

Fostering Self-Efficacy in English Speaking among Canossian Sisters: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

This study explores the self-efficacy of Canossian Sisters in speaking English, focusing on their perceived challenges and the support they receive within their religious community. Grounded in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory and using a phenomenological approach, the study involved in-depth interviews and observations with five Canossian sisters from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Findings revealed three key themes: 1) the importance of English in global and mission-related contexts, 2) communication challenges, particularly pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence, and 3) strategies to improve English, such as listening to songs and engaging with English-speaking communities, and positive feedback from environment. The results underscore that supportive learning environments and consistent practice play pivotal roles in enhancing self-efficacy. The study highlights the need for tailored formative strategies in religious communities to build confidence in EFL communication, especially in multicultural and multilingual settings. These insights contribute to the development of educational interventions that empower religious learners to effectively communicate in English, aligning with their vocational missions.

Keywords: Cannosian sisters; English speaking; self-efficacy

1.Introduction

In this era of globalization, speaking skills have become an important skill to master, particularly in the field of education. Speaking skills are essential in language learning because they facilitate effective and clear communication in academic or professional settings (Sudarmo, 2021). Through good communication skills, learners can express their thoughts or ideas coherently and fluently. High self-efficacy levels can positively influence students' performance in learning, particularly second language learning including speaking (Tuyet Phan & Chen, 2022). Seeing the importance of speaking skills nowadays, the researchers were interested in investigating self-efficacy in speaking. Self-efficacy is a significant factor and contributes to effective communication, especially in EFL learners. Many researchers sought to investigate the dimensions of self-efficacy in language learning and its impact on the speaking abilities of students. For Brown (2004), self-efficacy students were encouraged and extended their actions in speaking as this activity is a necessity



throughout language learning. Given the Figurative Theory of Language, the importance of self-confidence for learning a foreign language, or in this case, English as EFL, can hardly be overestimated.

To conduct this research, the researcher chose self-efficacy theory as an important foundation. The definition of self-efficacy is a learner's self-confidence in their own skills in doing some activities (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is different with self-confidence. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs in their skills to organize or finish certain actions. This definition emphasizes that self-efficacy is not about actual skills or abilities, but rather about their beliefs regarding their capability to perform specific behaviours or tasks. In the context of the EFL learning process, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in speaking activities without fear of failure. Bandura (1977) identified four primary sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states. Mastery experience believes that the success in past-experience will increase people's self-efficacy. Next, vicarious experience explains that seeing other people who finish their task will trigger people's self-efficacy. Later, Pajares & Zeldin (2022) added that self-efficacy represents people's judgements of their capabilities to finish specific task which become the most influential arbiter in human agency. Then, social persuasion believes that verbal support and encouragement from other people can boost people's self-efficacy. Finally, psychological and emotional responses such as excitement or anxiety can influence self-efficacy.

Admittedly, the self-efficacy of the students affects to a greater extent their desire to perform speaking skills, which are vital for the evolution of language proficiency. In some previous research, self-efficacy has been widely explored among researchers, particularly in the academic field (Hermagustiana et al., 2021; Siboro et al., 2022; Afifah et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2025). The study by Febriyani & Astuti (2020) supports this view, indicating that interactive learning environments can improve students' self-efficacy through practical experience. The authors emphasized that from this standpoint, individuals with greater confidence are more likely to participate in speaking activities and embark on their language-learning endeavors. This idea was affirmed by Setiawan et al. (2025) who examined the needs of students concerning English fluency and confidence; they maintained that specialized assistance could significantly boost self-efficacy among EFL learners. Moreover, examining students' confidence particularly in certain skill which is speaking English and recognizing the elements of contributing to students' low self-esteem, Tridinanti (2024) discovered that the fear of committing errors significantly affects students' involvement in speaking activities, while an additional factor reducing students' confidence in speaking is shyness and anxiety. In other similar research, Setiawan et al. (2025) conducted similar research. The results showed that motivation, social environment, role models had positive effects on the students' self-efficacy in speaking. On the other hand, anxiety, lack of confidence, and low mastery of the material may hinder students' self-efficacy in speaking English. Therefore, the researcher did not explain the strategies to enhance self-efficacy.

From the previous research, some gaps can be investigated. Self-efficacy is crucial in acquiring a second language. It is like a key to a successful teaching and learning process. However, there is very little research that discusses self-efficacy in monastic life, particularly for sisters. Their "mission" required them to work in the English-speaking countries. Therefore, the researcher chose a Canossian sister as the research participant and tried to research to explore the challenges and strategies in their self-efficacy in speaking English. Self-efficacy theory by Bandura has been widely used in research, particularly in the education setting. However, there is still very limited research that has tried to use self-efficacy theory with language learning in different settings, which is in religious community. Therefore, two research questions were raised: 1) What challenges do Canossian candidates face regarding their self-efficacy in speaking English? 2) What strategies do Canossian Sisters use to develop their self-efficacy in speaking English? This can bring a new insight into research in this field. Then, most of the research in self-efficacy was using quantitative methods with a questionnaire as the research instrument. In this research, the researcher tried to explore the topic deeper using a qualitative approach, phenomenology. Different methods might have different results. The researcher hoped that this research would be relevant and useful to monastic life, particularly for sisters.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This research aims to explore the factors and challenges that affect canossian sisters' self-efficacy in speaking English and how to improve it. This research needs in-depth analysis and observation of a personal experience, particularly in self-efficacy in speaking English. Therefore, the researchers Implemented qualitative study. Creswell (2013) in his book stated that qualitative research is interpretive and naturalistic which means that the researcher investigates the subject in their natural setting and tries to understand or interpret the phenomena based on their experience. The researcher believes that through a qualitative approach, researchers can investigate complex phenomena and get profound understanding about the topic. Furthermore, a phenomenology was used to provide a deeper insight into canossian sisters experience. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology is the study that focuses on people's experience of certain phenomena. Hence, the goal of this method is to understand the essence of people's experience. Phenomenology in the field of education focuses on understanding students lived experiences and emotions. It aims to uncover deep issues affecting students' wellbeing, allowing researchers to interpret and analyze participants' perspectives, and ultimately enhancing educational practices and addressing challenges faced by students (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024). For these reasons, the researchers consider phenomenology the most suitable method for this research.

2.2. Research Setting and Participants

This research involved five Canossian sisters from the Canossian Sister Community of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. According to Creswell (2013), the number of participants can vary, but ideally between 5 and 25 participants. They were chosen as a participant because they frequently engage in English-speaking activities. Two participants were from Timor Leste, two other participants were from Kefa, East Nusa Tenggara, and one last participant was from Central Java. It becomes interesting because they come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, primarily speaking Tetun, Portuguese, and Bahasa Indonesia. It makes some of them encounter challenges when speaking English, particularly related to their self-efficacy. They were chosen as participants through purposive or purposeful sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher only interviewed respondents who were most likely to yield relevant experience or information and were willing to share it (Kelly, 2010). This sampling helped researchers to choose relevant participants to get deeper exploration. In phenomenological studies, researchers must obtain permission from participants to be studied and explain to the participants about the purpose of the study, procedures that will be used, and the benefits or risks (Creswell, 2013). In this research, informed consent was obtained verbally and recorded. Besides, to protect their privacy, the researcher used numerical pseudonyms or pseudonymization with numerical identifiers such as “participants 1 (P1), participants 2 (P2), ..., participants 5 (P5)”.

2.3. Data Collection

To carry out this research, the researchers performed data collection. To collect the data, interviews were the most suitable technique in phenomenology. This method often includes in-depth interviews and reflective analysis, allowing for rich, qualitative data that explore deeper insights into participants' experiences (Meadows, 2024). Semi-structured interview was used in this research to gain data. The idea of a semi-structured interview is a flexible conversation that enables researchers to explore the topic deeper (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). This interview combines structured and unstructured (spontaneous and follow-up) questions. To make the interview comfortable for the participants, the researcher used one-on-one interviews. Besides, this type of interview can provide rich and detailed data which can capture experiences or ideas that other instruments may miss (Hilman, 2022). The interview was also conducted in Tetun and Indonesia to ensure clarity and comfort. Since sisters have daily activities in monastery life, the researcher decided to use online interview. It made the interview more effective and efficient, and ensured the comfortability of participants. Alongside the data collection used by the researchers, the researchers used triangulation to confirm that the findings were valid and credible. The triangulation used by the researchers is observation, the researchers tried to make an observation to the research participants when they engage in English speaking activities. The combination of those two methods, theories, or observers in research can minimize the biases arising from the use of a single method, theory, or observer and are overcome (Noble & Heale, 2019).

2.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the researchers used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves examining qualitative data in the form of text and spoken words that have been gathered by the researchers to find and interpret patterns related to the topic discussed in the research (Cernasev & Axon, 2023). There were 5 steps for analyzing the data, first the researchers transcribed the recorded interviews to text, then code the data, grouped the coded data, and tried to interpret the data. The data analysis was based on a step by step stated by Creswell & David Creswell (2017). However, after transcribing the text, the researcher did a member checking by asking for confirmation from the interviewee. The purpose of member checking is to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data transcribed. After the member checking, the researchers continued to the next step, which is coding and interpreting the data. The coding and interpreting process was done using application QDA miner lite. The last step is to translate the findings from Bahasa Indonesia to English.

3. Findings and Discussion

The data collected from the participants' interviews regarded as (P1 to P5) were coded systematically into categories using QDA Miner Lite to identify the key themes influencing the participants' self-efficacy in speaking English.

The importance of English

In this study, the researchers recognized that English is widely recognized as a global language and the central focus of the study, and through the participants' shared experiences, they acknowledged that English is useful in both international communication and mission-related activities. Data reveals that participants acknowledged the importance of English principally in two aspects, including: Global Communication and Mission-related activities, where several participants (Participant 1 and Participant 4) identified English as Global Communication (I1), underscoring its significance as an international language that facilitates communication across borders. As participant 1 states,

“English is important to me because it is an international language. It is very helpful because it is related to communication during my journey worldwide.” Participant 1.

“English is very important because now we are entering a globalized world, and it is inevitable.” Participant 4

This reflects a common understanding that English serves as a bridge in a globalized world, as highlighted by participant 4. Some of the participants acknowledged that English is needed as the global communication.

The other theme that occurs was the importance of English-speaking during mission-Related Activities (I2): For some participants, English also serves a specific purpose related to their mission work. It is because during their mission, sisters might move from country to country. Meaning that in order to perform their activities, they have to speak English as the international language. Participant 3 mentions,

“I can understand one language well, maybe it’s enough. However, English is indeed needed such as for introduction or basic conversation, it is an introductory language.” Participant 3

Similarly, P5 acknowledges,

“English is the international language that I understand. It helps us communicate with foreigners, father, fellow sisters and so on, so we can perform our activities better”

Overall, the findings highlight that participants perceive English not merely as a lesson, but as an important tool that support both their global communication and mission-related activities. This finding indicates that their self-efficacy in speaking English is strongly shaped by its perceived necessity in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as a sister across diverse cultural context. Sudarmo (2021) stated that speaking skills are vital in language learning for effective communication in both academic and professional settings. This aligns with Brown (2004), who supports this idea by defining that self-efficacy in speaking English is formed by learners’ consciousness of the practical usefulness of the language, which the participants in this study noted; their motivation to learn English comes not only from personal growth but also from the requirements of their religious mission.

Challenges in Communication

The participants disclosed that they face multiple challenges when speaking English, with pronunciation (C1), lack of confidence (C2), and miscommunication (C3), which they acknowledged to be the most common issues they encountered. Mispronunciation (C1) appears to be a significant hurdle for many participants. As two participants shared,

“The real challenge for me is that my pronunciation is not correct or wrong Sometimes it led to misleading.” Participant 2

“Speaking is difficult because I have to organize the words word by word, so it is not only pronunciation, but also word formation” Participant 5

Besides mispronunciation, lack of confidence also became the most prominent challenges faced by participants. It is inevitable because English is not their first language, and most of the participants learn English during their monastery life. Most of the participant were not confident because they are afraid of making mistakes, which impacts their efficacy to speak English. According to Bandura (1986), believing in their own abilities is the core aspect of self-efficacy. However, when learners lack confidence, it not only makes them to question their ability but also can affect their actual performance. Participant 1 points out,

“The first challenge is about natural language. English is not our mother tongue, and we have to learn English. Since it is not our mother tongue which we don’t really master, we afraid of making mistakes” Participants 1

On the other hand, participant 5 also has a similar concern. He admitted that,

“I am shy to speak because I am afraid that I will be judged wrong. Fear of mistakes is what hinder me to speak English” Participant 5

Last theme that frequently occurs in the challenges was miscommunication (C3). This might be related to previous challenges. Those can impact the communication problem, where the speaker and receiver have interpreted things differently. It has happened due to the language barrier. Some of the participants mentioned that miscommunication often happens in their conversation.

“Maybe there is also miscommunication between me and the person I talk to, because both of us may be a little difficult to understand. It’s kind of funny sometimes, but still, it can lead to misunderstanding.” Participant 4

Participant 4 added a funny yet interesting example of slight miscommunication that could arise in their monastery life, she stated:

“Hungry becomes angry. Sometimes we can understand what the person means, that he is angry.” Participant 4

The results of this study indicated that participants' self-efficacy in speaking English was significantly influenced by various communication difficulties, particularly issues with pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and frequent misunderstandings. These findings align with the studies conducted by Setiawan et al. (2025), which emphasized that fear of making mistakes and feelings of shyness serve as major psychological obstacles to verbal expression in English. Similarly, Gurbuz & Cabaroglu (2021) observed that students who possess a more positive perception of their language abilities are more likely to actively participate in classroom interactions and oral presentations. Kubo (2009) also identified that a lack of confidence often stemming from an insufficient vocabulary can diminish the effectiveness of language communication. Furthermore, the fear of making errors emerged as a prominent factor restricting learners' willingness to engage in conversation, supporting Alvarez et al. (2024) and Pysarchyk et al. (2025) earlier findings. Ultimately, this research confirms that the participants' primary communication barriers mispronunciations, vocabulary deficits, and misunderstandings had a direct and adverse impact on their self-efficacy in using spoken English.

Strategies to Improve Self-Efficacy in Speaking English

Participants mostly cited some common challenges they faced in their English language development; therefore, several strategies were employed to enhance their self-efficacy in speaking English, with the most popular methods such as engaging in English-speaking communities (S1), giving feedback actively (S2), living in the healthy environment (S3), and practicing with fun activities (S4).

The first strategies that the participant implement was actively engage in the English-speaking communities (S1). It is because there are so many moments or activities in the community that they can participate, such as English mass, sharing moment, et cetera. One participant shared her experience:

"There are sisters from other countries in Asia such as Philippines, Malaysia. I even met some of sister from Europe such as Italy and other English-speaking countries. Of course those are very good opportunities to speak English." Participant 4

One participant added:

"Like it or not, I have to practice speaking. In the community, even some of other sister understand my language, so I have to keep practice too" Participant 5

The other prominent strategy that they implement is by giving each other positive feedback. They believe that supportive and healthy environment can motivate them to speak English better. Participants shared that the community's encouragement helped them to feel accepted and motivated to improve. Their community has a good willingness to learn together. Some of participants mentioned:

"In our community, we are committed to speaking English. It did help, because our experience once in the Novitiate, there was no Indonesian speaking." Participant 3

"We don't feel rejected. We feel accepted. It helps us to communicate better." Participant 5

Not only the members of community, but the environment where they live also increase their self-efficacy in speaking (S3). The learning environment also contributes significantly to their self-efficacy in speaking. The participants live in an environment where they don't feel oppressed. However, it is important to create an environment that is healthy and supportive. One participant shared her experience during her journey in monastery life:

"At that time, I was moved to Singapore. I was initially afraid, but turns out, I was placed in the school, among children who spoke English. I had to try to talk to them, but since I live with children, somehow, I it boost my self-efficacy" Participant 2

Last but not least, their strategi to boost their self-efficacy in speaking English is by fun activities or tools (S4) such as songs or other English media. Some participants shared a common practice. They sometimes practice their speaking alone using English songs and media. By that strategy, they don't have to talk face to face with other people, which gives them more flexibility and less stress. Some participants mentioned:

"I listen to the English songs or watching English dub movies. I sometimes spell the words alongside the movie!" Participant 1

"Since I love music, I listen to songs that have English nuances and sing it all day long. I think it is considered learning but I actually having fun" Participant 4

"If I don't understand, I try to look at the dictionary. I also write down the word, because it helps me a lot, even though it's just in a simple expression, but it enriches me" Participant 3

These findings reveal that to gain higher self-efficacy in speaking English, participants employ strategies to improve their English proficiency, such as listening to English songs, browsing English dictionaries, and taking part in English-speaking Communities. And these approaches resonate with the previous research on language learning strategies which emphasized listening to the media and using dictionaries to develop English skills by the participants as effective tools to expand vocabulary and improve pronunciation (Yudar et al., 2020; Rahmawati & Yunus, 2020; Kaswari et al., 2023) who emphasized that external resources such as dictionaries and language tools contribute to improved self-efficacy. Additionally, participants of the study also highlighted the significance of involvement with the English-speaking community, such as interacting with Native English speakers from different countries. This idea is supported by Dörnyei (2014) assertion that exposure to authentic language use, whether through media or interaction with native speakers, encourages learners to take risks in speaking and boosts their self-efficacy.

The environment where the participants belong plays a crucial role in shaping their self-efficacy, which is considered an important theme in this study. The Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1986), mentioned that environmental factors can influence self-efficacy. Setiawan et al. (2025) argued that support from peers or community and a learning environment that encourages practice are significant external factors that contribute to self-efficacy in language learning. The Canossian Sisters mentioned that community support, particularly from fellow members who are fluent in English, was crucial in enhancing their language skills. Participants indicated that their willingness to engage in speaking activities increased because they felt accepted and supported in the community where they belonged. This is consistent with the work of Harahap et al. (2015), who found that learners' confidence is bolstered when they are part of a supportive community that encourages practice and feedback. Furthermore, the learning environment, particularly immersion experiences such as being placed in English-speaking environments, was reported by the participants as essential for enhancing their language skills.

4. Conclusion

Based on this study, the Canossian Sisters' self-efficacy in speaking English brought to light important factors that affect participants' language learning experiences. The study's findings highlight the importance of English, which is acknowledged as a vital communication tool for mission-related operations as well as a worldwide medium. Despite this recognition, participants still faced major communication obstacles, including poor pronunciation, a small vocabulary, and frequent miscommunications. The participants' self-confidence was directly impacted by these challenges, and many of them expressed that their fear of making mistakes prevented them from speaking up. On the other hand, the study also emphasized that consistent practice and interaction with English-speaking populations were important methods for boosting self-esteem and enhancing language proficiency. Additionally, the environment was crucial in supporting participants' language acquisition attempts, especially peer support and immersion learning opportunities. In summary, this study demonstrates that a mix of external elements like immersion and community support, as well as internal elements like practice and confidence, influences self-efficacy in language learning. These results are consistent with current ideas on self-efficacy and language learning, highlighting the value of consistent practice and a supportive environment in improving language proficiency.

Based on the results of this study, the researchers suggest the following points: Firstly, the researchers appeal to the educators, formators, and curriculum developers to increase practice opportunities, particularly in similar contexts to the Canossian Sisters, to encourage the sisters to practice speaking English regularly in a supportive environment. And secondly, to foster a positive learning environment where educational and community settings allow language learners to make mistakes, which is seen as part of the learning process. Thirdly, expanding vocabulary by providing learners with tools and resources, such as interactive dictionaries, vocabulary-building apps, or context-rich reading materials, that help learners overcome the challenges of limited vocabulary and enhance self-confidence. Lastly, encourage Peer Support that facilitates learners to interact in English-speaking communities, whether in person or online, which can be crucial for building confidence and language fluency. This type of social interaction fosters a sense of belonging and provides real-world language practice. Regular feedback, both from peers and educators, is effective for learners to identify areas for improvement while also reinforcing progress. This feedback loop can greatly enhance their self-efficacy by providing a clear sense of development and achievement.

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