

A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF SPEAKING PRACTICE AND LEARNER CONFIDENCE IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Speaking is widely regarded as a crucial skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning; however, many learners experience difficulties in speaking due to psychological factors such as anxiety and low confidence. Although previous studies have discussed speaking skills and learner confidence extensively, their relationship is often addressed implicitly rather than through a clear conceptual explanation. This article aims to examine the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL classrooms from a theoretical perspective. Employing a library-based and conceptual research design, this study synthesizes relevant theories, including Self-Efficacy Theory, the Affective Filter Hypothesis, and the Willingness to Communicate framework. The discussion suggests that systematic and meaningful speaking practice can serve as a source of positive learning experiences that enhance learners' confidence and reduce affective barriers to communication. As learners' confidence develops, their willingness to engage in speaking activities increases, creating a positive cycle between practice and confidence. This conceptual discussion provides a theoretical foundation for designing speaking activities that support both learners' oral development and affective readiness to communicate in EFL classroom contexts.

Keywords: speaking practice, learner confidence, self-efficacy, willingness to communicate

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is commonly seen as a crucial ability in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) since it reflects learners' ability to use the language for real communication (Brown, 2007). In contemporary EFL pedagogy, speaking proficiency remains a primary indicator of communicative competence and successful language use (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020; Harmer, 2007; Sato, 2023). However, speaking is often perceived as one of the most challenging language skills to develop, particularly in EFL contexts where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

Despite possessing sufficient grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, many EFL learners hesitate to speak due to psychological and affective factors such as fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and low self-confidence (Horwitz et al., 1986). Recent studies confirm that these affective factors continue to play a significant role in shaping learners' speaking behavior and classroom participation (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). As a result, learners may remain passive during speaking activities, limiting their opportunities to practice oral communication and hindering the development of their speaking proficiency.

In many EFL classroom contexts, the classroom serves as the primary environment for learners to practice spoken English. However, opportunities for sustained speaking practice are often constrained by large class sizes, examination-oriented instruction, and teacher-centered teaching practices. Consequently, learners may demonstrate adequate linguistic knowledge while lacking confidence and experience in using English orally. Recent literature

suggests that insufficient and poorly structured speaking practice can negatively affect learners' confidence and willingness to communicate (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020; Lee & Drajadi, 2019; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021).

Learner confidence has been identified as a key affective variable influencing learners' engagement in speaking activities. Confidence shapes learners' perceptions of their own communicative ability and their readiness to take risks when speaking in a foreign language (Bandura, 1997). Learners with higher levels of confidence tend to participate more actively in oral interaction, whereas learners with low confidence often avoid speaking tasks and remain silent during classroom communication (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021; Pawlak, 2023). These findings indicate that speaking performance in EFL classrooms is not solely determined by linguistic competence but is closely related to learners' affective readiness to communicate. Although numerous studies have examined speaking skills and affective factors such as anxiety and confidence in EFL learning, the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence is often discussed implicitly rather than through a clear conceptual explanation. Many studies focus on instructional methods or speaking outcomes without explicitly explaining how systematic speaking practice contributes to the development of learner confidence. As a result, teachers may lack a strong theoretical foundation for designing speaking activities that support not only learners' linguistic development but also their affective readiness to communicate.

Therefore, this conceptual review is significant because it seeks to clarify the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL classrooms by synthesizing key theoretical perspectives, including Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), and the Willingness to Communicate framework (MacIntyre et al., 1998). By offering an integrated conceptual discussion, this study aims to provide a theoretical foundation for designing speaking activities that foster learner confidence and encourage active participation in oral communication. In addition, this conceptual framework is expected to inform future empirical research on speaking practice and affective factors in diverse EFL classroom contexts.

Speaking Practice in EFL Classroom

Recent studies in English language teaching have consistently emphasized speaking practice as a central component of communicative competence in EFL learning. Contemporary research highlights that speaking ability reflects learners' capacity to use linguistic knowledge for real-time communication and interaction rather than merely demonstrating grammatical accuracy (Al-Hoorie & Derakhshan, 2024; Pawlak, 2023; Sato, 2023). From this perspective, speaking practice involves active engagement in meaning-focused interaction, negotiation of meaning, and the expression of ideas within communicative contexts.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) have played a significant role in shaping current perspectives on speaking instruction. CLT emphasizes meaningful communication and learner interaction as the primary means of developing speaking ability, while TBLT operationalizes this principle through the use of communicative tasks that require learners to use language to achieve specific outcomes (Richards, 2006). Both approaches position learners as active participants in the learning process and highlight the importance of interaction and purposeful communication in EFL classrooms.

In EFL contexts, classroom-based speaking practice often represents the primary opportunity for learners to use English orally, as exposure to English outside the classroom is typically limited. Consequently, the frequency and quality of classroom speaking activities play a crucial role in shaping learners' oral development. When learners are provided with regular opportunities to participate in meaningful speaking tasks, they are more likely to develop fluency, interactional competence, and communicative confidence. Conversely, limited or highly controlled speaking opportunities may restrict learners' ability to transform linguistic knowledge into active oral communication.

Despite its recognized importance, speaking practice in many EFL classrooms remains insufficient and unevenly distributed. Structural constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, examination-oriented curricula, and teacher-centered instructional practices often reduce opportunities for sustained oral interaction. In such contexts, speaking activities may be restricted to brief responses, choral repetition, or form-focused drills, which offer limited communicative value. Recent literature suggests that these conditions can negatively affect learners' engagement and reduce their willingness to participate in speaking activities (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022).

From a conceptual perspective, the effectiveness of speaking practice cannot be separated from its affective dimension. Speaking activities that emphasize accuracy, frequent error correction, or public evaluation may increase learners' anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, thereby inhibiting participation. In contrast, speaking practice that is scaffolded, collaborative, and meaning-focused can foster a supportive learning environment in which learners feel more comfortable taking communicative risks. Such environments allow learners to view speaking as a learning process rather than as a test of linguistic ability.

Furthermore, the design of speaking activities plays a critical role in determining whether speaking practice contributes positively to learners' confidence. Well-structured tasks that provide clear goals, opportunities for peer interaction, and gradual increases in complexity can help learners experience successful communication. These successful speaking experiences function as mastery experiences that reinforce learners' beliefs in their speaking ability. Conceptually, this suggests that speaking practice should be understood as a dynamic process that integrates linguistic development with affective engagement.

Overall, speaking practice in EFL classrooms should be viewed not merely as a means of developing oral proficiency but also as a key mechanism for supporting learners' affective readiness to communicate. When learners are provided with systematic, meaningful, and supportive speaking opportunities, speaking practice can serve as a foundation for both communicative competence and the development of learner confidence. This conceptual understanding provides an important basis for examining the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL classroom contexts.

Learner Confidence in EFL Learning

Learner confidence plays a significant role in shaping students' willingness to engage in speaking activities. Confidence influences learners' perceptions of their own communicative ability and their readiness to take risks when using a foreign language (Bandura, 1997). Learners with higher levels of confidence tend to participate more actively in oral communication, while those with low confidence often avoid speaking tasks and remain passive during classroom interaction (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). From a

conceptual perspective, learner confidence functions as a crucial affective variable that mediates learners' engagement in speaking activities.

Recent studies in EFL learning have increasingly emphasized learner confidence as a key factor influencing learners' participation, engagement, and willingness to communicate in speaking activities. Contemporary research highlights that confidence shapes learners' perceptions of their communicative ability and their readiness to take risks when using English orally (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021; Pawlak, 2023; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). These studies suggest that learners with higher levels of confidence are more likely to participate actively in speaking tasks, while learners with low confidence tend to avoid oral communication and classroom interaction.

In addition, recent literature suggests that learner confidence is closely related to psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, language anxiety, and affective factors in second language learning. Confidence is not viewed as a fixed personal trait but rather as a dynamic and context-dependent construct that can develop through classroom experiences and instructional practices (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Pawlak, 2023). From this perspective, learner confidence can be shaped by learning environments that provide supportive feedback, opportunities for success, and meaningful communicative experiences.

From a conceptual standpoint, learner confidence functions as a mediating factor between linguistic knowledge and actual speaking performance. Even when learners possess adequate grammatical competence, insufficient confidence may prevent them from translating this knowledge into oral communication. Empirical and conceptual studies have consistently shown that affective variables such as confidence, anxiety, and motivation significantly influence learners' speaking performance in EFL contexts (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Oflaz, 2019; Saito & Dewaele, 2022).

METHOD

This study uses a library-based methodology and a conceptual research design. Rather than collecting empirical data from participants, this article focuses on reviewing, analyzing, and synthesizing existing theories and scholarly literature related to speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL classrooms. This approach is appropriate because the main objective of the study is to develop a theoretical understanding and to propose a conceptual relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence.

Conceptual research emphasizes the systematic examination of concepts, assumptions, and theoretical perspective in order to generate new insights or conceptual propositions (Jabareen, 2009). In this study, relevant theories from second language teaching are examined to explain how speaking practice may influence learners' confidence. By synthesizing these perspectives, this article seeks to provide a coherent conceptual explanation that can inform pedagogical practice in EFL classrooms.

Sources of Data

The sources of data for this conceptual article were selected academic publications related to speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL contexts. Consistent with the nature of conceptual research, the literature selection did not aim to be exhaustive or systematic but followed a relevance-based and theory-driven approach. The sources included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and theoretical papers that contributed directly to the conceptual discussion.

The literature was obtained from reputable academic databases and publishers, including Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and major academic publishers such as Elsevier, Springer, and Cambridge University Press. To identify relevant literature, keyword-based searches were conducted using combinations of terms such as speaking practice, EFL speaking, learner confidence, speaking self-efficacy, willingness to communicate, and affective factors in EFL learning.

An initial pool of publications was identified through these keyword searches. The sources were then screened and selectively included based on their conceptual relevance to the research focus. Only publications that directly informed the theoretical discussion of speaking practice and learner confidence were retained and cited in the article. As a result, the final reference list reflects a curated selection of key sources rather than the total number of publications initially identified.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis was conducted through a thematic and analytical literature review. Relevant theories and concepts were identified, examined, and grouped into key themes related to speaking practice and learner confidence. These themes were then compared and interpreted to identify patterns and theoretical relationship across different perspectives.

The analytical process involved synthesizing findings from various sources to construct a conceptual explanation of how speaking practice can contribute to the development of learner confidence in EFL classrooms. This synthesis process allows the study to move beyond more description of theories and toward the development of an integrated conceptual discussion. To ensure analytical rigor, the selected sources were critically evaluated for their theoretical relevance and contribution to EFL speaking research.

Ethical Consideration

Since this study relies exclusively on secondary data from published academic sources and does not involve human participants, ethical issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, and participant protection are not applicable. Nevertheless, ethical responsibility was maintained by appropriately citing all sources used in this article to acknowledge the original authors and avoid plagiarism. In addition, the analysis and interpretation of theories were conducted objectively and transparently to ensure academic integrity and respect for scholarly work.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this conceptual study, the term findings does not refer to empirical data derived from participants but to conceptual insights generated through the analysis and synthesis of selected theoretical and scholarly literature. Rather than displaying numerical data or individual studies, this section presents the key conceptual themes that emerged from a critical and thematic examination of the literature related to speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL classrooms.

The analysis was conducted by identifying recurring theoretical patterns and central concepts across the selected sources, particularly those related to learner confidence as an affective variable in EFL speaking, the role of speaking practice as a source of communicative experience, and the interaction between affective factors and willingness to communicate. These recurring concepts were then synthesized and interpreted through relevant theoretical frameworks, including Self-Efficacy Theory, the Affective Filter Hypothesis, and the

Willingness to Communicate framework. The resulting themes form the basis of the conceptual discussion presented in this section.

Learner Confidence in EFL Speaking

Learner confidence is widely recognized as a key affective factor influencing learners' participation in speaking activities in EFL classrooms. Confidence refers to learners' beliefs in their ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language, which shapes their willingness to take risks and engage in oral interaction. Learners with higher levels of confidence are more likely to participate actively in classroom discussions, while learners with low confidence tend to avoid speaking opportunities and remain passive during communicative activities (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Pawlak, 2020).

From a psychological perspective, learner confidence is closely associated with self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) explains that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence their motivation, emotional responses, and performance in specific tasks. In EFL contexts, speaking self-efficacy plays a crucial role in determining whether learners are willing to use English orally despite potential errors or negative evaluation. Recent research suggests that learner confidence is not a fixed personal trait but a dynamic construct that develops through classroom interaction, instructional practices, and accumulated speaking experiences (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019).

From a conceptual standpoint, learner confidence functions as a mediating factor between linguistic knowledge and actual speaking performance. Even when learners possess adequate grammatical competence, insufficient confidence may prevent them from translating this knowledge into oral communication. Thus, understanding learner confidence is essential for explaining variability in learners' speaking participation in EFL classrooms (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019).

Speaking Practice in EFL Classrooms

The second conceptual theme focuses on speaking practice as a primary source of communicative experience in EFL classroom contexts. Speaking practice is a central component of communicative competence in EFL learning, as it provides learners with opportunities to apply linguistic knowledge in meaningful interaction. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasize learner-centered interaction and authentic communication as fundamental principles for developing speaking skills (Ellis, 2017; Long, 2015; Richards, 2006). Through structured speaking activities, learners can gradually develop fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence.

Through repeated opportunities for oral interaction, learners gain communicative experience that supports the development of speaking ability. Previous literature highlights the importance of peer interaction and task repetition in promoting learners' engagement and speaking development, as these activities allow learners to experiment with language use in relatively low-pressure contexts (Dao & McDonough, 2018; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). In addition, technology-mediated and task-based speaking activities may further enhance learners' exposure to meaningful communication (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014).

However, despite its pedagogical importance, speaking practice in many EFL classrooms remains limited. Factors such as large class sizes, examination-oriented instruction, and teacher-centered practices often restrict opportunities for sustained oral interaction. As a result, learners may demonstrate sufficient linguistic knowledge while lacking confidence and

experience in using English orally. Recent literature suggests that insufficient and poorly structured speaking practice can negatively affect learners' confidence and willingness to communicate (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022).

Conceptually, the effectiveness of speaking practice cannot be separated from learners' affective responses to these activities. Speaking tasks that emphasize error correction, evaluation, or teacher dominance may increase anxiety and inhibit participation. In contrast, speaking practice that is scaffolded, collaborative, and meaning-focused activities are more likely to foster positive affective experiences and contribute to the development of learner confidence.

The Relationship between Speaking Practice and Learner Confidence

The discussion of relevant theories and literature reveals a reciprocal relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence. Speaking practice provides learners with opportunities to experience success in oral communication, which functions as mastery experiences. According to self-efficacy theory, mastery experiences are the most influential source of confidence development, as successful performance strengthens learners' beliefs in their communicative ability (Bandura, 1997; MacIntyre et al., 2020)

In addition, speaking practice may lower learners' affective filter, enabling them to participate more freely in oral communication. As learners become more familiar with speaking English in classroom settings, emotional barriers such as anxiety and fear of negative evaluation may decrease. Increased confidence, in turn, enhances learners' willingness to communicate, leading to more frequent engagement in speaking activities (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Khajavy et al., 2018).

This relationship is further explained through the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) framework, which suggests that learners' readiness to speak in a second language is influenced by both linguistic competence and affective factors such as confidence and emotional engagement (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020; Saito et al., 2018). Conceptually, speaking practice and learner confidence form a cyclical and mutually reinforcing process in which increased opportunities for oral interaction strengthen confidence, and heightened confidence encourages sustained participation in speaking activities

From a conceptual standpoint, the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence can be understood as a cyclical and mutually reinforcing process. When learners are repeatedly exposed to structured speaking opportunities, they gradually become familiar with communicative demands, which reduces uncertainty and fear of negative evaluation. This increased familiarity strengthens learners' confidence in using English orally. Over time, this cycle promotes sustained participation and deeper engagement in classroom communication.

Reflective Conceptual Insight

Building on the conceptual findings discussed above, this section offers reflective insights into how the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence manifests in EFL classroom contexts. In many EFL settings, learners' reluctance to speak is often driven more by psychological barriers than by linguistic limitations. Classroom norms, feedback practices, and previous learning experiences can significantly shape learners' confidence to engage in oral communication.

From this perspective, speaking practice should be viewed not only as a means of developing oral proficiency but also as a space for affective development. Speaking activities that are supportive, non-threatening, and collaborative can help learners develop confidence over time. Conversely, environments that emphasize accuracy and error avoidance may reinforce anxiety and reduce learners' willingness to speak.

A Conceptual Proposition for EFL Classrooms

Based on the conceptual analysis presented in this study, the following proposition is put forward. In many EFL classroom contexts, particularly where English exposure is limited outside school, speaking activities often become sources of tension rather than opportunities for growth. This conceptual proposition emphasizes that speaking practice should be intentionally designed as an affective-supportive process rather than merely a linguistic exercise. By integrating confidence-oriented considerations into speaking instruction, EFL classrooms can function as environments that promote both communicative competence and psychological readiness to speak.

Based on the conceptual analysis presented in the preceding sections, this article proposes that systematic and meaningful speaking practice plays a central role in fostering learner confidence, which subsequently enhances learners' willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms. Speaking practice and learner confidence form a cyclical relationship in which increased opportunities for oral interaction strengthen confidence, and heightened confidence, in turn, encourages sustained engagement in speaking activities.

This conceptual proposition aligns directly with the objective of the study and underscores the importance of viewing speaking instruction as both a linguistic and psychological process. Such a perspective provides a foundation for future empirical studies examining how different types of speaking practice influence learner confidence across diverse EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This conceptual article has examined the relationship between speaking practice and learner confidence in EFL classroom contexts through a synthesis of relevant theories and previous studies. The discussion highlights that speaking practice is not only essential for developing learners' oral proficiency but also plays a significant role in shaping their affective readiness to communicate, particularly learner confidence. Using the Willingness to Communicate framework, the Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Self-Efficacy Theory, this paper contends that regular practical speaking practice can help students build confidence. Learners may experience successful communication, lessen anxiety, and foster good attitudes about their speaking abilities through supportive speaking exercises. Learners can be more inclined to actively engage in speaking exercises as their confidence grows, fostering a beneficial connection between practice and confidence in learning English as a foreign language. Based on these conceptual insights, it is suggested that EFL teachers design speaking activities that prioritize meaningful interaction, gradual scaffolding, and supportive feedback. Creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere may help learners feel more comfortable taking communicative risks. In addition, future research is encouraged to empirically examine the proposed conceptual relationship across different EFL contexts in order to strengthen and extend the theoretical discussion presented in this article.

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