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Developing Communicative Self-Efficacy in University Students Through Eportfolio-Integrated Task-Based Language Teaching

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Citation: Aripov Z. T. Developing Communicative Self-Efficacy in University Students Through Eportfolio-Integrated Task-Based Language Teaching. Web of Semantic: Universal Journal on Innovative Education 2026, 5(3), 73-81.

Received: 10th Feb 2026

Revised: 21st Mar 2026

Accepted: 08th Apr 2026

Published: 30th May 2026



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Abstract: Despite decades of communicative language teaching reform, university students continue to experience a persistent gap between receptive linguistic knowledge and productive communicative confidence. This study investigates whether an ePortfolio-integrated Task-Based Language Teaching framework can systematically develop the communicative self-efficacy component of university students' broader communicative competence. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Portfolio Assessment Theory, and the TBLT framework, the study employs a participatory action research design across three iterative cycles conducted over two academic semesters with 96 undergraduate students at a Central Asian university. Data were gathered through speaking self-efficacy surveys administered at five time-points, ePortfolio artefact analysis, structured peer feedback logs, audio-recorded task performances, and semi-structured focus group interviews. Results reveal that the eP-TBLT framework produced statistically significant and sustained self-efficacy growth across all five measurements, with the steepest gains occurring not during task performance itself but during structured peer feedback and ePortfolio reflection phases. Consistent with portfolio-based research demonstrating that deliberate self-directed compilation of evidence empowers students to take accountability for their own learning and development, students who engaged most deeply with the ePortfolio reflection component showed self-efficacy gains 2.3 times larger than those with minimal engagement. Three mechanisms drove growth: evidence accumulation, seeing documented proof of one's own communicative development, feedback internalisation, converting external peer commentary into internal performance standards, and task transfer. The study contributes an empirically tested, actionable pedagogical model for developing communicative self-efficacy as a structurally distinct and assessable component of university communication education.

Keywords: communicative self-efficacy, ePortfolio, task-based language teaching, TBLT, self-determination theory, willingness to communicate, peer feedback, action research, portfolio assessment, communicative competence, higher education, self-directed learning.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of communicative language education has never been merely to produce linguistically accurate students. It has always been, at least nominally, to produce students who can use language to act in the world — to negotiate, persuade, explain, question, collaborate, and create meaning with others. Yet the gap between what university students know about communication and what they are willing and able to do communicatively remains one of the most stubborn unsolved problems in higher education pedagogy. Students pass written grammar tests and fail to speak up in seminars. They write

sophisticated arguments and cannot summarise them aloud under pressure. They understand the discourse conventions of academic discussion and systematically opt out of participating in it. This gap is not, in the main, a knowledge problem.[1] It is a self-efficacy problem — specifically, a problem of communicative self-efficacy: students' belief in their capacity to deploy their communicative resources effectively in specific communicative situations. Research investigating willingness to communicate, speaking self-efficacy, and perceived communicative competence as predictors of second language spoken task production has demonstrated that the influences of SSE and PCC on spoken task production are fully mediated by WTC, with the entire model accounting for 21% of variance in observable behavioural output. In practical terms, this means that a student's self-efficacy belief is not merely a psychological correlate of communicative performance — it is the gateway through which all other communicative resources must pass before they produce observable communicative behaviour. No self-efficacy, no willingness to communicate; no willingness to communicate, no communicative action, regardless of underlying knowledge. If communicative self-efficacy occupies this gatekeeping role, then its development must be treated as a primary pedagogical objective rather than a side-effect of language instruction.[2] Two methodological developments in recent educational research offer productive tools for this purpose. The first is Task-Based Language Teaching, which organises instruction around real-world communicative tasks that require genuine meaning-making rather than form-focused exercises. Communicative tasks that simulate real-life scenarios can enhance speaking fluency, confidence, and willingness to communicate, while informal peer practice environments that are less structured and more relaxed help reduce speaking anxiety and build communicative confidence.[3] The second is ePortfolio-based assessment, which enables students to collect, curate, and reflect on evidence of their own communicative development over time — a process that directly addresses the self-efficacy deficit by making developmental progress visible, documented, and student-owned. The integration of these two approaches — which we term ePortfolio-integrated Task-Based Language Teaching — has not, to our knowledge, been systematically investigated as a vehicle for developing communicative self-efficacy as a distinct pedagogical target. This study addresses that gap through a two-semester participatory action research design that iterates the eP-TBLT framework across three cycles, refining it in response to student experience and outcome data at each stage. The study is governed by three research questions. First, does the eP-TBLT framework produce statistically significant, sustained growth in communicative self-efficacy across a two-semester period? Second, which specific components of the framework — task performance, peer feedback, or ePortfolio reflection — are most strongly associated with self-efficacy development? Third, what mechanisms, as articulated by students themselves in focus group discussions, account for the self-efficacy growth that the quantitative data document?[4]

METHODOLOGY

Self-Determination Theory holds that human motivation and psychological growth are optimally supported when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, feeling that one's communicative choices are self-governed; competence, experiencing oneself as effective in communicative action; and relatedness, feeling connected to and valued by one's communicative community. The eP-TBLT framework was designed to address all three: ePortfolio curation supports autonomy by giving students control over the evidence they select and the narrative they construct; task completion supports competence by providing performance opportunities scaled to the student's developmental edge; peer feedback supports relatedness by embedding communicative growth within a community of responsive peers.[5] Self-efficacy and grit function as fundamental psychological drivers of communicative action, with self-efficacy demonstrating both direct and indirect effects on willingness to communicate, while speaking enjoyment and anxiety play comparatively supplementary roles — suggesting

that designing for self-belief and perseverance rather than anxiety reduction is the more productive pedagogical posture. Portfolio Assessment Theory provides the conceptual basis for using curated artefact collections as developmental learning tools rather than merely summative records. A portfolio's structure can facilitate the promotion of students' self-awareness, integrating theory with practice and reflection; the decision on the use of portfolios must be made alongside careful design of their structure and tasks to facilitate and support students' reflections, as inadequate portfolio design may fail to generate reflection and may promote rejection of the process.[6] The ePortfolio component of the present study was designed with this caution explicitly in mind, incorporating scaffolded reflection prompts, documented peer response cycles, and visual self-efficacy tracking charts that made developmental trajectory visible to students in real time. Task-Based Language Teaching provides the pedagogical architecture within which communicative self-efficacy development is operationalised. TBLT's core claim — that language is most effectively learned and communicative competence most effectively developed through engagement in genuine communicative tasks with real-world meaning rather than form-focused exercises — aligns precisely with the self-efficacy research finding that mastery experiences, particularly those involving authentic communicative action rather than simulated exercises, are the most powerful source of self-efficacy growth.[7] Task-based speaking tasks positively impact university students' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate, since TBLT specialists formulate curricula based on objectives for which people are learning language — tasks to be fulfilled in real-life settings rather than focusing on specific words and grammar rules — and self-efficacy demonstrably affects motivation constructs, learners' academic performance, and communicative engagement. Participatory action research was selected as the overarching methodology because the research question is fundamentally practical — how can a specific pedagogical framework be designed and refined to develop communicative self-efficacy? — and because the study required iterative adjustment in response to participant experience rather than adherence to a fixed protocol.[8] PAR is distinguished from other action research traditions by its commitment to participant involvement in the research process itself: students in this study were not merely research subjects but active contributors to the evaluation and refinement of the framework between cycles. The study proceeded across three action research cycles, each involving four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Table 1 provides an overview of the cycle structure.

Table 1. Action Research Cycle Structure and eP-TBLT Framework Modifications

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Primary focus	Task performance + ePortfolio setup	Peer feedback integration	Transfer and autonomous self-assessment
Task type	Structured pair/group discussions	Unscripted debate and negotiation tasks	Self-selected real-world communicative tasks
ePortfolio requirement	Artefact collection only	Artefact + structured reflection prompt	Artefact + self-authored reflection + peer commentary
Peer feedback structure	Optional	Structured using a feedback framework	Self-designed feedback criteria
Framework modification based on Cycle 1 data	—	Added audio self-rating post for each task	Replaced instructor-set reflection prompts with student-generated ones
Framework modification based on Cycle 2 data	—	—	Added visual self-efficacy growth tracking component

Ninety-six undergraduate students from two faculties — Humanities $n=54$ and Social Sciences $n=42$ — at a state university in Uzbekistan participated across both semesters. Mean age was 19.9 years, $SD = 1.3$. Gender distribution was 63.5% female, 36.5% male. Students enrolled voluntarily in the eP-TBLT course as an elective communication module; no participant had prior formal ePortfolio experience. Institutional ethical approval was obtained; all participants provided informed written consent and are identified by pseudonym in qualitative extracts. Speaking Self-Efficacy SSE was measured using an adapted version of the Speaking Self-Efficacy Questionnaire SSEQ; Rahimi, 2022, at five time-points: baseline T1, end of Cycle 1 T2, mid-Cycle 2 T3, end of Cycle 2 T4, and end of Cycle 3 T5.[9] The SSEQ comprises 24 items across three subscales — task confidence, audience adaptability, and breakdown recovery — rated on a 0–100 confidence scale. Internal consistency across all five administrations was satisfactory, α range: 0.84–0.91. Component engagement was tracked through ePortfolio activity logs, which recorded frequency, depth scored using a three-level rubric, and timeliness of three engagement types: task performance recordings uploaded, peer feedback entries completed, and self-reflection entries written. Task performance was audio-recorded across all three cycles.[10] A stratified random sample of 30% of recordings per cycle was scored by two trained raters using a five-dimensional communicative performance rubric: fluency, coherence, interactional management, audience responsiveness, and recovery from breakdown; inter-rater agreement $\kappa=0.82$. Focus group interviews six groups of eight participants each, were conducted at the end of each cycle, audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Framework Analysis Ritchie & Lewis, 2003 to identify mechanisms students attributed to their own self-efficacy development. Quantitative SSE data across five time-points were analysed using repeated-measures ANOVA with Greenhouse-Geisser correction for sphericity violations. Pairwise comparisons used Bonferroni-corrected t-tests. Pearson correlations examined associations between component engagement scores and SSE gains. [11]

RESULTS

Repeated-measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of time on SSE

scores across all five measurement points: $F_{4,380}=47.6$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.33$, indicating a large effect. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics at each time point.

Table 2. Speaking Self-Efficacy Scores Across Five Time-Points N=96

Time-Point	Event	M	SD	Change from Previous Δ	t vs. Previous	p
T1	Baseline	38.4	9.1	—	—	—
T2	End Cycle 1 Wk 8	46.7	8.6	+8.3	7.41	<0.001
T3	Mid Cycle 2 Wk 12	52.1	8.2	+5.4	5.89	<0.001
T4	End Cycle 2 Wk 16	59.8	7.9	+7.7	8.03	<0.001
T5	End Cycle 3 Wk 24	68.3	7.4	+8.5	9.12	<0.001

Note. All pairwise comparisons Bonferroni-corrected. Total SSE gain T1→T5: $\Delta=29.9$ points, 77.9% relative increase.

Growth was continuous and statistically significant at every measurement interval. The largest single-interval gain occurred between T4 and T5 $\Delta=8.5$, during Cycle 3's autonomous self-assessment phase — suggesting that student-controlled reflection rather than instructor-scaffolded feedback produces the strongest self-efficacy signal. The T1-to-T5 total gain of 29.9 points represents a 77.9% relative increase from baseline. Subscale analysis revealed differential growth patterns. The Breakdown Recovery subscale showed the largest absolute gain across the full study period, $\Delta=34.2$ points, followed by Audience Adaptability, $\Delta=31.7$ points, and Task Confidence, $\Delta=24.8$ points.[12] This pattern suggests that the eP-TBLT framework was particularly effective in developing the more sophisticated, real-time communicative self-regulatory skills — managing communicative difficulty and adapting to the audience — rather than merely pre-task confidence. To examine which elements of the eP-TBLT framework drove self-efficacy development, participants were divided into High, Moderate, and Low engagement tertiles based on composite ePortfolio activity log scores. Table 3 presents the SSE gain by engagement level across all three components.

Table 3. Mean SSE Gain T1–T5 by Component Engagement Level

Component	Low Engagement n≈32	Moderate Engagement n≈32	High Engagement in≈32	F	p	η^2
ePortfolio Reflection	+13.1	+24.6	+41.8	38.4	<0.001	0.45
Peer Feedback	+17.4	+27.9	+36.2	21.7	<0.001	0.31
Task Performance	+22.3	+28.4	+33.1	8.9	<0.001	0.16

Note. Engagement tertile boundaries: Low = bottom 33%, Moderate = middle 33%, High = top 33% of composite engagement score. n values approximate due to rounding.

Three findings stand out. First, ePortfolio Reflection engagement showed by far the largest effect size $\eta^2=0.45$, with High-engagement students gaining 41.8 SSE points compared to 13.1 for Low-engagement students — a ratio of 3.2:1. This is the study's most consequential finding: structured, self-authored written reflection on communicative performance is a stronger driver of self-efficacy development than the communicative performance itself. Second, Peer Feedback engagement showed a substantial effect

$\eta^2=0.31$, confirming that receiving substantive, content-engaged responses from peers functions as a powerful self-efficacy-building mechanism. Students have consistently reported that peer review is useful for developing communication skills through listening, speaking, writing, and observing, with peer feedback helping students to develop analytical methods and providing targeted points to improve on. Third, Task Performance engagement, while significantly associated with self-efficacy gain, showed the smallest effect, $\eta^2=0.16$ — a counterintuitive result suggesting that doing more communicative tasks is less important than what students do with the evidence of having done them. Multiple regression analysis confirmed that ePortfolio Reflection engagement was the strongest independent predictor of T1–T5 SSE gain $\beta=0.54$, $p<0.001$, followed by Peer Feedback engagement $\beta=0.31$, $p<0.001$ and Task Performance engagement $\beta=0.18$, $p=0.004$. Together, the three components explained 67.3% of variance in self-efficacy gain, $R^2=0.673$, $F_{3,92}=63.1$, $p<0.001$. Observer-rated task performance scores five-dimension rubric increased significantly across cycles: Cycle 1 $M=5.2$ $SD=1.1$, Cycle 2 $M=6.1$ $SD=1.0$, Cycle 3 $M=7.0$ $SD=0.9$ out of 10. However, the correlation between performance quality and SSE gain was moderate rather than strong $r=0.41$, $p<0.001$) and notably weaker than the correlation between ePortfolio engagement and SSE gain $r=0.72$, $p<0.001$. More revealing was the pattern across performance quartiles. Students in the lowest performance quartile Cycle 1 $M=3.8/10$, showed a mean SSE gain of 24.7 points — comparable to students in the highest performance quartile, Cycle 1 $M=7.4/10$, SSE gain $M=28.3$ points. The decisive differentiator within each performance quartile was ePortfolio engagement: within the lowest performance quartile, High-engagement students gained 38.1 SSE points while Low-engagement students gained only 11.3 points. This pattern powerfully confirms that it is the processing of communicative experience — not the quality of the experience itself — that generates self-efficacy growth. Self-feedback engagement appears to improve students' feedback self-efficacy and learning performance, with the self-feedback process viewed not as a single action but as an ongoing cyclical process of refinement where students continually interact with evidence, evaluate its meaning, and formulate future improvement plans. Framework Analysis of six focus group transcripts across three cycles identified three primary mechanisms through which students accounted for their own self-efficacy development.[13]

Mechanism One: Evidence Accumulation. The most consistently cited mechanism was the experience of being able to see — literally, visually, in their ePortfolio — a documented record of communicative development over time. Students described this as qualitatively different from the abstract instructor's claim that "you have improved." One second-year Humanities student described it as follows: "Before, I knew teachers said I was getting better, but I didn't feel it. When I listened to my Week 3 recording next to my Week 14 recording, I could actually hear it. That changed something." This finding aligns with the self-efficacy literature's emphasis on mastery experiences as the most powerful self-efficacy source: what the ePortfolio did was make mastery experiences auditable — replayable, comparable, and student-owned rather than teacher-certified.

Mechanism Two: Feedback Internalisation. A second mechanism involved the gradual conversion of external peer feedback into internal performance standards. Students described an early-cycle pattern of receiving feedback and experiencing it as evaluation, followed by a mid-cycle shift in which feedback began to function as information — actionable data about communicative choices rather than social judgments about communicative worth. Mastery goals, which focus on the development of competency and skills, have a direct positive influence on students' perceived usefulness of received feedback, while performance goals related to competitive motivation do not show similar effects — suggesting that the goal orientation framing within which feedback is received substantially mediates its developmental impact. The eP-TBLT framework's Cycle 3 shift to student-generated feedback criteria appeared to accelerate this internalisation process: when students had authored the criteria by which peers

responded to their performances, they were more likely to receive that feedback as informative rather than evaluative.[14]

Mechanism Three: Transfer Recognition. A third mechanism, most prominent in Cycle 3 focus group data, involved students recognising that communicative competence developed in one task context transferred to other contexts — including contexts outside the classroom. Students described using communicative strategies practised in TBLT tasks in workplace internship settings, social encounters, and family communication situations, and recognising this transfer as evidence that their communicative self-efficacy was not task-specific but genuinely dispositional. "I realised I wasn't just getting better at the tasks. I was getting better at talking. And then I started trusting myself more generally," reported a third-year Social Sciences student. This transfer recognition appeared to function as a self-efficacy multiplier: each successful communicative event outside the classroom retroactively validated the self-efficacy gains within it, creating a generative cycle of competence-experience-efficacy-action that the instructional design had initiated but could no longer claim to contain.

DISCUSSION

The study's most significant theoretical contribution is its empirical demonstration that communicative self-efficacy development is primarily a processing problem rather than a performance problem. The conventional assumption in communication pedagogy is that more communicative practice produces more communicative confidence — that the path from low to high self-efficacy runs through the accumulation of communicative performance experiences. The present findings challenge this assumption directly. Task Performance engagement was the weakest predictor of self-efficacy gain among the three eP-TBLT components, $\eta^2=0.16$, while ePortfolio Reflection engagement was the strongest, $\eta^2=0.45$. Within performance quartiles, the single most powerful predictor of self-efficacy growth was not how well students performed but how deeply they engaged with their ePortfolio after performing. This finding is consistent with — and extends — Boud and Molloy's 2013 sustainable feedback framework, which argues that the developmental value of feedback lies not in its delivery but in its uptake and integration by the student. What the eP-TBLT design accomplished was to create a structured, repeated, student-controlled process of uptake: the ePortfolio made it logistically and psychologically possible for students to return to their communicative performances, compare them across time, respond to peer commentary in writing, and generate their own interpretive accounts of what had changed and why. The strong association between Peer Feedback engagement and self-efficacy gain $\eta^2=0.31$, is consistent with self-efficacy theory's account of social persuasion as a self-efficacy source, but the present data allow a more precise account of what kind of peer feedback matters. Students in focus groups consistently distinguished between feedback that responded to their communicative performance — noting accuracy, fluency, or structure — and feedback that responded to their communicative contribution — engaging with the content of what they had said, asking follow-up questions, or describing how their contribution had changed the responder's thinking. The latter was described as categorically more powerful in its effect on self-efficacy. During peer learning, students get opportunities to listen to the views of group members, exchange different opinions and positive criticism, and learn to ask meaningful and clarifying questions; peer influence can shape and reshape academic self-concept, and peer pressure can lead to personal responsibility and motivation for high achievement. The distinction between performance feedback and contribution feedback may explain why trained peer feedback studies show inconsistent self-efficacy effects: training programmes that focus peers on technical evaluation criteria may inadvertently suppress the contribution-response mechanism that drives the strongest self-efficacy signal. The iterative, participatory structure of the action research design was not merely a methodological convenience; it appears to have been an

active self-efficacy ingredient. The Cycle 3 modifications — student-generated reflection prompts, self-authored feedback criteria, visual self-efficacy growth charts — were all co-designed with students on the basis of their Cycle 2 feedback, and all were associated with accelerated self-efficacy growth in Cycle 3 T4–T5 gain $\Delta=8.5$, the largest single-interval gain in the study. When students experienced their own feedback shaping the framework within which they were developing, the framework itself became evidence of their communicative agency — a meta-level self-efficacy experience in which the research process reinforced the learning process. Students have improved their self-efficacy, performance, and learning abilities through frameworks that prioritise repeatability, flexibility, and learning initiative, attributing growth to their active engagement rather than passive reception of instruction. A subsidiary finding deserves mention. Observer-rated task performance scores increased significantly across cycles, Cycle 1 $M=5.2$ to Cycle 3 $M=7.0$, $p<0.001$, and this improvement was significantly correlated with SSE gain, $r=0.41$. This correlation, while moderate, suggests that self-efficacy growth was not merely psychological but behaviourally productive: students who developed higher communicative self-efficacy also communicated more effectively by external standards. The influences of speaking self-efficacy and perceived communicative competence on spoken task production are fully mediated by willingness to communicate, meaning that self-efficacy gains translate into observable communicative behaviour only when they first increase the student's willingness to engage communicatively. The eP-TBLT framework appears to have operated precisely through this pathway: self-efficacy growth $\rightarrow$ increased WTC $\rightarrow$ increased task engagement $\rightarrow$ improved observable performance. The action research design, while appropriate for the study's practical questions, precludes causal inference in the experimental sense; the absence of a control group means that observed gains cannot be attributed solely to the eP-TBLT framework rather than to maturation, Hawthorne effects, or other unmeasured factors. The single-institution, single-context sample limits generalisability; future research should replicate the framework in different disciplinary and cultural contexts. The five-point SSE measurement schedule, while more granular than most intervention studies, cannot resolve the within-cycle dynamics of self-efficacy development; ecological momentary assessment or experience sampling methods would provide a finer-grained view. Finally, the ePortfolio engagement measure was researcher-constructed and has not been independently validated; future studies should develop and validate a standardised ePortfolio engagement instrument.[15]

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate whether an ePortfolio-integrated Task-Based Language Teaching framework could develop communicative self-efficacy as a distinct, assessable component of university students' communicative competence. The answer, based on 24 weeks of iterative participatory action research with 96 undergraduate students, is affirmative — and the nature of the mechanism is illuminating. Communicative self-efficacy did not grow primarily because students did more communicative tasks. It grew because students engaged deeply with the evidence of having done them: listening to recordings of their own performances, reading peer responses to the content of what they had said, writing reflective accounts of what had changed and why, and — in Cycle 3 — generating their own criteria for what communicative growth looked like. The decisive variable was not exposure to communicative experience but the deliberate, structured, student-owned processing of that experience. This finding has a direct practical implication that cuts against the current design logic of most university communication courses: more task time is not the answer. The answer is more reflection time — specifically, structured ePortfolio reflection that makes communicative development visible, auditable, and narratable by the student who is doing the developing. This is not a minor methodological adjustment. It is a fundamental reorientation of what communication education is for: not the production of

technically accurate communicative performances, but the development of students who experience themselves as capable, agentive, and self-improving communicators. Four recommendations follow for curriculum designers and communication educators. First, incorporate ePortfolio artefact collection as a core structural feature of any communication module, not as an optional supplement. Second, design peer feedback protocols that elicit contribution-response rather than performance-evaluation; the question "How did this change your thinking?" is more self-efficacy-generative than "What did they do well and what needs improvement?" Third, include visual self-efficacy growth tracking — allowing students to chart their own SSE scores across time — as a standard component of the ePortfolio architecture. Fourth, progressively transfer reflective autonomy to students across the course: begin with scaffolded prompts, move to student-modified prompts, and culminate in fully student-authored reflection frameworks. The trajectory of increasing autonomy appears to be itself a mechanism of self-efficacy development, not merely a desirable endpoint. The student who moves from passive recipient to active communicator does not do so primarily by speaking more. They do so by learning to recognise and trust the evidence of their own communicative growth.

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