

**Article**

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**Determinants of Speaking Self-Efficacy Among Independent English Users in Japan**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study develops a model for CEFR Independent User-level Japanese L2 English learners to examine the relationships among reflections, classroom community, fear of negative and positive evaluation, and conversation-focused speaking self-efficacy, using structural equation modeling (SEM) with bootstrapping. The study collects data from 236 students through a questionnaire comprising four psychometric scales. The investigations found that reflections with consistent instructor feedback may potentially predict enhanced classroom community among independent users. Additionally, classroom community significantly predicts fear of positive evaluation but not fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, reflections with consistent instructor feedback indirectly predict a reduction in both evaluation-related fears among independent users. Overall, the model explains variance in conversation-based speaking self-efficacy for independent users (15.8%). The findings of this study conclude that instructors using reflections should provide consistent feedback, as it may play a key role in facilitating classroom community.

**KEYWORDS:** EFL speaking self-efficacy, instructor interventions, classroom community, fear of negative evaluation, fear of positive evaluation

## Introduction

This article reports on the development of a model predicting the relationships among instructor interventions, classroom community, fear of negative evaluation, fear of positive evaluation, and conversation-focused speaking self-efficacy, across two English proficiency levels. The study involves 236 university-level Japanese L2 English learners, comprising CEFR Independent Users. The present study considers foreign language anxiety as a primary cause of reduced English-speaking self-efficacy in Japan. Andrade and Williams (2009) found that approximately three-quarters of all Japanese university EFL students report some degree of anxiety, with around one-tenth experiencing debilitating levels that strongly hinder performance. Anxiety is most pronounced during spontaneous speaking situations like group discussions and conversations (Jalleh et al., 2021). Muroya (2023) specified that the anxiety experienced by English learners in Japan is culturally shaped by a strong concern for others' perceptions, which may be more pronounced than in other countries.

In spite of research that has separately identified individual causes of anxiety, such as evaluation-based fears and classroom community, there is no model that describes how these factors interact among English learners who are sensitive to evaluations from peers. Based on Goffman's (1955) concept of face and Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987), the present study postulates that classroom community influences evaluation-based fears, with both of these factors simultaneously impacting speaking-efficacy during conversations. The current investigation seeks to develop a model that predicts the relationship between these factors, while considering the interventions that are implemented by learners' instructors.

After a review of previous research, this article provides the research questions of the study and the research material and methods. The article then presents the results of a prediction model for English learners of independent user levels. Finally, the article discusses the results and concludes with a final overview of the study's focus, findings, limitations, and implications.

## Literature Review

### *Fear of Negative Evaluation and Speaking Self-Efficacy*

The fear of negative evaluation (Watson & Friend, 1969) is widely recognized as a central source of anxiety that stems from anticipating unfavorable judgments from others and avoiding situations in which such evaluations may occur. Consistent with this conceptualization, individuals with higher levels of fear of negative evaluation have been found to be more sensitive to evaluative situations in general (Button et al., 2015). Within the field of language learning, a growing body of research suggests that fear of negative evaluation plays a pivotal role in the development and maintenance of foreign language anxiety. Studies by Shabani (2012) and Reyes (2022) identified significant positive relationships between fear of negative evaluation and foreign language anxiety, while Sadighi and Dastpak (2017) argued that concerns about negative evaluation are the primary source of learners' anxiety about making mistakes in English.

Research further suggests that the influence of fear of negative evaluation extends beyond anxiety to learners' language performance and classroom engagement. Liu and Huang (2011) and Tzoannopoulou (2016) found that English language performance was associated with levels of fear of negative evaluation, indicating that evaluative concerns may have tangible consequences for learning outcomes. However, these studies do not fully explain the mechanisms through which fear of negative evaluation affects performance. Subsequent research has pointed to social and interactional processes as possible pathways. For example, Idri (2011) reported that concerns about peer evaluation were particularly prevalent among first-year university learners, while Sabri et al. (2021) found that learners with higher fear of negative evaluation experienced greater difficulty interacting with classmates. Similarly, Fakhruddin et al. (2022) observed that fear of negative evaluation interfered with learners' ability to comprehend and perform during speaking activities. Together, these findings suggest that the negative effects of fear of negative evaluation may be partly mediated by reduced willingness to engage in communicative interactions.

Recent studies have increasingly examined the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and speaking self-efficacy. Across different educational and language-learning contexts, Kamal et al. (2025), Okyar (2023), and Yan (2024) found consistent evidence of a significant negative relationship between fear of negative evaluation and speaking self-efficacy, with higher levels of evaluative fear predicting lower confidence in speaking ability. Notably, Kamal et al. (2025) and Okyar (2023) reported that fear of negative evaluation was often the strongest predictor of poor speaking outcomes among anxiety-related variables, highlighting its potentially unique contribution to learners' speaking experiences. This finding complements earlier research linking fear of negative evaluation to anxiety and performance, suggesting that self-efficacy may be one mechanism through which evaluative concerns influence speaking behavior.

At the same time, there is evidence that the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and speaking performance may be cyclical rather than unidirectional. Busch et al. (2023) and Gomez et al. (2023) found that anxiety arising from fear of negative evaluation contributed to avoidance, excessive self-monitoring, and reduced participation during speaking tasks, behaviors that may in turn reinforce learners' perceptions of poor speaking ability. Supporting this interpretation, Grieve et al. (2021) reported that learners perceived fear of judgment as directly undermining both their speaking experiences and their willingness to participate. Taken together, these studies suggest that fear of negative evaluation not only contributes to foreign language anxiety but may also initiate a self-reinforcing cycle in which anxiety, reduced participation, lower self-efficacy, and poorer speaking performance mutually influence one another.

### ***Fear of Positive Evaluation and Speaking Self-Efficacy***

A relatively newer source of learner anxiety that has received less attention is the fear of positive evaluation (Weeks et al., 2008), defined as the apprehension individuals experience when they receive positive attention or recognition. Although fear of positive evaluation is conceptually distinct from fear of negative evaluation, research suggests that it contributes uniquely to social anxiety. Fredrick and Luebbe (2020) and Reichenberger and Blechert (2018) found that individuals with higher fear of positive evaluation experience discomfort when receiving praise or positive attention, indicating that positive social feedback may function as a source of anxiety rather than

reassurance. This challenges the assumption that positive evaluation is universally beneficial and suggests that some individuals perceive positive attention as socially threatening.

Several studies have proposed explanations for this seemingly paradoxical response. Rassaby et al. (2024) and Wilson et al. (2022) found that individuals with higher fear of positive evaluation are concerned that positive evaluations may increase future expectations or provoke envy among peers. Similarly, Reichenberger and Blechert (2018) and Weeks and Howell (2012) reported that individuals with high fear of positive evaluation often avoid situations in which they may receive praise or recognition, fearing that positive evaluations will result in greater scrutiny or pressure to maintain performance. Together, these findings suggest that the anxiety associated with positive evaluation may arise not from the evaluation itself but from its anticipated social consequences. However, while studies generally agree on the avoidance tendencies associated with fear of positive evaluation, there remains uncertainty regarding whether concerns about heightened expectations, peer reactions, or increased social scrutiny are the primary mechanism underlying these behaviors.

Research has also linked fear of positive evaluation to disruptions in social interaction and relationship development. Botkin et al. (2021) and Rassaby et al. (2024) found that individuals with higher fear of positive evaluation experience greater anxiety during social interactions and are more likely to avoid eye contact and limit their participation. Extending these findings, Botkin et al. (2021), Rassaby et al. (2024), and Reichenberger and Blechert (2018) reported that fear of positive evaluation is associated with fewer positive emotions during interactions and a reduced desire for future engagement. Notably, these effects are evident not only in self-reports but also in the perceptions of others. Rassaby et al. (2024) and Botkin et al. (2021) found that observers and conversation partners viewed individuals with higher fear of positive evaluation as displaying greater anxiety and being less approachable, suggesting that the interpersonal consequences of fear of positive evaluation may be visible to others.

Taken together, the literature indicates that fear of positive evaluation may create a self-reinforcing cycle of social withdrawal. Individuals who fear positive evaluation may avoid opportunities for recognition and participation, which can limit positive social experiences and lead others to perceive them as anxious or distant. In turn, these interpersonal outcomes may further discourage engagement and contribute to ongoing social anxiety. While existing studies consistently demonstrate links between fear of positive evaluation and social avoidance, the extent to which these processes operate in language-learning contexts remains underexplored, highlighting a gap in the literature that may merit further investigation.

### ***Heightened Fear of Evaluation in Japan and The Influence of Language Proficiency***

Face is the self-image an individual holds when interacting with others, and common concerns towards changes in face in Japan suggest an increased fear towards evaluation in general. Goffman's (1955) concept of face is an important tenet in Japanese society, with English learners in Japan potentially fearing evaluation, both negative and positive, to a greater extent. In terms of fears towards negative evaluation, Geisler (2016) found this to be the case among Japanese individuals. More specifically, this increased fear towards evaluation in general is related to

concerns towards face loss. Ishii et al. (2011) pointed out this heightened concern, as Japanese individuals were more likely to be sensitive towards judgement and potential disapproval than Western counterparts.

Regarding aversion towards positive evaluation in Japan, research suggested that it is due to values that emphasize self-criticism. Research by Chang and Asakawa (2003) found that Japanese individuals tend to have a pessimistic bias and be more self-critical. Research (Heine and Renshaw, 2002; Kanagawa et al., 2001; Takata, 2003) on evaluative situations found a tendency in Japan to self-criticize as opposed to self-praising. Specifically, regarding praise and positive evaluation, Heine et al. (2000) found that learners with Japanese backgrounds tended to avoid claiming superior performance compared to their peers. This is likely due to an emphasis on sameness in Japanese society, as noted by Ohashi and Yamaguchi (2019).

Research found that Japanese students with lower English proficiency generally have lower speaking self-efficacy. Multiple studies (Aizawa et al., 2020; Leeming, 2017) indicated a positive relationship between English proficiency and speaking self-efficacy among Japanese students. These studies found that students with higher proficiency generally report greater confidence and ability to speak English, while those with lower proficiency often experience more challenges and lower self-efficacy. In particular, students with lower TOEIC scores in a study by Aizawa et al. (2020) reported more difficulties during speaking tasks and perceived greater linguistic challenges in English-medium instruction programs. Longitudinal research (Leeming, 2017) also showed that as students' proficiency improves, their speaking self-efficacy tends to increase.

### ***Benefits of Classroom Community***

Evaluation-related fears arise from concerns about face loss, which Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) suggested can be alleviated by reduced interpersonal distance. Supporting this, Huang (2023) and Solhi (2023) found that a strong sense of classroom community, peer support, and group cohesion are consistently linked to lower foreign language anxiety, higher self-confidence, and greater willingness to communicate. Additionally, Karunanayake (2022) noted that speaking anxiety and other effects of the fear of evaluation were affected by social factors. Specifically, Humphries et al. (2023) noted that familiarity with classmates and the type of speaking situation further influence students' confidence and willingness to speak. Research on support in the classroom (Dewaele et al., 2018; Jin and Dewaele, 2018) found that peer support is a significant predictor of reduced speaking anxiety and improved proficiency. Chung et al. (2018) also noted that close relationships have significant positive effects on group task performance, especially for tasks requiring a high quantity of output. Carrillo et al. (2019) revealed a relationship between high academic performance and the quality of an individual's relationships with their classmates. Both working together with a close classmate and having a close classmate are positively related to cognitive and performance outcomes (Wentzel et al., 2018). Lamere and Kennedy (2020) found that learners also perceived the development of positive relationships with their classmates as a contributor to their success in the classroom. Theobald et al. (2017) found that positive peer relationships served to mitigate negative emotions, noting that working with a close classmate was the most significant predictor of student comfort. Wang et al. (2021)

highlighted relationships as crucial for classroom cohesion and added that these relationships reduced anxiety.

### ***Impact of Reflections***

Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) noted that instructors can play a role in facilitating positive peer relationships among learners. In classroom contexts, reflection is typically understood as the deliberate process of examining one's experiences and actions to develop insight and enhance future learning (Rodgers, 2002). Zhai et al. (2023) notes that reflection significantly enhances academic achievement and deepens students' understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, reflections contribute to students' emotional well-being, motivation, and sense of belonging (Diekmann et al., 2024). Additionally, Schürmann et al. (2025) notes that reflections facilitate psychological safety among students. However, Guo (2021) pointed out that the effectiveness of reflections depends on the quality of prompts, feedback, and scaffolding provided to students. Furthermore, Bjerkvik and Hilli (2019) identified challenges such as time limitations and inconsistent levels of reflection, emphasizing the importance of intentional design and adequate support.

### **Research Questions**

Identifying a model that predicts the relationships among instructor interventions, classroom community, fear of negative evaluation, fear of positive evaluation, and conversation-based speaking self-efficacy can inform pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing speaking confidence in learners who are particularly susceptible to fear of negative evaluation. This paper builds on existing theoretical frameworks that stem from Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) by proposing that instructor interventions enhance classroom community and speaking self-efficacy; stronger classroom community reduces both fear of negative and positive evaluation, which in turn further improves speaking self-efficacy. The current research was designed to evaluate this via the following inquiries:

RQ1: How do reflections predict classroom community?

RQ2: How do reflections and classroom community predict evaluation-related fears?

RQ3: How do reflections, classroom community, and evaluation-related fears predict speaking self-efficacy?

### **Materials and Methods**

#### ***Participants***

The data collection for the study was conducted during one 100-minute class in June 2025, by administering a 50-item questionnaire to the participants of this study. The categorization of participants' English proficiencies was based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as described by the Council of Europe (2001). The participant groups are

comprised of 236 CEFR Independent Users and were students between the ages of 18 to 20, who were enrolled at a mid-ranking Japanese national university. The students were from education, engineering, human sciences, law, life sciences, and materials for energy departments. The participants were enrolled in a university-wide English communication program that placed students into independent user-level or basic user-level classes, each following a standardized syllabus specific to its level. Data were collected from 21 classes in total, consisting of 10 independent user-level classes taught by four instructors. Table 1 presents the number of participants who opted into the study from each instructor's classes. Placement was determined by students' most recent TOEIC Listening and Reading Test scores. Participants belonged to a cohort that had a CEFR B1 speaking proficiency, and a mean TOEIC Listening and Reading Test score of 551.29 (SD = 75.52). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the host university. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study.

*Table 1. Number of Participants from Each Instructor's Classes*

| Instructor  | Number of Participants |
|-------------|------------------------|
| Professor A | 105                    |
| Professor B | 94                     |
| Professor C | 23                     |
| Professor D | 14                     |

### ***Reflections***

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted separately with the instructors to determine the differences between their standardized courses. The instructors were asked to describe activities that facilitated the development of peer relationships and enhanced students' confidence when speaking with their classmates. The interviews determined that only three of the four instructors, Professor A, C, and D, consistently responded to students' reflections throughout the course. Professor B was unable to consistently respond to reflections due to time constraints. In order to conduct a complete reflection after each class, instructors needed to carefully read each student's reflection and respond to students directly via Microsoft Teams or when meeting in person. Questions about content, homework, and assessments were answered privately, but when appropriate, they were also shared with the entire class, without any information that could identify the student. The contents of the reflections are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Contents of the Reflections

| Question goal                                                              | Question example                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students consolidate and apply their learning.                             | <i>Did any part of your image about Africa change after studying the book and taking today's class? Why or why not? If yes, what changed?</i> |
| Students explore their opinions about classroom activities and procedures. | <i>In this class, we did many role plays. What are two good points of doing role plays? Give reasons for your answers.</i>                    |
| Students build their relationship with the instructor.                     | <i>Tell me one thing you are excited to do this summer. Why are you excited about that?</i>                                                   |
| Students ask questions about anything they did not understand.             | <i>Was there anything about the class content, homework, major assessments, etc. that you did not understand?</i>                             |

## Measures

### *Classroom Community Scale*

The Classroom Community Scale (CCS) is a psychometric scale that is used to measure how connected students feel towards their classmates (Rovai, 2002). This scale has 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 10 reverse-scored items that detect response bias. The current study used the Japanese version of the CCS, which was developed and validated for Japanese subjects by Miyazoe (2009). In the current study, the Japanese version of the CCS demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .80$ ), based on the guidelines established by George and Mallery (2003) and Kottner et al. (2011).

### *Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale*

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE) is a psychometric scale that is used to measure fear of negative evaluation (Leary, 1983). This scale consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with four reverse-scored items that detect response bias. The Japanese version of the BFNE was developed and validated by Okawa et al. (2021) and Okawa et al. (2024). The current study contextualized the instructions by including the phrase *in this English class* in order to measure participants' fear of negative evaluation specific to their classmates. Actual items on the questionnaire were not modified. In this study, the Japanese version of the BFNE demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .90$ ), based on the guidelines established by George and Mallery (2003) and Kottner et al. (2011). The scale also had convergent validity, as demonstrated by the correlation with the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES).

### *Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale*

The Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES) is a psychometric scale that is used to measure fear of positive evaluation (Weeks et al., 2008). This scale has 10 items rated on a 10-point Likert-type scale, with two reverse-scored items that detect response bias. The two reverse-scored items are not included in the total score. The Japanese version of the FPES was developed by Maeda et al. (2015). This study contextualized the instructions by including the phrase *classmates in this English class* in order to measure participants' fear of positive evaluation specific to their classmates. Actual items on the questionnaire were not modified. In this study, the Japanese version of the FPES demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .70$ ), based on the guidelines established by George and Mallery (2003) and Kottner et al. (2011). The scale also had convergent validity, as demonstrated by the correlation with the BFNE.

### *Second and Foreign Language Speaking Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*

The Second and Foreign Language Speaking Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SSQ) is a psychometric scale that is used to measure the speaking self-efficacy of English learners (Phipps, 2023). This scale was developed in both English and Japanese. The current study used eight items from the original scale, which specifically measured learners' speaking self-efficacy during two-way conversations. This study also contextualized the instructions by including the phrase *in this English class* in order to measure participants' speaking self-efficacy in their English class. The eight items on the questionnaire that were used in this study were not modified. In this study, the Japanese version of the SSQ demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .90$ ), based on the guidelines established by George and Mallery (2003) and Kottner et al. (2011).

### *Data Analysis*

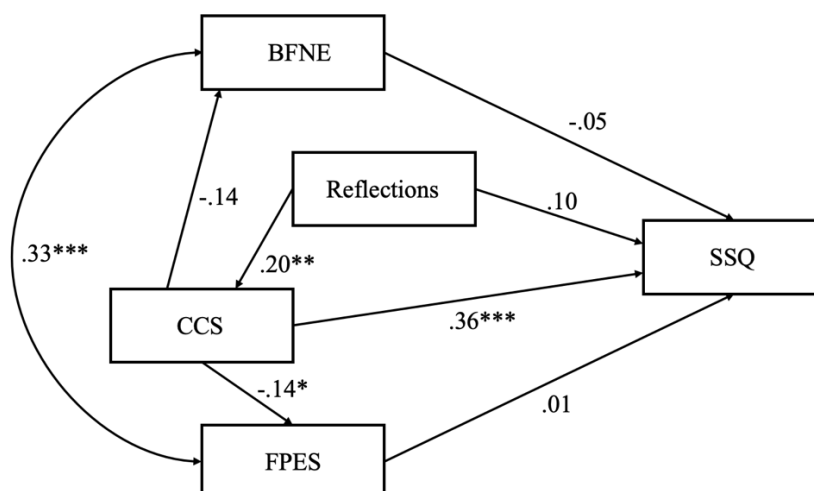
Reflections was a binary variable, with *incomplete reflections* coded as 0, and *complete reflections* coded as 1. This coding was in accordance with a similar study by Kitano (2001) that also had binary variables. In the correlation analysis, the mean for reflections represents the proportion of participants coded as 1. This study used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the relationships between the variables. Preliminary correlation analyses (Table 3) were conducted in SPSS to examine possible relationships between variables, which were later confirmed through path analyses using structural equation modeling in SPSS AMOS. Bootstrapping with 2,000 samples was employed to estimate effect sizes and their 95% confidence intervals. Model fit was evaluated with multiple indices representing different aspects of fit. The chi-square test, comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were reported. Based on Hu and Bentler (1999), model fit was evaluated using the following criteria: CFI  $> .95$ , RMSEA  $< .06$ , and SRMR  $< .08$ . The model (Figure 1) demonstrated excellent fit. Consistent with previous studies on Japanese subjects (Okawa et al., 2021; Okawa et al., 2024), the residuals of BFNE and FPES were allowed to covary.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

| Variable       | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1.    | 2.     | 3.     | 4.    | 5. |
|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|--------|--------|-------|----|
| 1. Reflections | 236      | 0.60     | -         | -     |        |        |       |    |
| 2. CCS         | 236      | 68.23    | 10.41     | .20** | -      |        |       |    |
| 3. BFNE        | 236      | 41.01    | 10.50     | 0.04  | -.14*  | -      |       |    |
| 4. FPES        | 236      | 28.07    | 11.48     | 0.08  | -.14*  | .34*** | -     |    |
| 5. SSQ         | 236      | 25.56    | 6.73      | .17** | .38*** | -0.09  | -0.06 | -  |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Results



\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 1. Comparison of standardized effect sizes ( $\beta$ ).  $\chi^2(2) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .206$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .033.

### *Instructor Interventions Predicting Classroom Community*

As shown in Table 4, the complete reflections conducted by the instructors had a significant positive direct effect on CCS. Complete reflections explained 4.1% of the variance in CCS among participants ( $R^2 = .041$ ).

Table 4. Effect of Instructor Interventions on Classroom Community (CCS)

| Path to CCS                        | <i>b</i> | $\beta$ | <i>SE</i> | 95% <i>CI</i> |           | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------|
|                                    |          |         |           | <i>LL</i>     | <i>UL</i> |          |
| Reflections→CCS<br>Direct effect** | 4.27     | 0.201   | 1.309     | 1.821         | 6.924     | 0.004    |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### Variables Predicting Evaluation-Related Fears

As shown in Table 5, CCS did not have a significant direct effect on BFNE among participants. However, the complete reflections conducted by instructors showed a significant negative indirect effect. The model explained 1.9% of the variance in BFNE among participants ( $R^2 = .019$ ).

Table 5. Effects on Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE)

| Path to BFNE                         | <i>b</i> | $\beta$ | <i>SE</i> | 95% <i>CI</i> |           | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------|
|                                      |          |         |           | <i>LL</i>     | <i>UL</i> |          |
| CCS→BFNE<br>Direct Effect            | -0.138   | -0.137  | 0.071     | -0.278        | 0.007     | 0.059    |
| Reflections→BFNE<br>Indirect effect* | -0.589   | -0.028  | 0.343     | -1.512        | -0.058    | 0.033    |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

As shown in Table 6, CCS had a significant negative direct effect on FPES among participants. Additionally, the complete reflections conducted by instructors also showed a significant negative indirect effect. The model explained 2.1% of the variance in FPES among participants ( $R^2 = .021$ ). Among the participants, BFNE and FPES showed a significant positive covariance ( $B = 38.798$ ,  $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 8.082$ ,  $p = <.001$ ).

Table 6. Effects on Fear of Positive Evaluation (FPES)

| Path to FPES                          | <i>b</i> | $\beta$ | <i>SE</i> | 95% <i>CI</i> |           | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------|
|                                       |          |         |           | <i>LL</i>     | <i>UL</i> |          |
| CCS→FPES<br>Direct Effect*            | -0.159   | -0.144  | 0.069     | -0.29         | -0.024    | 0.021    |
| Reflections→FPES<br>Indirect effect** | -0.68    | -0.029  | 0.316     | -1.428        | -0.198    | 0.009    |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### *Variables Predicting Speaking Self-Efficacy*

As shown in Table 7, complete reflections had a significant positive indirect and total effect on SSQ among participants. Furthermore, among these participants, CCS had a significant positive direct and total effect on SSQ. BFNE and FPES did not have significant effects on SSQ. The model explained 15.8% of the variance in SSQ among participants ( $R^2 = .158$ ).

*Table 7. Effects on Speaking Self-Efficacy (SSQ)*

| Path to SSQ       | <i>b</i> | $\beta$ | <i>SE</i> | 95% <i>CI</i> |           | <i>p</i> |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------|
|                   |          |         |           | <i>LL</i>     | <i>UL</i> |          |
| Reflections→SSQ   |          |         |           |               |           |          |
| Direct effect     | 1.339    | 0.098   | 0.86      | -0.209        | 3.095     | 0.09     |
| Indirect effect** | 1.002    | 0.073   | 0.361     | 0.407         | 1.805     | 0.003    |
| Total effect**    | 2.34     | 0.171   | 0.878     | 0.689         | 4.103     | 0.005    |
| CCS→SSQ           |          |         |           |               |           |          |
| Direct effect***  | 0.231    | 0.357   | 0.042     | 0.148         | 0.311     | <.001    |
| Indirect effect   | 0.004    | 0.006   | 0.008     | -0.012        | 0.024     | 0.557    |
| Total effect***   | 0.235    | 0.363   | 0.041     | 0.152         | 0.313     | <.001    |
| BFNE→SSQ          |          |         |           |               |           |          |
| Direct effect     | -0.033   | -0.051  | 0.041     | -0.115        | 0.047     | 0.406    |
| FPES→SSQ          |          |         |           |               |           |          |
| Direct effect     | 0.004    | 0.006   | 0.043     | -0.081        | 0.089     | 0.892    |

## **Discussion**

### ***RQ1: How Do Reflections Predict Classroom Community?***

The reflections that included consistent instructor feedback had a statistically significant, though small, predictive benefit on classroom community among participants. This suggests that instructor feedback on students' reflections, while not the sole factor influencing classroom community, plays a significant role. The results aligned with the findings of Diekmann et al. (2024) and Schürmann et al. (2025), as improvements in classroom community are associated with enhanced feelings of belonging and psychological safety among participants. In addition, the results also demonstrated the importance of instructor feedback, as noted by Guo (2021). The inability for instructors to perform sufficient reflections due to time limitations, as pointed out by Bjerkvik and Hilli (2019), may significantly diminish their benefits.

### ***RQ2: How Do Reflections And Classroom Community Predict Evaluation-Related Fears?***

Classroom community was not a significant predictor of fear of negative evaluation for the participants, but did significantly predict fear of positive evaluation. The reduction of one of the evaluation-related fears through increased closeness aligns with this study's theoretical framework, grounded in Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, this study extends previous

work (e.g., Huang, 2023; Solhi, 2023) by suggesting that this reduction may be specific to the fear of positive evaluation among individuals with Japanese backgrounds. This may be attributable to the higher average levels of fear of negative evaluation compared to fear of positive evaluation among the participants, with the fear of negative evaluation appearing more robust and less susceptible to influences such as classroom community, which exerts only a modest predictive effect. This aligns with Ishii et al. (2011), who observed a heightened sensitivity to negative judgment among Japanese individuals.

Among the participants, complete reflections had a significant indirect effect on the fear of negative evaluation and fear of positive evaluation. Although the direct effect of classroom community on the fear of negative evaluation was not statistically significant, complete reflections demonstrated a significant effect on classroom community. As a result, the overall indirect effect of reflections on the fear of negative evaluation through classroom community reached significance. These findings suggest that complete reflections may influence the fear of negative evaluation primarily by strengthening classroom community, such that even modest relationships between classroom community and the fear of negative evaluation become meaningful when amplified by the effect of complete reflections. Reflections may be particularly valuable in this context, given that fear of negative evaluation appears relatively robust and resistant to change.

### ***RQ3: How Do Reflections, Classroom Community, and Evaluation-Related Fears Predict Speaking Self-Efficacy?***

The combined effects of the variables included in the model accounted for 15.8% of the variance in conversation-based speaking self-efficacy among the participants, indicating that the model captured a meaningful portion of the factors associated with learners' confidence in speaking. Consistent with the findings of Humphries et al. (2023), classroom community emerged as a significant positive predictor of speaking self-efficacy, suggesting that a sense of belonging, connectedness, and mutual support may be an important determinant of learners' confidence across different proficiency levels and educational contexts.

In contrast, neither fear of positive evaluation nor fear of negative evaluation significantly predicted speaking self-efficacy in the final model. This finding suggests that evaluation-related concerns may not directly influence learners' beliefs about their speaking capabilities when broader social and relational aspects of the classroom environment are taken into account. From a social cognitive perspective, speaking self-efficacy is shaped primarily by mastery experiences, social persuasion, and interpretations of social interactions (Bandura, 1997). A strong classroom community may therefore provide learners with supportive interpersonal experiences that enhance confidence regardless of their concerns about how their performance is evaluated by others. The non-significant effects of evaluation-related fears may also indicate that these constructs are more closely associated with learners' emotional reactions to speaking, such as anxiety and apprehension, than with their judgments of speaking competence. While learners may worry about receiving positive or negative evaluations, such concerns do not necessarily translate into lower beliefs about their ability to communicate, particularly in classrooms where social relationships are perceived as supportive and accepting. In this context, classroom community may function as a more

proximal predictor of speaking self-efficacy, reducing the relative explanatory power of evaluation-related fears.

Among the participants, the indirect effect of reflections on speaking self-efficacy was mediated through classroom community. This indirect pathway is likely attributable to the comparatively strong relationship between classroom community and speaking self-efficacy within the model, suggesting that reflective activities may contribute to learners' confidence primarily by strengthening their sense of connection and belonging within the classroom environment.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to develop a prediction model for independent user-level Japanese L2 English learners that predicts the effects between instructor interventions, classroom community, evaluation-related fears, and speaking self-efficacy during one-to-one conversation. The data suggest that the variables investigated in this study exert an effect on speaking self-efficacy, with smaller effects observable along the model pathways. Notably, classroom community was a key predictor of speaking self-efficacy for both levels of English learners.

At this stage, it is important to note that the findings concerning variables other than speaking self-efficacy are limited by their small effect sizes. Although statistical significance was observed, the small magnitudes suggest that other variables that were not covered in this study may exert stronger effects. Furthermore, instructor-related factors such as teaching style, personality, grading practices, and classroom management were not controlled for in the present study. As these factors may influence students' classroom experiences and perceptions, future research should account for potential instructor effects when examining the relationships among the variables investigated.

The results and limitations of this study lead us to implications for teaching and research. Instructors implementing reflections should provide consistent feedback whenever possible, as it may be a significant factor that influences classroom community. To create a more robust prediction model, future research should investigate additional anxiety-related factors to determine which may exert stronger effects.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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### **Ethical Approval Informed Consent Statements**

The Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Law and Literature at Shimane University approved the questionnaires and interviews (approval number: L07-1, L07-3) on May 21, 2025. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Direct access to the data from this study is restricted under the conditions set by the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Law and Literature at Shimane University. However, the authors can provide additional details about the data upon reasonable request.

### **Biodata**

Stachus Peter Tu is from the Center of Foreign Language Education at Shimane University in Japan. Stachus' research focuses on pragmatics-based inquiry in university-level EFL classrooms in Japan. Situated within English language education, his work examines how Japanese learners use and interpret language during interactions.

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