

Article

Speech and Elocution Training (SET): A Self-Efficacy Catalyst for Language Potential Activation and Career-Oriented Development for Higher Vocational Students

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Abstract

This study explores how Speech and Elocution Training (SET) activates language potential and fosters career-oriented development among higher vocational students through self-efficacy mechanisms. Through qualitative interviews with four vocational graduates who participated in SET 5 to 10 years ago, the research identifies three key findings. First, SET comprises curriculum content (e.g., workplace communication modules such as hosting, storytelling, and sales pitching) and classroom training using multimodal TED resources and Toastmasters International-simulated practices, which spark language potential through skill-focused, realistic exercises. Second, these pedagogies facilitate a progression where initial language potential evolves from nascent career interests into concrete job-seeking intentions and long-term career plans: completing workplace-related speech tasks boosts confidence in career choices, planning, and job competencies, enabling adaptability to professional challenges. Third, SET aligns with Bandura's four self-efficacy determinants; these are successful experiences (including personalized and virtual skill acquisition and certified affirmation), vicarious experiences (via observation platforms and constructive peer modeling), verbal persuasion (direct instructional feedback and indirect emotional support), and the arousal of optimistic emotions (the cognitive reframing of challenges and direct desensitization to anxieties). These mechanisms collectively create a positive cycle that enhances self-efficacy, amplifies language potential, and clarifies career intentions. While highlighting SET's efficacy, this study notes a small sample size limitation, urging future mixed-methods studies with diverse samples to validate these mechanisms across broader vocational contexts and refine understanding of language training's role in fostering linguistic competence and career readiness.

Keywords: Speech and Elocution Training (SET); self-efficacy determinants; language potential activation; career-oriented development; higher vocational students; TED talks; Toastmaster International (TMI); classroom pedagogical strategies



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1. Introduction

In an era of intense job market competition, the career development of vocational college students has drawn increasing attention (Sahul Ahmid et al., 2023; G. Wang & Doyle, 2022). Post-pandemic data shows a 16% enrollment surge in U.S. vocational institutions and a 180% growth in China, challenging traditional perceptions of vocational education (China

Daily, 2022; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2023). Language competence, a critical transferable skill in vocational education, significantly impacts academic performance and serves as a determinant for career choices and promotions. Vocational students with strong language abilities are more likely to access advantageous opportunities in professional development, as their linguistic skills enhance cross-cultural communication, problem-solving, and adaptability in globalized workplaces (Hamid et al., 2024; Marlin et al., 2024; Nhung, 2018).

While research acknowledges the importance of language proficiency, a notable gap exists in understanding how it influences long-term career intentions and aspirations, particularly through psychological mechanisms (Barus & Simanjuntak, 2023; Chang et al., 2023). Specifically, while mother-tongue speech training programs exist for local labor markets, they receive insufficient attention due to the dominance of English education and technical education. This has led to a lack of extensive and in-depth research, hindering large-scale data collection. For instance, in China's vocational and technical education, the Speech and Elocution Training (SET) model was developed to help graduates achieve employment and career aspirations. However, the local literature only explains its role in mother-tongue speech, lacking empirical support for promoting employment and career development—only sporadic fragments from individual interviews mention its effect on boosting confidence (Peng, 2021; J. Wang, 2020; Zhang & Xie, 2022).

Thus, this study interprets the language potential of the SET model from the perspective of self-efficacy, aiming to explore its positive impact on students' career trajectories. Below, we first elaborate on the SET pedagogical system (Section 1.1), then introduce the self-efficacy theoretical framework (Section 1.2), and finally propose research questions (Section 1.3) based on gaps between theory and practice.

1.1. *Speech and Eloquence Training (SET)*

1.1.1. SET Curriculum Outline

SET is a language teaching model in Chinese vocational education designed to enhance students' communication skills, job-hunting preparation, and public-speaking abilities (Celume & Korda, 2022; Takyi Mensah et al., 2023). It equips students with the linguistic tools to engage with industry trends and improve employability (Ozer & Perc, 2020). Six SET textbooks have been included in China's latest national planning for a textbook catalog (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023), covering (1) oral expression skills (e.g., pronunciation, intonation, and speech rate control); (2) speech content development (e.g., crafting persuasive scripts and logical structure); (3) nonverbal communication (e.g., posture, gestures, and eye contact to amplify message impact). Additionally, it also incorporates context-specific language applications (e.g., business negotiations, public speaking, and team debates) to cultivate adaptability in professional settings (Ding, 2022; Gu & Pei, 2021; Liu & Fan, 2019; Tang & Tang, 2021; Yan, 2019; Zhao, 2021).

Despite its pedagogical value, SET is often offered as an elective course and underemphasized in vocational curricula (Peng, 2021; J. Wang, 2020; Zhang & Xie, 2022). Institutional variations exist in SET implementation: some emphasize theoretical foundations to build linguistic literacy, while others prioritize hands-on practice through simulations and real-world speech activities to enhance applied skills.

1.1.2. SET Supporting Tools (TED and TMI)

TED talks, with their diverse topics, innovative styles, and cutting-edge ideas, provide authentic case studies for analysis. Teachers use TED examples to deconstruct rhetorical strategies, improving students' expressive logic and clarity while explaining complex SET

concepts (Cheng et al., 2022; Furman et al., 2023; Kedrowicz & Taylor, 2016; Stout, 2020; W. Wang & Csomay, 2024).

Toastmasters International (TMI) offers a proven training framework for SET, emphasizing iterative practice and constructive feedback. Through regular speeches and peer evaluations, students refine skills in realistic settings (Daroukola et al., 2022; Kalińska, 2022; Lovato, 2023; Rifah & Sabilah, 2022; Yu-Chih, 2008). TMI's reward system ("Speech Star" awards) and leadership roles ("Best Officer" titles) create a simulated professional environment, fostering both speaking proficiency and team management capabilities (Goyal et al., 2022; Shadinger, 2016).

1.1.3. Integrative Roles of TED and TMI in SET

TED and TMI bridge the gap between SET's curricular goals and classroom execution, with TED delivering theoretical inspiration and TMI enabling practical application (Huang, 2018; S. T. Wu, 2018). Together, they form the core of SET's instructional design, i.e., a blend of structured curriculum and experiential learning.

1.2. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, a cornerstone of social cognitive theory, refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors that are required for specific outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 1995). Unlike general confidence (Bandura, 2006; Bubany & Hansen, 2010; Kane et al., 2021), self-efficacy is task-specific, influencing short-term motivation (e.g., study habits) and long-term development (e.g., career persistence) (Adachi, 2004; Bandura et al., 2001; Holderman & Wijono, 2024; Leeming, 2017). Its formation is shaped by four key determinants:

Successful experiences: Mastery of tasks build self-belief in replicating such success (Bonilha & Dawson, 2012).

Vicarious experiences: Observing peers with similar abilities succeed enhances perceived capability (Forbes, 2022; Hsieh et al., 2007).

Verbal persuasion: Encouragement or constructive feedback from others can elevate self-efficacy (Jena et al., 2024; Sekharan Nair et al., 2014).

Emotional states: Positive emotions (confidence and optimism) boost perceived competence, while anxiety or stress undermine it (Shao et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2024).

1.3. Research Questions (RQs)

While existing vocational education research highlights the critical role of eloquence in employability and career intention development, it lacks in-depth insights from graduates' practical experiences. As workplace practitioners, their retrospective accounts of how oral communication skills shaped their career paths offer authentic empirical evidence. By integrating Bandura's self-efficacy theoretical framework, this study aims to precisely analyze the psychological mechanisms through which eloquence—by enhancing language potential—influences career intentions. Therefore, this study targets graduates who completed their studies 5–10 years ago, addressing these gaps through three core research questions:

RQ1: Which SET pedagogical strategies activate language potential?

RQ2: How does SET-activated language potential facilitate career intention development?

RQ3: What role does self-efficacy play in translating language potential into career intentions?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Participants

This study targeted vocational diploma graduates who completed their studies 5 to 10 years ago. Invitations were distributed through email and social media to all alumni who had participated in the Speech and Elocution Training (SET) model courses, resulting in four respondents. The participants were from a vocational education institution in Shenzhen, China, with diverse academic backgrounds: secretarial (A), digital media (B), microelectronics (C), and construction engineering (D).

These four interviewees were selected for three key reasons:

- (a) Curriculum relevance: All had experienced the SET model, enabling in-depth analysis of its pedagogical features.
- (b) Diverse career trajectories: They pursued distinct career paths (e.g., hosting, voice acting, teaching, and sales), illustrating SET's impacts across different professional contexts.
- (c) Longitudinal representativeness: Their graduation years spanned over a decade, allowing the examination of the SET's long-term effects on career development.

2.2. Data Collection (Interviews)

2.2.1. Interview Design

To explore SET's latent effects on self-efficacy without imposing theoretical constructs (Roulston, 2011; Weller et al., 2018), four open-ended interview questions were designed (see Table 1). These questions indirectly probed self-efficacy through:

- (a) Perceived differences between SET and other language courses (psychological impact clues);
- (b) Self-reported changes in speech competence and confidence;
- (c) Key activities that activated language potential;
- (d) Links between language skills and career planning, including intention shifts.

Table 1. Interview questions.

No.	Questions
1	Could you share your overall impression of the SET model training? What stands out to you most when you reflect on this experience compared to other learning or training activities you've been part of?
2	When you think about your growth in speech and eloquence, how would you describe the role the SET model training played? Feel free to elaborate on any moments or aspects that come to mind.
3	Regarding language potential, could you talk about your journey during the SET model training? Is there a story or experience from it that you think captures its impact on you?
4	Thinking about your personal development and career planning, how does the SET model training fit into that narrative? What comes to mind first when you link the training to these aspects of your life?

2.2.2. Interview Implementation

Interviews were conducted in 2024 at times that were convenient for the respondents, recorded audio-visually, and accompanied by detailed notes on nonverbal cues (e.g., emotional shifts and emphasis points) to ensure data richness (Brayda & Boyce, 2014). The first author, a former SET instructor with expertise in self-efficacy theory and vocational education, moderated the interviews. This insider knowledge facilitated targeted probing on self-efficacy-related themes, minimized information asymmetry, and enhanced data relevance to RQs.

2.3. Data Analysis

A mixed qualitative approach was employed, combining thematic analysis, narrative inquiry, and theory-driven coding to address the RQs systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bruce et al., 2016; Naeem et al., 2023, p. 9).

2.3.1. Thematic Analysis (For RQ 1)

Phase 1: Data Familiarization

Interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to immerse in participants' experiences, focusing on their descriptions of SET's structure, emotional impacts, and career-related outcomes.

Phase 2: Text Coding

Transcripts were coded line-by-line to identify the following:

- (a) SET pedagogical features: Details about teaching methods (e.g., TED simulations and TMI role-playing), teacher behaviors, and student participation.
- (b) Psychological impacts: Statements about confidence, interest in language, or shifts in self-perception (e.g., "I realized I had a knack for storytelling").

Phase 3: Theme Extraction

Codes were clustered into overarching themes through inductive analysis, yielding constructs such as: "Diverse SET modules facilitate personalized learning," "TED's theatrical atmosphere desensitizes public speaking anxiety," and "TMI's reward system certifies individual strengths." These themes captured both the SET's instructional design and its psychological effects on language potential.

The interview transcripts were systematically coded using ATLAS.ti 23 software. Line-by-line annotations were performed on descriptions of specific instructional components in the raw data via the software's "coding tree" function, generating primary code nodes that reflect the pedagogical strengths of the SET model. These nodes include "SET modular design," "TED multimodal resources," and "TMI supportive simulation training environment." The software's semantic network feature was employed to visually map the logical relationships among these codes (see Appendix A).

2.3.2. Narrative Analysis (For RQ 2)

Building upon the thematic coding framework generated via ATLAS.ti in RQ 1, the research team conducted a narrative chain mapping of participants' professional development journeys. Individual career trajectories were analyzed in two stages to trace the "language potential → career intention" pathway:

Phase 1: Career Path Mapping

Each interviewee's journey was decomposed into a narrative chain: language capability enhancement → career intention awakening → career choice. The key factors driving choices were identified, such as Interviewee B's transition to voice acting, which was linked to the SET's storytelling modules that activated her narrative potential.

Phase 2: Linking to SET Pedagogical Themes

The SET's identified features (from Themes 1, 2, and 3) were integrated into career narratives. For example, Interviewee A's shift from secretarial studies to professional hosting was explained by personalized module engagement ("Hosting Eloquence" module), TED-inspired skill modeling (emulating speaker body language), and TMI role validation (peer recognition as "Best Officer"), demonstrating how SET's multifaceted approach supported career intention development.

2.3.3. Theory-Driven Coding (For RQ 3)

Guided by Bandura's self-efficacy theory, data were re-analyzed to map SET features onto its four determinants:

Phase 1: Theory-Data Alignment

Findings from RQs 1 and 2 were cross-referenced with self-efficacy components (successful experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional regulation). For

instance, TMI's peer-voted awards ("Speech Star") were coded as "successful experience," while TED's diverse speaker stories became "vicarious learning."

Phase 2: Model Construction

A theoretical model, i.e., the "SET Pedagogy → Self-Efficacy Enhancement → Career Development", was built by linking the SET features (e.g., TMI's constructive feedback) to self-efficacy determinants (verbal persuasion) and the self-efficacy outcomes (e.g., increased confidence in sales pitches) to career choices (Interviewee D's transition to sales). This cross-case comparison revealed how SET systematically strengthens self-efficacy to bridge language skills and career competencies.

2.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, interview themes and preliminary analyses were shared with participants for member checking, incorporating their feedback to refine interpretations and reduce researcher bias. Triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying interview data with participants' reported achievements (e.g., awards and job roles) and course performance, though specific identifiers were omitted to protect privacy.

For reliability, three researchers independently coded transcripts, resolving discrepancies through discussions to achieve consensus. Detailed records of coding rules, analysis steps, and decision-making processes were maintained to enhance replicability, aligning with qualitative research best practices (Morse et al., 2002).

3. Results

3.1. RQ 1: Which Pedagogies in the SET Model Activate Language Potential?

According to the semantic network diagram in the Appendix A, this section presents the interview findings on three aspects; these are the instructional content design of the SET model and the TED and TMI methods that are used in classroom teaching. The extracted themes are visualized in Figure 1, illustrating the thematic structure derived from the coding analysis.

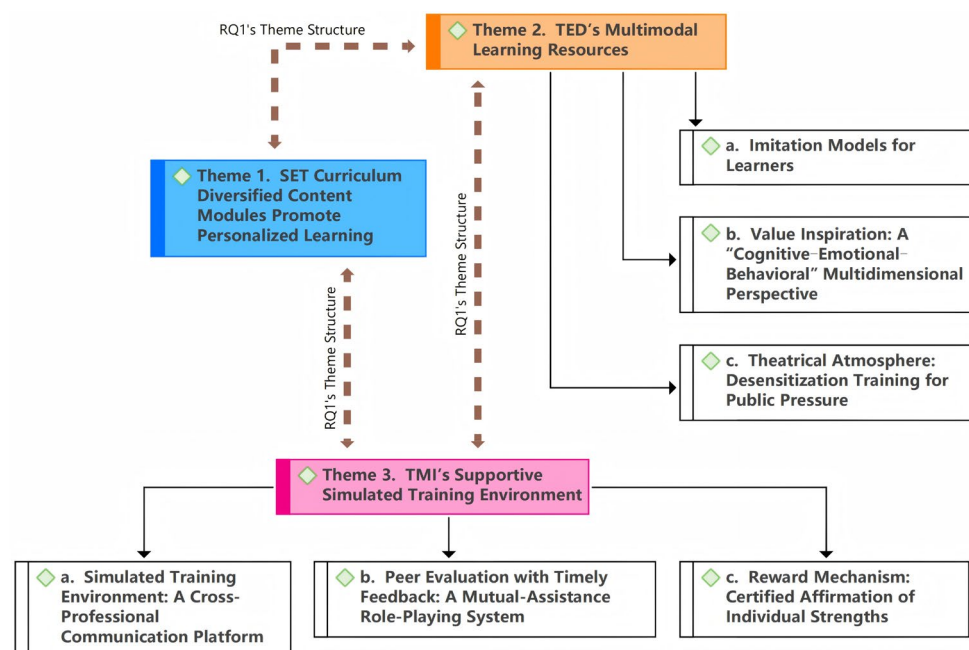


Figure 1. The extracted themes in RQ 1.

3.1.1. Theme 1: SET Curriculum Diversified Content Modules Promote Personalized Learning

The SET model cultivates language expression abilities through modular chapter design, allowing learners to always find personalized learning pathways. On the one hand, SET includes foundational language expression training modules. For example, Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) specifically noted the immersive teaching in the “Storytelling” and “Recitation” units; Interviewee A (personal communication, 2 July 2024) emphasized the practical value of the “Hosting Eloquence” module. On the other hand, SET incorporates career-oriented chapters. Interviewee D (personal communication, 21 October 2024) pointed out that modules such as “Social Eloquence,” “Negotiation Eloquence,” and “Sales Eloquence” helped him to master communication skills for different professional scenarios.

3.1.2. Theme 2: TED’s “Multimodal” Learning Resources

The primary advantage of TED lies in its provision of multimodal resources, including materials for imitation-based learning, value inspiration, and a theatrical atmosphere, all of which are elements beneficial for reducing public speaking anxiety and enhancing oratory confidence.

a. (Theme 2a) Imitation Models for Learners

TED offers language learners expressive models for imitation, encompassing both the content of speeches and the speakers’ performance styles. At the nonverbal level, Interviewee A (personal communication, 2 July 2024) emphasized continuous observation of TED speakers’ body language, particularly facial expressions, gesture use, and spatial movement patterns, with imitation serving as a means to accumulate practical experience. At the vocal level, Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) noted that she intentionally mimicked TED speakers’ storytelling styles, especially their intonation and speech pace, which significantly improved her vocal expressiveness. Regarding speech content construction, Interviewee D (personal communication, 21 October 2024) affirmed TED’s value in two dimensions: First, TED cases emphasize logical rigor in speech framework design, especially through inductive reasoning structures that strengthen syllogistic arguments linking claims and evidence. Second, these cases provide practical skills in speech structure planning, particularly demonstrating clear structural paradigms at transitional points (e.g., openings, conclusions, and connections between sections). In summary, TED offers multimodal expressive templates for language learners through both content and form.

b. (Theme 2b) Value Inspiration: A “Cognitive–Emotional–Behavioral” Multidimensional Perspective

TED cases provide learners with multidimensional cognitive perspectives, effectively expanding their ways of viewing issues, especially offering unique adaptive value when confronting psychological setbacks such as fear. At the level of cognitive restructuring, Interviewee A (personal communication, 2 July 2024) stated: “The diverse values conveyed by TED speakers often influence me. I remember a TED Talk titled *Before I Die, I Want To* (<https://bit.ly/43JveD7>, accessed on 20 December 2024). Our teacher used this talk to explain that ‘the purpose of speaking is to give.’ When we go on stage, we’re sharing our experiences with classmates. Adopting this mindset, I noticed my fear of speaking gradually decreased.” Interviewee D (personal communication, 21 October 2024) also recognized that TED speakers’ stories can inspire resilience, adding: “During the ‘Job Interview Eloquence’ module, our teacher showed us the TED Talk ‘Looking for a Job? Highlight Your Ability, Not Your Experience’ (<https://bit.ly/44sOo0a>, accessed on 20 December 2024)’. The speaker began by sharing past failed job interviews, which immediately made me realize that ev-

ery successful person must have endured failures in the past. . .” Notably, this influence unfolds gradually and subtly: Learners initially engage with cases for skill improvement, but through sustained immersion gain psychological energy using narrative identification, ultimately achieving “cognitive–emotional–behavioral” multidimensional transformation.

c. (Theme 2c) Theatrical Atmosphere: Desensitization Training for Public Pressure

The TED-style theatrical setting highly replicates typical public speaking scenarios, such as a single speaker addressing a group audience. This scenario rehearsal mechanism allows learners to adapt to public environments in advance through video observation, effectively reducing anxiety about public expression. Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) described the adaptive training process: “I really like the theatrical atmosphere of TED. Every time I prepare a story to share, I imagine myself on a TED stage and plan my walking routes. This rehearsal helps me advance the narrative more naturally and maintain an emotional connection with the audience during actual delivery.” This situational simulation leverages the principles of exposure therapy to help learners gradually build psychological tolerance for public speaking scenarios.

Integrating the above analyses, the core value of TED as a multimodal learning resource lies in its constructed three-dimensional support system: it provides expressive paradigms through linguistic modality, achieves cognitive restructuring through narrative modality, and completes behavioral training through scenario modality. This three-dimensional learning support not only enhances the learners’ public speaking skills but also fosters the development of a positive expressive mindset at the psychological level.

3.1.3. Theme 3: TMI’s Supportive Simulated Training Environment

The advantages of TMI are manifested in three aspects—a simulated training environment, peer evaluation with timely feedback, and a reward mechanism.

a. (Theme 3a) Simulated Training Environment: A Cross-Professional Communication Platform

TMI establishes a training mechanism for full participation, providing equal expression opportunities to each member after completing knowledge learning. Notably, as members come from diverse professional backgrounds, this design inherently fosters cross-disciplinary intellectual exchanges. Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) described the experience: “I get really excited during TMI training sessions—finally get a chance to share the stories I’ve prepared.” Interviewee D (personal communication, 21 October 2024) further explained the value of this cross-professional communication: “When discussing the same topic, everyone offers insights from their respective professional perspectives. During the 40 min interaction, we remain in a state of high-density communication. Although there are disagreements, we always reach a consensus based on rigorous speech logic.” These realistic-like settings not only protect the individual’s right to express themselves but also promote the development of cross-professional competencies through collisions of diverse thinking.

b. (Theme 3b) Peer Evaluation with Timely Feedback: A Mutual-Assistance Role-Playing System

TMI constructs an actionable peer evaluation mechanism by limiting group size (typically five to eight members). This mechanism relies on role-playing to achieve a specialized division of labor, with four interviewees speaking positively about this design.

Interviewee A (personal communication, 2 July 2024) particularly affirmed the “filler word counter” role: “At first, I unconsciously used filler words like ‘um,’ ‘then,’ and ‘so.’ The counter recorded these in detail and gave immediate feedback. Although I felt awkward at first, my speaking fluency improved significantly as training progressed—and interestingly, I first noticed this progress through the counter’s feedback.” She also shared

her experience as a “host” role: “I served as the host for six TMI sessions. This role involves organizing group activities and assessing training performance. I felt a strong sense of mission because I wasn’t just leading the group through the agenda—I also felt my leadership skills growing. I must say this was an unexpected gain.”

Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) appreciated her peers’ evaluations of her vocal delivery and presentation aids: “One peer evaluated my vocal tone and rhythm, while another assessed my props. They always pointed out both my strengths and weaknesses, which helped me improve a lot in both auditory and visual expression. I could especially feel the audience’s attention on me, which was very rewarding.”

Interviewee D (personal communication, 21 October 2024) highlighted the emotional support during evaluations: “I was scared of the peer evaluation at first, worried about being criticized. But whenever something went wrong in my speech, peers encouraged me with eye contact and body language, which gave me more confidence to take on challenges.”

Interviewee C (personal communication, 16 September 2024), serving as a grammar evaluator, shared: “When I noticed a peer using incorrect words, I pointed it out immediately. I’d worried they might resist, but they actually appreciated it and asked for advice. This role gave me a strong sense of presence—I ended up serving as a grammar evaluator four times. I think speakers often can’t detect their own mistakes, so peer evaluation is essential.” She also emphasized the role of immediate feedback: “For evaluators, this is a great way to practice impromptu expression, as we need to organize feedback content and deliver it accurately to the speaker within minutes. Another benefit is that it allows us to record speech performance in real time, avoiding the risk of forgetting details later.”

This role-playing mechanism thus cultivates a collaborative learning atmosphere whereby the evaluators gain self-recognition through their efforts, while the evaluatees improve progressively through constructive feedback. The interview results indicate that this cooperative learning structure provides powerful psychological support.

c. (Theme 3c) Reward Mechanism: Certified Affirmation of Individual Strengths

At the conclusion of the TMI sessions, groups vote to select the “Speech Star” and “Best Officer” awards. The four interviewees agreed to participate in the interview because they had received these awards: Interviewees B and D were named “Speech Stars,” while Interviewees A and C received “Best Officer” for their roles as hosts and evaluators. They viewed this reward mechanism as an official recognition of their personal strengths.

Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) attributed her award to “tailoring my speech topics to the audience’s interests and weaving engaging stories to connect with them.” Interviewee D (personal communication, 21 October 2024) credited his success to “easily persuading others during speeches.” Interviewee C (personal communication, 16 September 2024) shared an unexpected benefit: “As a grammar evaluator, others’ affirmation of my assessment skills gradually sparked my interest in literature. After multiple evaluations, I gained experience in quickly identifying issues like improper word usage and subject–verb disagreement, which unlocked my potential in Chinese language and literature and built a solid linguistic foundation.” Interviewee A (personal communication, 2 July 2024) discovered new capabilities through her hosting role: “While serving as a host, I realized I had the ability to emcee evening events. My performance later led to being recommended to host a large university gala.” This immediate authoritative affirmation has a lasting impact on individual development—all four interviewees still vividly remembered their award experiences after graduation, serving as the best evidence of the reward mechanism’s effectiveness.

In summary, each pedagogical advantage of the SET model generates positive psychological effects, which are linked to the interviewees' personal language potential. In the next RQ, this study explains how this language potential further incubates their career intentions, leading to the development of long-term career plans.

3.2. RQ 2: How Language Potential Activated by the SET Model Facilitates Career Intention Development

This section focuses on the interviewees' career intentions, aiming to analyze how the SET model's activation of their language potential in the past assisted them in exploring and defining these intentions. To clarify this process, the study follows a three-stage narrative, i.e., language capability enhancement → career intention awakening → career choice, with references to themes from RQ 1.

3.2.1. Interviewee A: The Cross-Disciplinary Host

Interviewee A majored in secretarial studies but transitioned to a career as a professional host after graduation. She has over 10 years of experience and has emceed hundreds of events. Her academic major clearly diverged from her eventual career path, which was a shift influenced by her participation in the SET model.

a. Language Capability Enhancement

Theme 1, "Diverse Content of SET," helped spark her career intention. She noted (personal communication, 2 July 2024): "The SET model changed my view of oral training—I was particularly interested in the 'Hosting Eloquence' module." This led her to recognize the connection between her linguistic potential and hosting work, planting the initial idea of becoming a professional host and prompting her to deepen her study of hosting expertise within the SET model.

b. Career Intention Awakening

Subsequently, training in TED (Theme 2a) and TMI (Theme 3a) gradually solidified her career intention. She intentionally imitated TED speakers' body language, which was crucial for shaping a professional host image; meanwhile, TMI's simulated training provided abundant practice opportunities. She highlighted this as a unique advantage of the SET model compared to traditional teaching (personal communication, 2 July 2024): "I remember a business English class where the teacher only lectured on knowledge points, and few students spoke on stage. When they did, it was usually the top students. Those with weaker speaking skills avoided presenting because they feared being mocked for poor pronunciation or hesitation."

c. Career Choice

Ultimately, TMI (Themes 3b and 3c) affirmed her hosting performance. In TMI group training, she frequently served as a session host, organizing activities and winning peer favor, leading to her election as "Best Officer" through group vote. As her performance gained recognition, she was increasingly recommended for hosting roles in diverse events such as exhibitions, galas, ceremonies, government affairs meetings, and TV programs. This led to her career choice: despite minimal academic overlap with broadcasting or hosting, her linguistic potential demonstrated in hosting convinced her that this could be her professional path (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Interviewee A hosting China Big Data + 5G Summit Forum in 2022. The image was authorized for public disclosure by Student A, and the headshot was obscured for privacy protection purposes.

3.2.2. Interviewee B: The Story Voice Actor

Interviewee B majored in digital media and now works as a story voice actor in a media company. While her current employer is related to her academic discipline, her specific role has shifted, a change that is driven by the SET model's activation of her storytelling potential.

a. Language Capability Enhancement

During the SET model's "Storytelling Composition" module (Theme 1), Interviewee B (personal communication, 29 July 2024) first recognized her potential in this area: "The SET model's storytelling module made me realize I had a knack for weaving narratives."

b. Career Intention Awakening

She then channeled this potential into a sustained effort. On one hand, she imitated the linguistic styles of TED storytellers and drew inspiration from the theatrical performance scenarios (Themes 2a and 2c); on the other hand, within TMI's simulated training environment (Theme 3a), she learned to select topics and structure stories based on audience preferences. Her storytelling potential received multiple affirmations: first, through repeated elections as "Speech Star" in TMI votes (Theme 3c), reflecting peer recognition; later, through broader acclaim when two of her story-based speech works won first and second prizes in Guangdong Province, China, competitions, respectively (see Figure 3).

c. Career Choice

These experiences crystallized into a career goal through a serendipitous opportunity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine policies increased demand for online businesses. A digital media company specializing in audiobook technology hired her based on her SET model experience. Today, she works as a voice actor for story narration. Notably, she has not fully departed from her academic major but instead has integrated her professional knowledge with SET-derived skills to carve out a new professional path.



Figure 3. Certificates of Interviewee B's achievements in competitions. These two certificates were issued by a provincial-level education department. The first certificate, dated 27 November 2019, indicates that the audio-visual work has won the second prize in a provincial-level university's excellent network culture selection. The second certificate, issued on 29 June 2020, shows that the classic recitation work has won the first prize in a 2019-themed educational series activity.

3.2.3. Interviewee C: The Chinese Language Teacher

Interviewee C majored in microelectronics, yet her current career path diverges entirely from her academic discipline, as she is now an elementary school Chinese language teacher. This significant shift was catalyzed by the TMI method within the SET model, which affirmed her linguistic potential in the Chinese language. Ultimately, she decided to pursue cross-disciplinary advanced studies, enrolling in the “Chinese Language and Literature” upgrading exam (from vocational diploma to Bachelor's degree) and gaining admission to a Guangdong provincial university (see Figure 4).

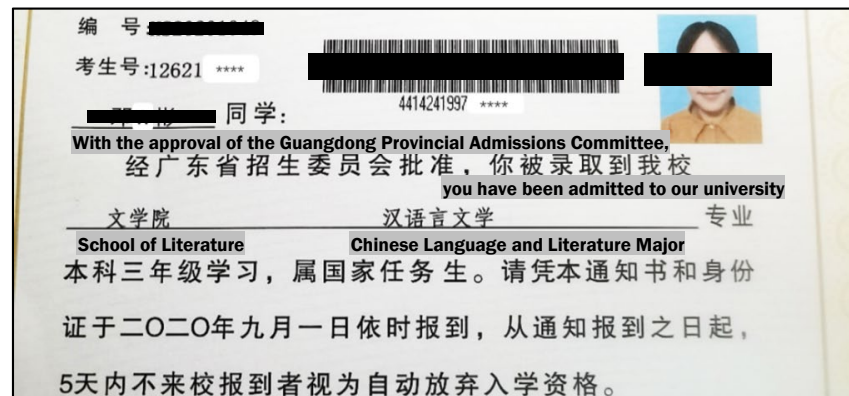


Figure 4. Admission notice of Interviewee C to a Chinese Literature major. This notice shows that she was admitted to the Chinese Literature major of a Guangdong-based undergraduate institution for a third-year undergraduate study in 2020 as a state-task student. Headshots and personal information are obscured.

a. Language Capability Enhancement

Initially, Interviewee C was unaware of her potential in Chinese language and literature. This awareness emerged through her repeated participation in TMI's peer evaluation and timely feedback activities (Theme 3b). Serving as a grammar evaluator, she was responsible for identifying peers' issues with word choice and sentence structure. In carrying out this role, she observed that her peers not only accepted her feedback but also actively sought her advice after the sessions, recognizing the value of her insights.

b. Career Intention Awakening

Subsequently, being repeatedly selected as "Best Officer" in TMI voting sessions (Theme 3c) led her to recognize her latent potential in Chinese language and literature. These votes signified peer acknowledgment of her linguistic strengths, planting the seed for her consideration of this field as a career.

c. Career Choice

With each election, her interest in Chinese language and literature deepened, prompting her to explore whether this passion could become a professional path. She recalled (personal communication, 16 September 2024): "When I won by a high vote count again, I thought maybe I had the potential for this kind of work. I did some research and found that becoming a Chinese teacher was the best fit, so I decided to take the upgrading exam for a Bachelor's degree. It wasn't easy—balancing my major courses while self-studying new Chinese language and literature materials. After a year of effort, I finally passed." The "upgrading exam" she mentioned refers to the national unified exam for transitioning from a vocational diploma to a Bachelor's degree. Her experience demonstrated how the language potential activated by SET enabled her, after clarifying her career intention, to sustain an effort that was driven by confidence in her professional capabilities.

3.2.4. Interviewee D: The "Sales Champion"

Interviewee D majored in construction engineering but has since switched to a career in sales.

a. Language Capability Enhancement

His career intention first emerged through SET modules related to workplace communication (Theme 1). He shared (personal communication, 21 October 2024): "You know, I didn't like my college major. But once I took the SET modules on social eloquence, negotiation skills, and sales pitch techniques, I became obsessed with sales communication. I especially noticed my strong urge to speak about workplace topics, especially product sales."

b. Career Intention Awakening

This intention was reinforced through the exposure to TED’s paradigms and diverse perspectives (Themes 2a and 2b). First, imitating TED’s speech structuring and opening techniques improved his persuasive speaking, which he saw as directly applicable to sales: “Although the teacher used TED videos to teach presentation skills, I also learned about oral sales from TED talks like How to Make People Listen (<https://bit.ly/3YqTy9e>, accessed on 20 December 2024) and How Great Leaders Inspire Action (<https://bit.ly/3GheskR>, accessed on 20 December 2024). They showed me that selling products isn’t just about quality—it also requires communication skills and values-driven messaging. That was eye-opening.” He then translated this intention into action through TMI’s simulated training and peer feedback (Themes 3a and 3c): “In group sessions, everyone had to speak, so I used product pitches as my topic. During peer feedback, even though it got a bit noisy, it felt like a brainstorming session—no conflicts, just deeper mutual understanding.”

c. Career Choice

After being voted “Speech Star” in TMI (Theme 3c), Interviewee D solidified his career intention, which directly influenced his job search: “When job hunting near graduation, I saw many sales positions available. Remembering my ‘Speech Star’ experience gave me the courage to apply. I’ve been working here ever since, and my sales performance has ranked first multiple times. . . (see Figure 5)” This demonstrates how the SET model helped him uncover his sales-related linguistic potential, ultimately leading to successful employment.



Figure 5. Sales Champion” certificates of Interviewee D. These certificates indicate outstanding sales performance. One recognizes an individual as the “Sales Champion” in June 2020, and the other as the “Sales Champion” in the second quarter of 2020, both issued by a company’s business department. Headshots and company names were obscured.

In conclusion, through the narrative of “language capability enhancement → career intention awakening → career choice,” this study has traced the career intention development of the four interviewees. While the study has established that the SET model influences long-term career planning by activating language potential, the psychological mechanisms underlying this process, i.e., how SET’s pedagogical advantages translate into such effects, remain to be systematically organized. This constitutes the focus of the next RQ.

3.3. RQ 3: The Role of Self-Efficacy in the Process from Language Potential to Career Intention

This section aims to clarify the influencing framework linking language potential (findings from RQ 1) and career intention (findings from RQ 2). The framework is constructed using self-efficacy determinants in gaining successful experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. For each determinant, the role of the SET’s peda-

gical advantages is revisited, ultimately concluding that self-efficacy acts as a catalyst in how language potential influences career intention (see Figure 6).

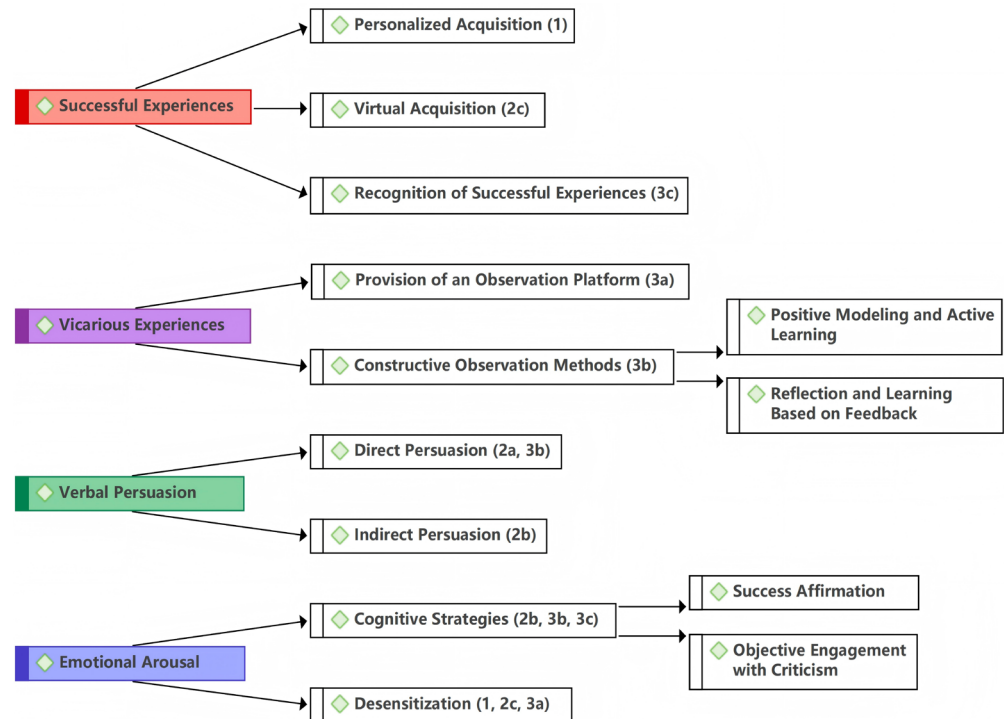


Figure 6. The self-efficacy determinants behind SET pedagogical advantages.

3.3.1. Determinant 1: Gaining Successful Experiences

When individuals acquire successful experiences, their self-efficacy significantly increases, leading them to believe they can complete similar tasks. The identification and affirmation of these experiences are facilitated by the SET model, which offers diverse acquisition channels (Theme 1), virtual experience opportunities (Theme 2c), and systematic recognition of successes (Theme 3c).

a. Personalized Acquisition (Theme 1)

The SET model provides diverse content modules that are tailored to the learners' individual needs, including workplace communication, impromptu speech, and persuasive argumentation, all of which are relevant to career preparation. This enables the learners to easily identify their interests and strengths, making it simpler to recognize successful experiences. For example, Interviewee A gravitated toward the "Hosting Eloquence" module, Interviewee B toward "Storytelling Composition," and Interviewee D toward "Sales Pitch Techniques." Interviewee D also noted that he integrated speech skills with these modules, proactively developing competencies for sales roles. Thus, SET's modular design aligns with individual preferences while directly connecting to their career choices.

b. Virtual Acquisition (Theme 2c)

TED's theatrical atmosphere offers a simulated public stage experience. Although virtual, this environment helps learners familiarize themselves with stage settings in advance, alleviating public speaking anxiety. Interviewee B emphasized imagining herself on a TED stage to rehearse story details, which significantly enhanced her comfort with public settings and allowed her to "acquire successful experiences of addressing audiences."

c. Recognition of Successful Experiences (Theme 3c)

TMI's peer voting mechanism in training sessions plays a crucial role. All four interviewees received titles such as "Speech Star" or "Best Officer" during SET participation. By establishing multiple success benchmarks, elected by all trainees and representing diverse

roles such as speaker and organizer, SET helps students identify their own successful performances. This diversity ensures that every student has opportunities for recognition in different capacities. Once students recognize their successes, they begin to tap into their language potential, which can even shape subsequent career intentions.

For instance, Interviewee C's excellence as a "grammar evaluator," characterized by a keen sensitivity to linguistic errors, ignited her aspiration for language-related work. She later pursued a Bachelor's degree in Chinese language and literature, eventually becoming a Chinese language teacher. Interviewee B's strong vocal skills, demonstrated by her ability to coach peers on speech intonation, helped her recognize her auditory strengths, leading to a career in voice acting. Interviewee D applied TMI's team collaboration experience to sales leadership, leveraging the model's training in persuasive communication. Interviewee A's recurring recognition as a host in SET led to invitations to campus and public events, solidifying her path as a professional emcee.

In summary, through personalized module selection, virtual stage rehearsal through TED, and tangible recognition in TMI voting, these successful experiences allowed interviewees to identify their language potential. When this potential aligned with career intentions, it further strengthened their confidence and self-identity, highlighting the self-efficacy's catalytic role in this process.

3.3.2. Determinant 2: Vicarious Experiences

Individuals form self-efficacy by observing peers with comparable abilities such as their behaviors and outcomes. Vicarious experiences gained through this process significantly influence self-efficacy development, relying on two key components, i.e., providing an observation platform (Theme 3a, a prerequisite) and adopting constructive observation methods (Theme 3b, a critical link).

a. Provision of an Observation Platform (Theme 3a)

TMI creates a simulated training environment that doubles as a cross-professional communication platform, enabling peers to showcase their performances during exercises. This setup allows individuals to fully observe others' behaviors, serving as a foundational prerequisite for acquiring vicarious experiences. TMI's simulated training also ensures equitable educational opportunities through abundant practice. As Interviewees B and D noted (personal communication, 29 July and 21 October 2024), the TMI environment allowed them to "present personal insights through speeches," facilitating mutual observation.

b. Constructive Observation Methods (Theme 3b)

TMI's peer evaluation mechanism creates opportunities for mutual learning, where individuals observe the behaviors and outcomes of peers with similar abilities, establishing a type of vicarious experience central to shaping self-efficacy. Two observation forms exist within TMI's peer evaluation:

(a). Positive Modeling and Active Learning

High-performing peers leverage their experience and skills to assist others, boosting collective self-efficacy. For example, Interviewee A proactively served as a session host, guiding peers through training; Interviewee C's expertise in grammar evaluation drew active inquiries from classmates, demonstrating how positive role modeling encouraged others to learn.

(b). Reflection and Learning Based on Feedback

Individuals accept specific, consensus-based feedback from peers and engage in proactive reflection and adjustment. For instance, when a filler word counter pointed out overuse of "um" or "then," Interviewee A refined her fluency through self-reflection; Interviewee B adjusted her vocal tone and rhythm based on peer feedback, gaining a sense

of achievement from improved expressiveness. These examples illustrate how feedback-driven reflection enhances self-efficacy.

In summary, TMI provides constructive observation methods within its simulated, cross-professional environment, offering students vicarious experiences through peer interactions. These experiences act as reference points for self-improvement, enabling students to refine their performance and build confidence in showcasing personal strengths.

3.3.3. Determinant 3: Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion, including encouraging words and constructive suggestions from others, such as teacher affirmations or peer motivations, can significantly influence and shape an individual's self-efficacy. In the SET model, this is achieved through TMI's immediate feedback mechanism (Theme 3b) and TED's speaker modeling and storytelling (Themes 2a and 2b), providing direct and indirect forms of encouragement and guidance, respectively.

a. Direct Persuasion (Themes 3b and 2a)

TMI's timely feedback system enhances the effectiveness of direct persuasion in three ways. First, feedback is delivered immediately after peer evaluations, preventing the loss of details that may occur with delayed reflection. Second, the tone of feedback is primarily affirming and encouraging, focusing on recognizing progress from previous performances. Third, feedback is based on systematic peer observations, ensuring that even critical comments are constructive and persuasive because they offer clear pathways for improvement.

Additionally, TED's model speeches elevate the quality of persuasion: under targeted teacher guidance, students mimic TED speakers' expression techniques and speech structuring, gradually bridging the gap in communicative competence. This mimetic process serves as a form of direct instructional persuasion, reinforcing students' belief in their ability to master similar skills.

b. Indirect Persuasion (Theme 2b)

Even without explicit teacher guidance, TED speakers' values subtly influence learners through their narratives. TED talks often recount the speakers' journeys in overcoming challenges or making new discoveries, which inspire and encourage learners, especially in shaping career intentions. Because these stories are rooted in the speakers' specific backgrounds, they empower learners to embrace bold career choices. For example, Interviewee A felt that TED cases exposed her to diverse values that broadened her professional vision, while Interviewees B, C, and D cited TED speakers as sources of affirmation for their choices to pursue voice acting, teaching, and sales, respectively. This indirect persuasion operates implicitly: through the speakers' personal stories and performances, learners absorb motivational messages that align with their emerging career aspirations, fostering self-efficacy without overt instruction.

3.3.4. Determinant 4: Emotional Arousal

An individual's emotional and physiological state significantly impacts task performance: positive emotions such as confidence, calmness, and optimism enable learners to perceive their capabilities positively, believing that they can complete tasks and thus enhancing self-efficacy. In the SET model, public speaking anxiety—a common negative emotion during oral tasks—serves as a key barrier to emotional arousal, hence, necessitating targeted strategies for overcoming it. Insights from the four interviewees highlight the critical role of cognitive and desensitization strategies in this process.

a. Cognitive Strategies (Themes 2b, 3b, and 3c)

Cognitive strategies alleviate speaking anxiety through two pathways: affirming successful experiences (Themes 3c and 3b) and objectively engaging with negative feedback

(Themes 2b and 3b). For success affirmation, TMI establishes milestone rewards such as voting for “Speech Star” or “Best Officer”, which transform interviewees into peer role models, fostering self-affirmation. For objective engagement with challenges, TED speakers share personal stories tied to their professional backgrounds, particularly narratives of overcoming obstacles, which inspire learners to pursue career goals. These stories offer new perspectives that inform career choices, while TMI’s feedback mechanism balances constructive criticism with encouragement, helping learners acknowledge their efforts, refine performances, and reinforce strengths, thereby mitigating anxiety through realistic self-assessment.

b. Desensitization Strategies (Themes 1, 2c, and 3a)

Speaking anxiety often stems from excessive public self-consciousness (Morin & Everett, 1990; Snowden & Lond, 1939), the fear of being judged by audiences. Desensitization strategies work by exposing individuals to real-world scenarios where potential “failure” is normalized. The SET model ensures such authenticity through three means. First, content modules focus on interpersonal and workplace communication that align with real-life contexts, making speech topics relevant (e.g., Interviewees A, B, and D chose modules directly related to their career intentions, which helped them persist despite anxiety). Second, TED’s theatrical atmosphere allows students to rehearse in simulated public settings; for example, Interviewee B visualized herself on a TED stage during practice, reducing the fear of audiences. Third, TMI’s cross-professional platform provides abundant opportunities for expressing career intentions in realistic group interactions.

Reflecting on their SET experiences, all interviewees recognized the emotional guidance of TED cases and TMI training, which helped them to recall positive, successful moments, especially how language potential influenced career intentions. Interviewee D, a former construction engineering major, leveraged SET’s sales communication modules to discover his persuasion skills, leading to a high-performing sales career. Interviewee C, inspired by peer affirmations in TMI, switched from microelectronics to Chinese language education, earning a bachelor’s degree and becoming a teacher. Interviewee A applied SET-honed hosting skills to campus events, eventually turning professional. Interviewee B, after improving vocal techniques and winning provincial awards, merged her digital media background with storytelling talents into a voice-acting career. By cultivating optimism, SET created a psychological environment where interviewees felt empowered to take risks and pursue challenging goals, demonstrating how emotional arousal amplifies self-efficacy in career-related pursuits.

4. Discussion

4.1. Overview of Key Findings

This study explores the pedagogical advantages of China’s Speech and Elocution Training (SET) model, focusing on how it activates language potential to facilitate career intention development among vocational students. Using self-efficacy theory, the study clarifies the SET model’s influence mechanism. As illustrated in Figure 7, the SET model’s advantages include three core components: diverse eloquence modules for personalized learning, multimodal TED resources, and a supportive TMI-simulated training environment. These advantages unfold across three stages, i.e., language capability enhancement, career intention awakening, and career choice, which ultimately impacted both the short-term job-seeking intentions and long-term career planning of the four interviewees.

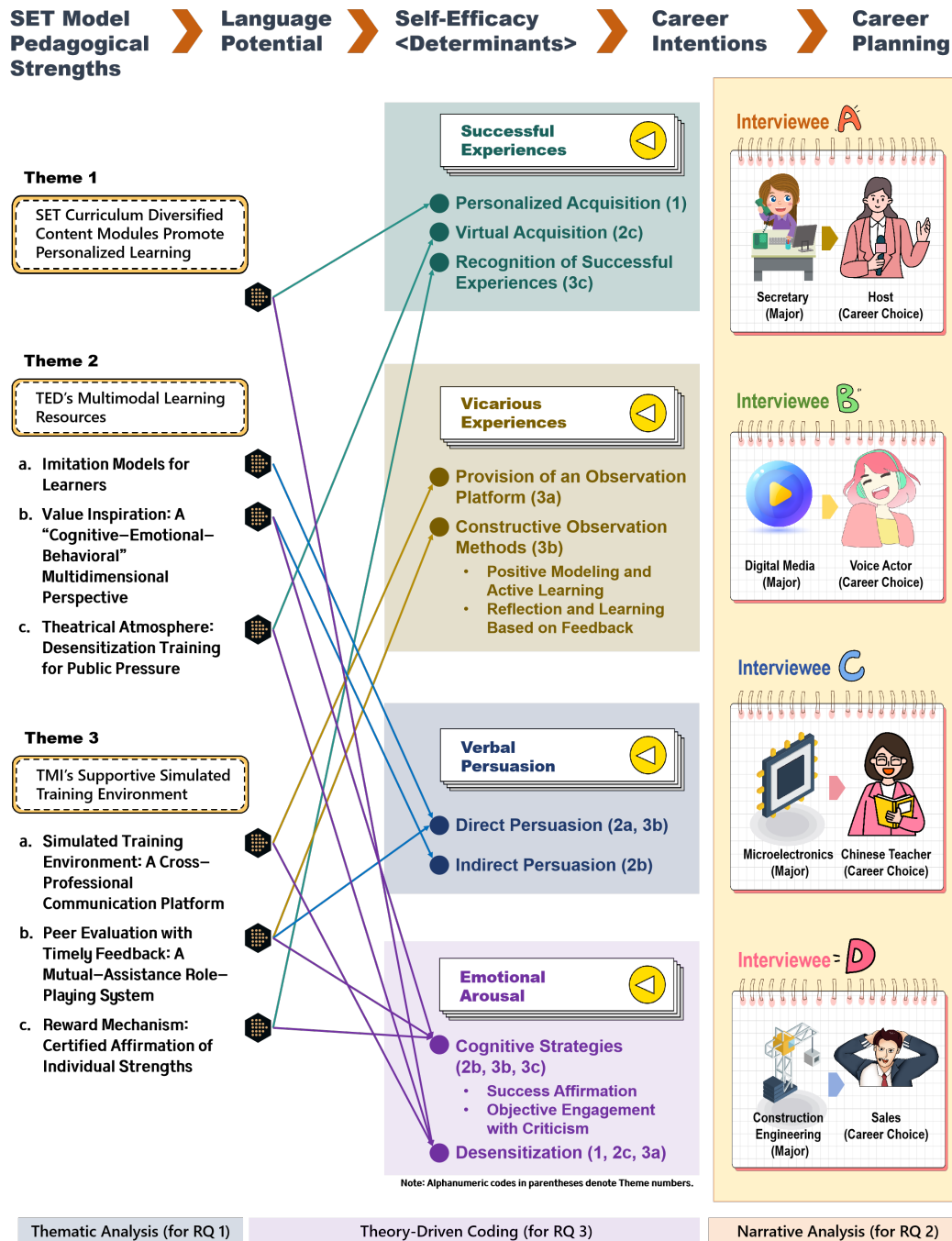


Figure 7. Self-efficacy as catalyst—SET promotes career-oriented development.

These effects align closely with the determinants of self-efficacy, as detailed below:

a. Gaining Successful Experiences

The SET model strengthens students’ confidence and self-identity by providing personalized and virtual channels for acquiring success, while systematically affirming these experiences. Specifically, diverse content modules offer “experience” display opportunities tailored to individual preferences (Theme 1), enabling learners to identify strengths early. Moreover, TED video observation grants “virtual stage experiences” (Theme 2c), allowing students to rehearse public speaking in low-pressure environments. Additionally, TMI voting sessions formally recognize “successful stage performances” (Theme 3c), converting peer approval into tangible self-affirmation.

b. Vicarious Experiences

The SET model provides observation platforms and constructive methods, offering students peer references and role models. Specifically, TMI's simulated environment (Theme 3a) fosters cross-professional interactions, enabling learners to observe peers' skills and outcomes in realistic group settings. Moreover, the peer evaluation mechanism (Theme 3b) facilitates two types of constructive observation: positive modeling (where high-performing peers actively assist others) and feedback-driven reflection (where individuals refine skills through peer critiques), both of which serve as vicarious learning opportunities.

c. Verbal Persuasion

The SET model delivers direct and indirect encouragement and guidance to shape self-efficacy. Direct persuasion occurs through TMI's feedback system (Theme 3b), which provides timely, encouraging, and constructive comments, and TED's model speeches (Theme 2a), which offer replicable techniques for students to mimic and master. Indirect persuasion arises from TED's diverse values and narratives (Theme 2b), which inspire career intentions implicitly—even without explicit teacher guidance—by showcasing the speakers' journeys of overcoming challenges and pursuing non-traditional paths.

d. Emotional Arousal

Cultivating optimism creates a positive psychological environment that motivates students to take risks and embrace challenges, involving two strategies: Cognitive strategies (Themes 2b, 3b, 3c) balance success affirmation (e.g., TMI voting and peer praise) with objective engagement with criticism (e.g., TED's resilience stories and TMI's constructive feedback), helping learners regulate negative emotions. Desensitization strategies (Themes 1, 2c, and 3a) expose students to real-world pressures, such as TED's theatrical simulations and TMI's cross-professional interactions, normalizing public speaking anxiety and building psychological tolerance through repeated practice.

4.2. Discussion of Key Findings

We discuss the main findings of the three RQs as follows:

4.2.1. RQ 1: Pedagogical Advantages of the SET Model

The pedagogical advantages of the SET model affirmed by interviewees aligned with prior research while introducing new insights:

First, the SET curriculum's diverse modular design—intended to enhance language skills and mirror real-world employment scenarios—catered to the learners' individual needs. However, the extensive content system posed challenges for the teachers to maintain focus. Interviewees consistently noted that while public speaking was a core component, the curriculum provided insufficient targeted intervention, identifying this as a priority for future research (Datu & Sulindra, 2025).

Second, building on the existing literature about TED and TMI in classroom applications, this study highlights novel contributions: TED resources demonstrated multimodal benefits, including inspirational diverse values and theatrical scenario simulations. Future research should explore translating these features into actionable teaching strategies (Bernad-Mechó & Valeiras-Jurado, 2023; Xia, 2023). TMI's simulated environment enhanced learning authenticity through cross-professional interactions and peer evaluation. However, the degree to which students perceive its fidelity and accept its feedback mechanisms requires empirical validation (Ajjawi et al., 2024; Kearney et al., 2016; Wake et al., 2024). Both TED and TMI can be combined into the "TED-TI" strategy. They regulated emotions during high-stakes activities such as public speaking, resembling "deliberately guided failure learning" strategies (Sinha, 2022; Sinha & Kapur, 2021; Tamir, 2015; Zepeda et al., 2020). This phenomenon warrants in-depth case studies to unpack its psychological mechanisms.

4.2.2. RQ 2: Language Potential and Career-Oriented Development

This study confirms that SET-activated language potential influences career-oriented development, consistently with prior research emphasizing the SET's role in cultivating industry-ready labor (Tian et al., 2024). It makes two new contributions:

Enhanced Employment Confidence. SET strengthens vocational students' confidence in career choices, empowering them to pursue paths that are aligned with their linguistic strengths. For example, the four interviewees successfully matched their language abilities to diverse professions, achieving notable career outcomes.

Dual Impact on Short-Term and Long-Term Career Processes. Regarding short-term, SET increases job-seeking self-efficacy by addressing a previously unaddressed factor, i.e., language potential, complementing the existing literature on psychological capital and social background. Large-scale interventions are needed to validate this effect (Fort et al., 2011; Petruzzello et al., 2021; Saks et al., 2015). Concerning long-term career planning, the extent to which job-seeking self-efficacy influences sustained career development remains unclear (Biramo et al., 2025; Emirza et al., 2021; Morici et al., 2022). Future research should investigate whether SET-activated language potential can serve as an effective intervention for sustainable career development.

4.2.3. RQ 3: The Role of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy serves as a critical bridge connecting the SET model, the students' language potential, and career-oriented development, functioning as a core catalytic mechanism throughout this process. The four determinants of self-efficacy—gaining successful experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal—interweave and operate synergistically within the SET model: successful experiences boost students' confidence and self-identity; vicarious experiences provide peer references and role models; verbal persuasion offers direct and indirect encouragement and guidance; emotional arousal cultivates a positive psychological environment that motivates risk-taking and challenge-seeking. These determinants collectively enhance self-efficacy, driving the activation of language potential and facilitating the clarification and development of career intentions. While prior research has acknowledged language training activities that promote self-efficacy, the SET model introduces more nuanced intervention strategies that are aligned with the four determinants:

Gaining Successful Experiences. Previous studies have shown that completing a high-quality speech significantly enhances students' confidence in language expression. This study extends these findings by focusing on how success is acquired and affirmed: SET offers innovative pathways, including personalized module selection (e.g., hosting or storytelling modules tailored to individual interests) and virtual simulations (e.g., TED stage rehearsals), allowing students to practice skills in low-pressure environments (Holbrook & Cennamo, 2014; Slk & Fitriani, 2024). Additionally, TMI's peer voting system provides a formal recognition of successes (e.g., "Speech Star" awards), transforming peer approval into tangible self-affirmation that reinforces perceived competence (Wolf, 2014).

Vicarious Experiences. Classic self-efficacy theory posits that observing similar peers' successes enhances individuals' confidence in their own capabilities. This study extends this theory by emphasizing two dimensions of observational learning. The first is observation platform design: TMI's simulated cross-professional environment ensures authentic interactions and equitable practice opportunities, laying the foundation for meaningful peer observation (Pleines, 2020). The second is constructive observation methods: peer evaluation serves a dual role. Evaluators model successful behaviors (e.g., clear linguistic structure or vocal techniques), while evaluatees use feedback to identify gaps and refine strategies, creating a reciprocal learning dynamic (Nosratinia et al., 2014).

Verbal Persuasion. Consistent with prior research on the value of peer encouragement, this study specifies actionable strategies for effective persuasion within SET: specifically, direct persuasion—TMI’s feedback prioritizes affirming progress (e.g., “You’ve reduced filler words by 50% since last week!”) and offers constructive criticism rooted in specific criteria (e.g., “Try pausing after key points to emphasize importance”), enhancing both credibility and applicability (Cherame, 2013; McCarthy & Garavan, 2001; Yusoff, 2012). Moreover, indirect persuasion—TED’s diverse narratives, particularly stories of overcoming adversity (e.g., a non-native speaker becoming a professional presenter), provide emotional resonance that motivates learners to embrace challenges, even without explicit instruction (Chuang et al., 2022).

Emotional Arousal. While prior studies recognize the role of positive emotions in self-efficacy, this research identifies two targeted strategies to regulate public speaking anxiety, i.e., cognitive reframing and desensitization: specifically, cognitive strategies—by highlighting milestones (e.g., TMI awards) and normalizing setbacks (e.g., TED speakers sharing past failures), SET helps students view challenges as learnable moments rather than threats (Meng, 2023). Moreover, desensitization strategies—repeated exposure to realistic pressures (e.g., TED’s theatrical simulations and TMI’s cross-professional peer audiences) reduces excessive self-consciousness, building tolerance for performance anxiety (Morton et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the SET model aligns with Bandura’s four self-efficacy determinants by providing not just congruent but more granular interventions. Students build confidence not in a vague way, but in their capability to perform particular tasks, holding onto this belief even when confronted with difficulties. This situational confidence, fostered through personalized experiences, peer learning, targeted feedback, and emotional regulation, bridges language training, and career intention, offering a robust framework for vocational education that prioritizes both skill development and psychological readiness for professional success.

4.3. Future Research Directions

4.3.1. Extensions of SET Pedagogy

Language instructors are encouraged to refine SET curriculum design to prioritize public speaking modules, given that presentations underpin assessments across all modules. The pedagogical applications of TED’s multimodal features (e.g., integrating visual, auditory, and narrative elements) should be expanded, while the empirical validation of TMI’s simulated training environment, specifically its fidelity to real-world scenarios and student acceptability, remains a critical next step.

4.3.2. Focus on Language Potential’s Impact on Career Confidence

Vocational education researchers are urged to investigate how SET-activated language potential influences both short-term job-seeking confidence and long-term career-planning confidence. Future studies should identify factors that significantly enhance job-seeking self-efficacy and explore their longitudinal effects on sustained career development, addressing the current gap in understanding language-related interventions within this context.

4.3.3. Integrating Self-Efficacy Interventions into Systematic Teaching Strategies

Instructional designers are encouraged to use rigorous design frameworks (e.g., the ADDIE model) to integrate the SET-derived self-efficacy interventions that have been identified in this study, such as personalized modular learning, vicarious observation protocols, and feedback-driven persuasion techniques, into a cohesive set of teaching strategies (Gong et al., 2020). This would enable the scalable implementation of the SET’s psychological and pedagogical advantages across vocational institutions.

4.4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study enriches the application of SET and self-efficacy theory in vocational education, offering new perspectives and theoretical foundations for understanding the relationship between language training and students' career development. It demonstrates how pedagogical designs can systematically leverage Bandura's four self-efficacy determinants to bridge linguistic skill acquisition and professional readiness.

Practically, the findings provide valuable references for reforming language education in vocational colleges across diverse cultural settings. By optimizing the SET curriculum design, i.e., prioritizing personalized modules, multimodal resources, and collaborative training environments, educators can better activate students' language potential and career-oriented competencies, aligning program outcomes with both individual aspirations and industry demands (Ling et al., 2023; G. Wang & Doyle, 2022; J. Wu et al., 2023).

4.5. Study Limitations

This research has two primary limitations. First, the sample included only four graduates, which may limit the representativeness of findings and the generalizability of conclusions. Second, relying solely on interviews introduces subjectivity, as data interpretation is influenced by the participants' self-reported experiences.

Future studies could address these limitations by expanding the sample size to include diverse vocational disciplines and institutions, as well as adopting mixed-methods approaches (e.g., surveys, classroom observations, and longitudinal tracking) to triangulate data and provide a more comprehensive assessment of the SET's effects on language potential activation and career development. These efforts would deepen our understanding of how SET influences vocational students' psychological and professional growth, thereby informing evidence-based educational practices.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate how the Speech and Elocution Training (SET) model activates language potential and promotes career-oriented development among vocational students through self-efficacy mechanisms. By interviewing four graduates with diverse academic backgrounds who participated in the SET courses 5 to 10 years ago and analyzing the determinants of self-efficacy, the research yielded the following key conclusions:

First, the SET model comprises two core components—curriculum content and classroom training. The curriculum includes diverse modules that focus on workplace communication, catering to the vocational students' individualized development needs (e.g., hosting, storytelling, and sales pitch modules). Classroom training leverages multimodal TED talk resources and Toastmasters International (TMI)-simulated practice platforms, effectively sparking students' language potential through realistic, skill-focused exercises.

Second, under the interplay of these pedagogical strategies, interviewees reported that initial language potential evolved from nascent career interests into concrete job-seeking intentions and eventually long-term career plans. A common pathway emerged: successfully completing workplace-related speech tasks boosted the students' confidence in embracing career choices, formulating plans, and believing in their job competencies, enabling them to adapt swiftly when facing professional challenges.

Third, a reanalysis of the four cases revealed that SET's impact on career-oriented development aligned with Bandura's four self-efficacy determinants: gaining successful experiences (such as personalized and virtual acquisition and certified affirmation), vicarious experiences (providing an observation platform and constructive observation methods), verbal persuasion (direct advice and instruction and indirect emotional influence), and arousing optimistic emotions (cognitive deconstruction of positive and negative aspects

and facing desensitization directly). These mechanisms collectively enhanced self-efficacy, creating a positive cycle that amplified language potential and clarified career intentions.

While these findings highlight SET's efficacy, the study's small sample size may limit the generalizability of conclusions. Future research could expand sample diversity and employ mixed methodologies to validate these mechanisms across broader vocational contexts, further refining the understanding of how language training can systematically foster both linguistic competence and career readiness.

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Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This research involved human participants, who were four former members of the Speech Club of Shenzhen Institute of Information Technology. The study was approved by the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), with approval number JKEUPM-2023-1157 and approval date of 29 January 2024. It was also approved by the Speech Club of the Shenzhen Institute of Information Technology on 2 February 2024. This dual approval ensured compliance and ethical conduct of the research.

Informed Consent Statement: Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without suffering any negative consequences. Each participant signed an informed consent form, confirming their understanding of the agreement.

Data Availability Statement: New data, including interviewees' images and transcripts, were generated. With the interviewees' consent, anonymized images were presented. However, due to the presence of personal privacy details, such as past stories in the interview transcripts, they are not publicly available for ethical and privacy protection reasons. No other publicly archived datasets were analyzed, and there were no additional data repositories for this study.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

SET	Speech and Elocution Training
TED	TED Talks
TMI	Toastmasters International
RQ	Research Question

Appendix A

Below is the semantic network for thematic analysis, which was generated using ATLAS.ti software.

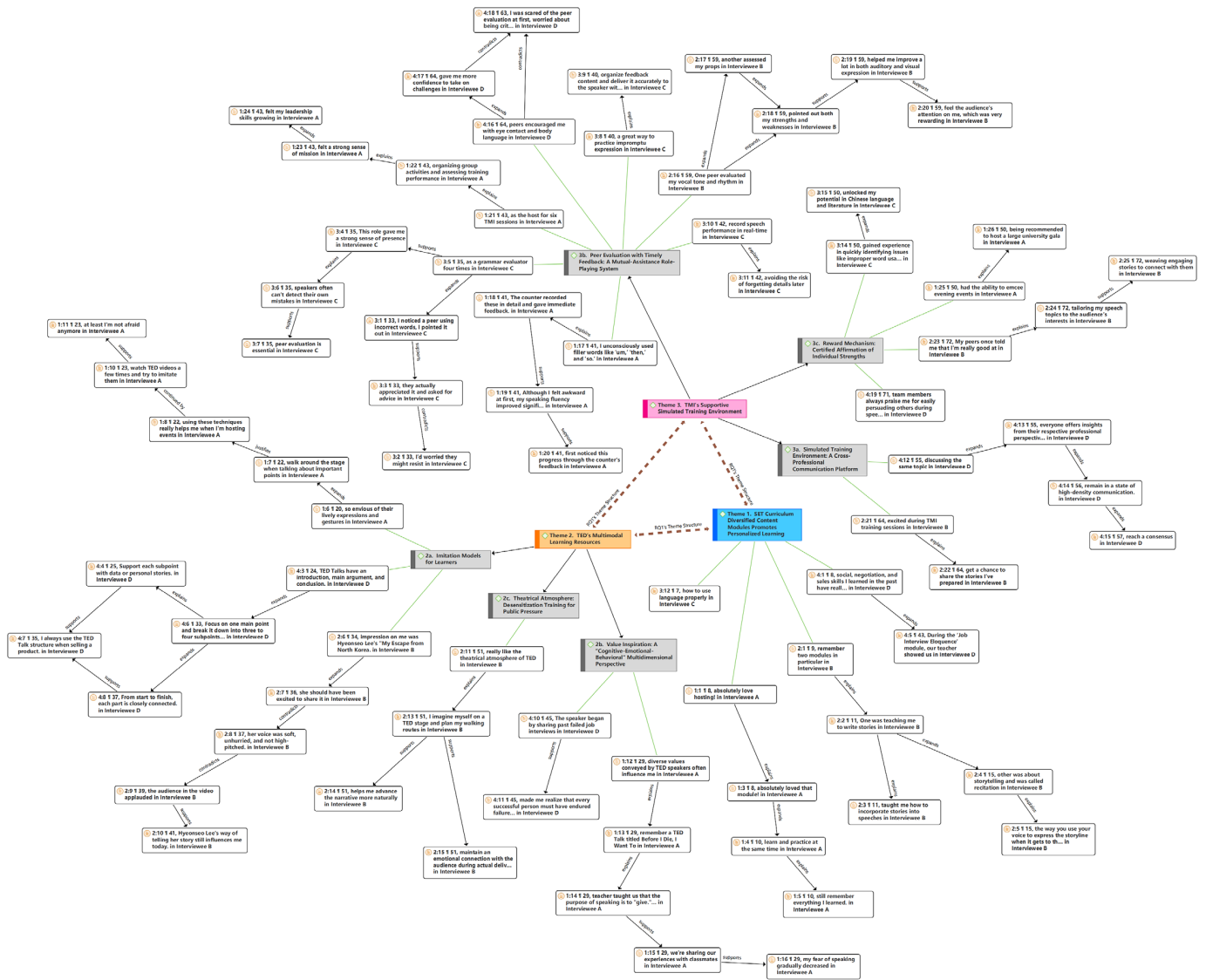


Figure A1. Semantic network for thematic analysis.

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