflections

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## 1. Introduction

Play Performance is a three-credit course offered at the English Language Education Study Programme in one of the universities in Indonesia for fifth-semester students. This course elaborates on underlying principles of drama performance that come into play on digital platforms. The topics addressed, among others, are script analysis, drama production, and artistic aspects of digital drama (ELESP, 2021). This course is also designed to improve students' hard skills in the English language as well as soft skills i.e. communication, collaboration, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, creativity, and digital skills. At the end of the semester, the students are challenged to showcase a performance to the public by selling tickets. The students are also exposed to challenges to overcome stress, playing multiple roles and collaborating with unfamiliar friends to produce the performance. These challenges pinpoint the importance of self-efficacy as to be able to accomplish academic tasks in the course. This study aims to investigate the students' academic self-efficacy in the Play Performance course and to examine how the students can manage the demands of the course as to achieve their learning objectives.

There are two main divisions for each Play Performance class, namely artistic and production teams. The artistic team consists of players, directors, makeup artists, costume designers, setting designers, music designers, and lighting designers. The chief manager, secretaries, treasurers, refreshment division, medical/first-aid division, and ticketing managers belong to the production team. However, since the number of students in this class was limited to organizing a performance, most students needed to play more than one role. To have a good and successful performance, students also need to deal with staff from different study programs and people who bought the tickets. Most students were not familiar with them. It means they need to perform both individually and as a team to make sure the performance runs well. Consequently, this class potentially exposed students to a wide range of stressful situations (Freire, et al., 2020).

Considering the complications of this course for each student, the researchers believe that academic self-efficacy plays an important role in students' success in this class in terms of mastering the language (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007; Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005) and conducting the event. Academic self-efficacy, which is grounded in Bandura's (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory, refers to someone's belief in their ability to complete a certain task and overcome challenges in achieving their goals (Bandura, 1998). Self-efficacy is one of the major factors influencing people's motivation, behavior, and overall psychological well-being. Self-efficacy does not emerge from nowhere but rather is a cognitive process where people use information sources to create their self-efficacy beliefs (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Khine and Nielsen (2022) said that self-efficacy is domain-, context- or task-specific and associated with student engagement, study habits, learning styles, and personality. In addition, self-efficacy is predicted to influence

motivation, learning, achievement, and self-regulation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Usher & Schunk, 2018). Learners with high academic self-efficacy trust their abilities to learn and persevere through difficulties. However, self-efficacy could vary from one subject to another and one context to another. It could change over time based on learners' experiences, feedback they receive, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 1995; 2000). In addition, the better someone's sense of self-efficacy, the better someone is able to cope with situations that he/she may encounter (e.g., Wright et al., 2013).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Sources of self-efficacy**

Bandura (1998) and Usher and Pajares (2008) identified several sources of self-efficacy, namely, mastery experience, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional states.

#### **2.1.1. Mastery experience**

Success in overcoming obstacles could build a strong belief in students' personal efficacy. However, failures lessen self-efficacy especially if students have not had a sense of efficacy. Some problems or challenges that require sustained effort are good for students especially when they can overcome them and be convinced that they have what it takes to be successful in various challenging situations. Some studies found that mastery experience is the most enduring source of self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008; Zimmerman & DiBenedetto, 2008)

#### **2.1.2. Vicarious learning**

"Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required to succeed" (Bandura, 1997, p.3). Naturally, people are looking for proficient models who have competencies they aspire to. Social cognitive theory assumes that by observing a successful model, one's self-efficacy can be raised, just as it can be lowered by observing someone fail (Bandura, 1997). In addition, the degree of similarity between the observer and the model significantly determines the persuasiveness of the model's successes and failures (DiBenedetto & Schunk, 2022).

#### **2.1.3. Forms of social persuasion**

Someone's verbal persuasion could significantly impact students' self-efficacy. The forms of social persuasion could be verbal statements and feedback from others (DiBenedetto & Schunk, 2022). Compared to those who doubt themselves, those who are persuaded that they have the capabilities to succeed will show greater effort and sustain it. However, unrealistic boosts will quickly be disconfirmed.

#### **2.1.4. Emotional states/indexes**

People's self-efficacy could be positively influenced by reducing stress reactions and altering their emotional proclivities and misinterpretation of their states. Based on the research,

people judge their aches or pains as signs of weakness. In addition, moods also affect someone's judgment of self-efficacy.

## ***2.2. Factors influencing academic self-efficacy and academic achievement***

Other than the sources, self-efficacy is also influenced by some factors influencing the strength of the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. There are three factors that potentially influence the strength of the relationship that exists between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement, namely, mindset, basic psychological needs satisfaction, and attachment, parental, and social support.

### ***2.2.1. Implicit theories and self-efficacy***

Dweck (2000) mentioned that individuals embrace implicit theories about intelligence or ability, which have potentially influenced their academic engagement. She categorized the mindsets into incremental (or 'growth') mindset or entity (or 'fixed') mindset. Individuals with a fixed mindset hold the belief that intelligence and general ability are stable traits. On the other hand, people with a growth mindset believe that success is the outcome of devoted effort, that ability can be developed through practice, and that effort is required to fulfill potential. Dweck argues that such beliefs can influence the way children engage with school and their academic performance.

### ***2.2.2. Basic psychological needs satisfaction***

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) focuses on the importance of relatedness, competence, and autonomy as fundamental psychological needs that must be fulfilled if we are to develop, adjust, and function successfully (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The needs are particularly noticeable in the case of adult students who are living away from established support networks, needing to adjust to new ways of living and working, and new methods of learning and assessment which may threaten the established senses of relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

### ***2.2.3. Attachment, parental, and social support***

Studies have found that the more securely the person is attached at a young age, the better self-esteem and self-reliance they possess (Davila & Kashy, 2009; Wright & Perrone, 2010; Wright et al., 2013). If students have a secure attachment, they are more confident and they believe more in their academic decisions and that they have made the right decisions (Wright et al., 2014). In addition, Davila & Kashy (2009) found that secure attachment can also contribute to experience of enhanced social support. Further, Wright et al. (2014) suggest that students with more secure attachments had better social support experiences and reported fewer obstacles than those with insecure attachments.

Studies found that self-efficacy influences students' academic achievement directly and indirectly (Celik, 2022; Shamdas, 2023). Students with high self-efficacy will have high

motivation, appropriate learning strategies, and perseverance in facing difficulties (Bandura, 1998; Campos & Madrigal, 2020) which are so much required in Play Performance subject. Students are faced with challenges that require them to step outside of their comfort zone. Bandura (1998) mentions that those who have high assurance in their capabilities see difficult tasks as challenges they need to master rather than threats they need to avoid. In addition, individuals who have a high self-efficacy are more likely to set themselves challenging goals which are most often achieved (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Stajkovic, 2006). Those things were required in this class.

### **3. Method**

#### ***3.1. Research design***

This study employed qualitative method to gather the data comprehensively. The researchers employed qualitative content analysis to analyze students' reflections from progress test 1, progress test 2, and the final test to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002, p.453) of the documents based on the themes. The reflections provide sequential information which helps to capture changes occurring in the student's motivation over time and provides richness of information from the student's perspective as students may elaborate on their feelings, motivation, and thoughts regarding the learning events (DiBenedetto & Schunk, 2022).

#### ***3.2. Participants***

There are four classes in Play Performance course. For this study, 29 of the 103 enrolled students participated. To maintain anonymity, participants were assigned pseudonyms namely, A, B, C, and the last one is AC. All students in this class participated in this study since they were required to submit reflections as part of the class assessment. The reflections then became the main source of data to be analyzed qualitatively. The researchers were more confident in analyzing the students' self-efficacy as supporting data can also be taken based on observing what was happening during the course and how the students interacted more especially with the first researcher.

#### ***3.3. Instrument***

This study mainly focused on the use of document analysis rubric based on the theories of self-efficacy by Bandura (1998). It explores the stories and journeys that students had described in their reflections guided by the rubric to find the major themes.

#### ***3.4. Data analysis***

This study coded the themes based on sources of self-efficacy and factors influencing the self-efficacy. Further, A is used to show sources of self-efficacy while B is for the factors influencing self-efficacy. There are four major sources so the codes are A1 – A4 while for the factors, the codes are B1 – B4. To find the major themes, this study used QDA Miner

Lite. In addition, expert validity and member-checking were conducted in order to check the validity of the analysis and limit ambiguous understanding.

#### 4. Finding and Discussion

##### 4.1. *How students perceive themselves at the beginning of the class*

At the beginning of the class, students were divided into two groups, artistic and production teams. Based on their reflections, Figure 1 showcases what they felt after knowing their roles in this Play Performance project.

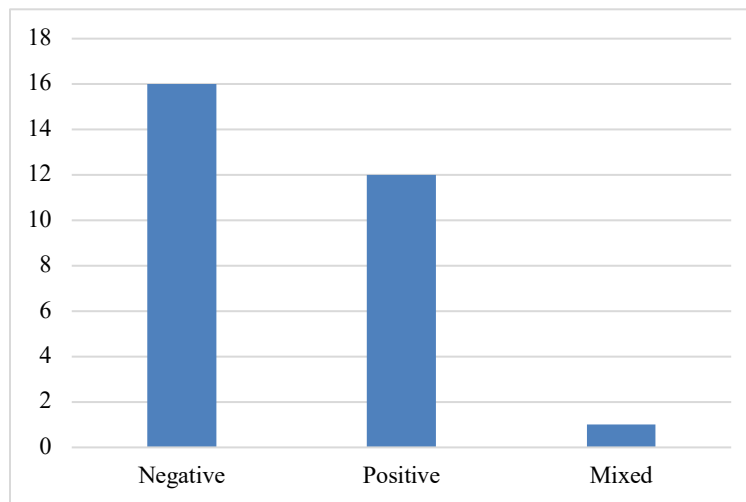


Figure 1. Students' Dominant Feelings at The Beginning of Play Performance Class

Based on their reflection, most students had negative feelings about the roles assigned to them. In other words, they were not confident in the roles they got. E mentioned,

To be honest, I was anxious, worried, and also nervous for the first time when I knew my role in Play Performance. ... Because it was the first time for me to be a treasurer and also fundraiser in my whole life. Also, becoming a treasurer and fundraiser will make me deal with money, how to manage it, what is the best way to earn money, how to make a good promotion of things that we have to sell, and also what would be the best way to keep it all clear and be as transparent as possible.

Most students experienced what they had to do for the first time contributing to their insecurity and not believing in their capabilities. Some students said they were nervous (three students) and anxious (11 students), and two students were disappointed to not get the role they wanted. However, some students felt happy and confident in their assigned roles as they had the experience or got roles they wanted. A mentioned,

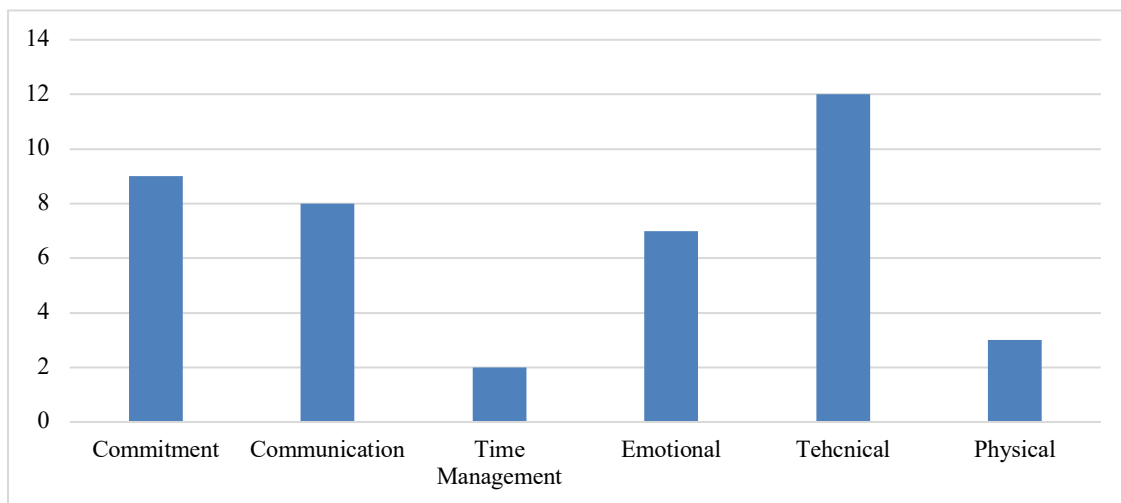
I was so excited when I first found out that I had the part to play Mrs. Trunchbull. I feel happy because deep down in my heart, I really want to be a player. "I want to do

this drama, "I thought when I first joined the casting. After my name was chosen as the person who will play Mrs Trunchbull, I am very grateful. That day, I was also determined to try my hardest to show my best.

Other students also mentioned their excitement knowing that they would play some roles they wanted to. The roles were not always as the main roles but most of students who said they were happy with the roles said they had had more or less similar experiences/roles before joining the class.

#### **4.2. Challenges students faced**

After working together for several months, students faced the following challenges,



*Figure 2. Problems Students Faced in the Play Performance Class*

Based on students' reflections, technical problems were the most dominant hindrance they faced. Students mostly mentioned sound system which did not work properly on D-day. However, other students also emphasized the lack of commitment and communication within their team as the most significant challenges they faced during the preparation. Students mentioned their friends often came late or did not come to their practices without notice and did not share the same visions in preparing the Play Performance. They also highlighted the lack of coordination between members in the same division or one division with other divisions. Emotional and physical issues are also faced by the students. They felt anxious, angry, and tired of what was happening when they were preparing for the performance. Students mentioned those feelings were triggered by some conditions like miscommunication, different perceptions on how the performance should be conducted, and a lot of tasks they need to work on from different subjects. F said,

First of all, it was annoying for me to know that the communication between us was so bad. Either among the players or among the players and the production. Besides that,

everyone here is being selfish, although some of them were not or just I haven't seen it. It took a long time for us to decide the time and place for our practice. Whether some of them still have an evening class, some of them don't want to go back home at night, or even some of them just don't want their quality time with their family or boyfriend disturbed. I mean it's okay if you *wanna* have your quality time with whoever, but they still come late when the time/ place is already decided. I think my friends and I could overcome it although we needed time to fix it. Doing the evaluation each after we had practices helps us a lot to build good communication between all the crews. And the second was the technical problem. Of course, it was out of control because we had a vendor who handled the mic and clip on, but still it didn't run as we expected. And fortunately, we have practiced our voice before, so we can shout out loud when our mics won't work.

#### 4.3. Sources of academic self-efficacy

This study could find all academic self-efficacy sources as Bandura (1998) and Usher and Pajares (2008) mentioned. The following figure shows the result.

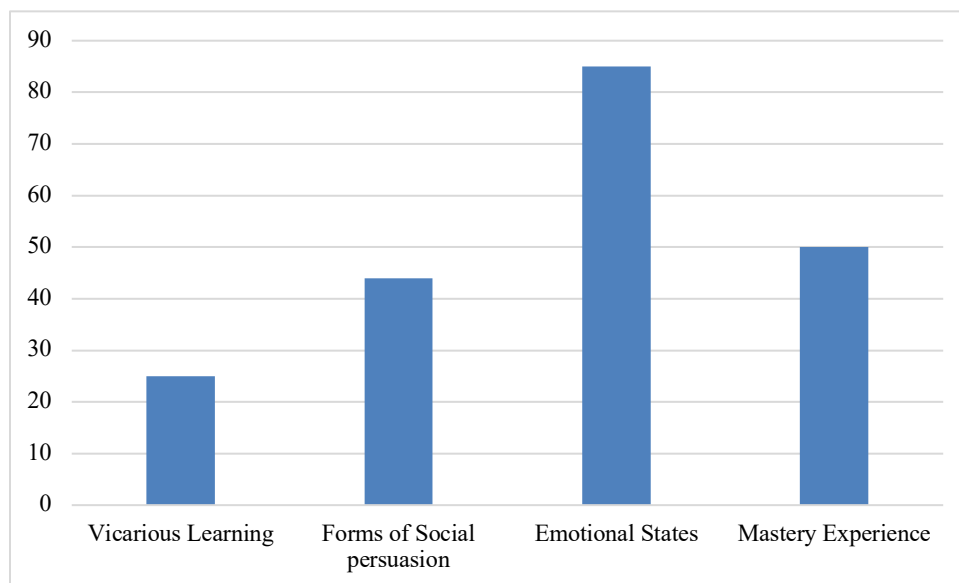


Figure 3. Sources of Academic Self-Efficacy

The figure shows emotional states become the major source of academic self-efficacy. As students experiencing ups and downs in the preparation and the responsibilities other than Play Performance, they realized the need to manage their emotions in handling the challenges they faced. We mentioned,

This semester is really complicated for me because the courses need more attention and are quite challenging. Besides the courses, play makes me overwhelmed because I have



to divide my attention, and many people have their egos so **I have to reduce my ego and emotion and try to listen to people but I also need a firm principle**

In addition, mastery experience gave students the confidence they needed. Almost all aspects of Play Performance were new for the students so they need to learn and master them. V said,

I have (a) new experience in using some Auditorium Driyarkara lighting hardware. I *was also believed* by class A, (I) helped them in operating the follow spot lighting. Then I communicate(d) to the responsible person, then I asks(ed) them to accompany me in the second floor where I operates the lighting. ...

The researchers also learned that students did support each other during the preparation and on the D-Day. I said,

Overall, the learning process was extraordinary. As I said before, my friends and lecturer helped me a lot. **They gave me advice and suggestion(s) what the exact things to do. G and E supported me, remembering my duty.** They did not be bored doing it. Then, C, R, and Q always said to believe in me and be firm. After that, Pak Thomas always reminded me to do something patiently. So, these attentions very help me a lot.

The least mentioned source is a model for them or the vicarious learning. Some students notice how other students were trying their best and improving also plays an important role in students' academic self-efficacy. Y said,

... However, if I chose one of the players, **maybe A would be the player that helps me stay on my track, not because she is the director other, but because she tries to do her best in her role;** it is a little motivated to stay on my track as a player.

However, this statistic shows students lacked of "model". It could be tracked back to the problems they faced. Most of students mentioned how their friends were not showing commitment they should have shown.

#### ***4.4. Factors influencing academic self-efficacy and academic achievement***

To cope with the challenges in this class, there were several ways for students to overcome them. Those ways influenced students' academic self-efficacy. The figure below shows the factors.

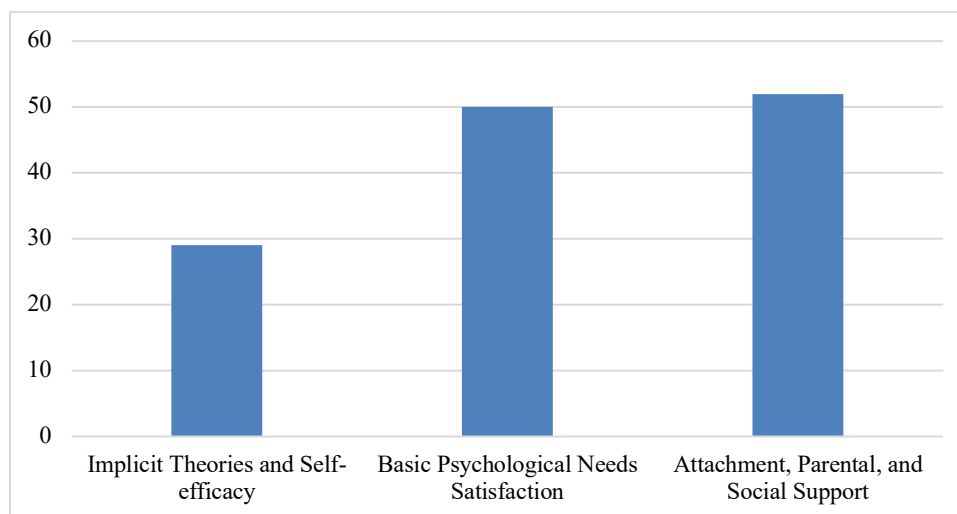


Figure 4. Factors Influencing Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Achievement

Social support became the most significant factor influencing students' academic self-efficacy. They include students' friends who were part of the project and were not part of the project, boy/girlfriend, lecturer, and family. H mentioned,

**B helps me to stay calm while training. When I don't memorize my scripts, she doesn't look annoyed at me.** She wants to be invited to work together to practice memorizing the script. **My mother** also always gives me messages via WA to support me. She always reminds me to take care of my diet and health so I can run smoothly during performances. **My grandmother is also the one who made me give my best performance in Matilda The Musical.** My grandma even came to watch me even though she was busy. **The presence of T is also significant.** When there is play performance practice, she brings snacks for the players. It means a lot to me because sometimes I'm hungry but don't have time to buy food. Then, the most important thing for me is God. When I couldn't memorize my script, I prayed to God so that I could quickly memorize the script. After that, it's easier for my brain to memorize scripts. Without God's blessing, I could not get through all of this. When my friends got sick with colds and coughs, I was lucky not to catch any during rehearsals up to D-Day.

There were a lot of students who mentioned more or less similar reflections as H. They acknowledge that support from others could help them believe in themselves and stay on track.

In addition, majority of students acknowledge the importance of fulfilling basic psychological needs. It ranges from having me time and family time, sharing with other students or their friends, and getting some feedback or acknowledgment from the lecturer. Students did self-care by eating foods they liked alone or with their friends, listening to

music, and paying attention to their diet. Other students mentioned they often shared their progress with their families and their family were so willing to listen and give support by providing some food or extra money to help them stay in a good mood. Some students actually complained about the lack of feedback at the beginning of the class period (before the progress test 1) but they were grateful knowing the lecturer attended more practice sessions outside the class after the progress test. C said,

In this class, the presence of a lecturer was significant to me. I always have something on my mind, and I need someone to talk to. For example, give me advice or any ideas about my voice, expressions, and gestures. ... **But, I was quite sad because, in the beginning, my lecturer rarely accompanied us during practice. I was not blaming my lecturer, I knew there would be reasons why he could not do that. Also, it was only at the beginning. After that, my lecturer always accompanied the practice and always helped us.** In my case, I faced my own struggle. I was uncomfortable with my role because a lot of things happened. **But, then my lecturer gave me the reasons why I should keep playing my role and I was thankful for that. So, for me, the feedback and presence of my lecturer for the whole process were more than enough.**

Lastly, the researchers also found the fluctuation of students' academic self-efficacy. Some students were very sure at the beginning but after knowing the challenges they had to face; they felt pessimistic of themselves. A mentioned,

**I was so excited when I first found out that I had the part to play Mrs Trunchbull.** I feel happy because deep down in my heart, I really want to be a player. "I want to do this drama, "I thought when I first joined the casting. After my name was chosen as the person who will play Mrs Trunchbull, I am very grateful. That day, I was also determined to try my hardest to show my best. I did feel excited at first. **However, after the scripts were shared and we had to start memorizing them, I started to feel anxious.** Miss Trunchbull's line was longer than I thought. I started questioning my abilities to myself. "Can I memorize the script this long? What if when I appear later, I forget my part? Can I just resign?"

On the other hand, some students were pessimistic at the beginning but starting to believe in themselves after having the experiences of practicing and interacting with other students. Z said,

I am very anxious about that because **I a little bit did not feel confident about myself when in front of a lot of people. I realize that sometimes I don't feel confident with my pronunciation, so it is basically bordering, and I sometimes make myself blank in the speaking process.** And the second is be children; one of the challenges for cause\* children should be active, but I'm a quiet personality, so it can be one of my

anxiety because sometimes I'm confused about being a child even though I know children's role during when the process of the play performance, I felt that this play performance can't be a success. ... After having the play performance, I see myself as better than my old version and more confident than before.

The findings showed the significance of students' self-efficacy in succeeding Play Performance class and how Play Performance class provided opportunities for students to practice their self-efficacy. Although self-efficacy is not the dominant factor determining students' success in passing a class, most studies highlight how important self-efficacy is (Bandura, 1998; Campos & Madrigal, 2020; Celik, 2022; & Shamdas, 2023). In addition, this study found that most students at the beginning of the class had low self-efficacy and tended not to have clear goals in the Play Performance class. The major factor contributing to these findings is the students' unfamiliarity with the course (dramatic aspects) and having no experiences of conducting such event. Based on the study, most students were predicted to most likely fail this class. However, some aspects of this course encouraged students to perform well in their given roles. The researchers acknowledge that those aspects could be intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Managing students' emotional states is the major source of the students' level of academic self-efficacy as they were experiencing challenges both in the Play Performance class, other classes, and their private lives. Regarding to the class, the planned activities in this class also gave students the experiences they need to exhibit a performance which helped them to be more confident in D-Day. At the same time, students got the chance to observe their friends' experiences, efforts, and struggles. Some students saw others as successful students who could overcome their weaknesses resulting the growing confidence as they considered themselves in the same condition/situation. In addition, learning how their friends showed commitment in preparing for the performance and how they performed in practices helped students find role models who shared the similarities that they could learn from and finally made students realize they had the capabilities to succeed in this course even though most students showed the commitment at the almost end of Play Performance class. Additionally, the support that the students received gave them lifts they needed to improve their confidence. Most students considered their peers, family, and lecturer supportive. In addition, the feedback students received from their lecturer and friends gave students the belief that they were on the right track and could finish the work well.

Furthermore, basic psychological needs satisfaction and attachment, parental, and social support are the major factors contributing to the strength of the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. The researchers found most students knew what they needed to make them able to perform well in the preparation and on the D-Day. They learned to take care of their physical and emotional well-being. This finding is in line with Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020). They discovered self-efficacy has supportive and

protective roles by increasing the positive effect of mastery and performance-approach goals and reducing the negative impact of avoidance goals on academic performance. Moreover, some students expected to get some kind of acknowledgment by their lecturer which they found missing before the mid-term test. After the lecturer regularly accompanied the students and gave them adequate feedback, students felt more empowered. In addition, the researchers also found that the students' relation with other students and their significant others contribute to the strength of the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. Students who found themselves surrounded by supportive environment were more motivated and believed in themselves more than those who could not find it. The condition above support Zysberg and Schwabsky's (2020) study which showed the link between environmental factors and students' academic achievement.

## 5. Conclusion

Play Performance class gave students challenges that could test students' academic self-efficacy and at the same time help them develop their academic self-efficacy. In the beginning, most students considered themselves not having self-efficacy. After facing some challenges, problems, as well as support, their self-efficacy grows. This study found all factors influencing self-efficacy as mentioned by Bandura in students' reflection. All of those factors emerged as students faced challenging situations or conditions. Lastly, most students perceived positively the challenges they had faced as they helped them to be better persons in terms of responsibility, confidence, and personal assessment. This study then irradiates the positive impact of giving students challenges to foster self-efficacy while practicing their English skills.

This study has shown how students develop their academic self-efficacy during their Play Performance class. However, this study only focused on a class out of three classes. Students from other classes might have different experiences. In addition, Document analysis may help researchers gain the meaning, preparing observation sheets administrated by at least two persons will likely help confirm and compare what students wrote in their reflections. Therefore, we suggest the next researchers focus on tracking students' academic self-efficacy based on biweekly observations and students' reflections.

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