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The Relationship Between Fear of Making Mistakes and Self-Confidence in EFL Speaking

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Abstract

Speaking is an important but challenging skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. One factor that may affect learners' willingness to speak is fear of making mistakes. This study examines the relationship between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence in EFL speaking based on a review of existing literature. Three recent studies were analyzed to identify common findings concerning emotional, psychological, and classroom-related factors influencing learners' speaking confidence. The reviewed literature indicates that fear of making mistakes is closely associated with low self-confidence, hesitation, anxiety, and reduced participation in speaking activities. The studies also suggest that previous negative experiences, fear of negative evaluation, limited language proficiency, and unsupportive classroom environments may contribute to learners' fear and lack of confidence. At the same time, supportive teachers, constructive feedback, regular speaking practice, peer support, and positive learning environments may help learners become more willing to communicate. The findings suggest that fear of making mistakes should not be considered only as a linguistic problem, but also as an affective factor that can influence learners' speaking behavior.

Keywords: fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, EFL speaking, speaking anxiety, language learning.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the most important skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires learners to use linguistic knowledge in real-time communication. However, speaking can also create psychological difficulties because learners need to produce language in front of teachers or classmates and may become concerned about making mistakes. Fear of making mistakes can therefore become an important affective factor in the development of speaking skills.[1]

Salihoğlu explains that fear of making mistakes is closely related to learners' self-confidence in language learning. According to the review, negative emotions such as fear and anxiety may influence learners' attitudes toward language production and reduce their confidence. The author also emphasizes that learners' individual differences and classroom environments can influence the way they experience fear during language learning.[2]

Recent research also shows that fear of making mistakes can influence students' participation in speaking activities. Fadillah et al. in a study of students participating in English classroom presentations, found that nervousness and hesitation were commonly associated with fear of being judged, making errors, and having limited vocabulary. Their findings also indicate that these factors can reduce students' confidence and participation. The study emphasizes the importance of supportive classroom environments, positive reinforcement, and opportunities for speaking practice.[3]

Self-confidence is also an important factor in EFL speaking. Asnaini et al. investigated factors influencing EFL students' self-confidence in speaking classes in higher education. Their findings identified mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and emotional states as important factors shaping students' confidence. The study suggests that negative experiences and unsupportive feedback may weaken students' confidence, whereas positive experiences and supportive learning environments can strengthen it.[4]

Although previous studies have examined fear of making mistakes and self-confidence from different perspectives, these concepts are closely connected in EFL speaking. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the existing literature explains the relationship between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence in EFL speaking.[5]

The research questions are:

1. How is fear of making mistakes related to self-confidence in EFL speaking?
2. What factors contribute to learners' fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence?
3. What classroom practices may help reduce fear and support learners' confidence in speaking?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative literature-based review approach. Rather than collecting primary data from students, the study analyzed existing research related to fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, and EFL speaking.

Three relevant studies were selected for analysis. The first was Salihoğlu's review article, which specifically examines the relationship between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence in language learning. The second was the study by Fadillah et al. which investigates the influence of fear of making mistakes on students' self-confidence and engagement in English classroom presentations. The third was the higher-education study by Asnaini et al. which examines factors influencing EFL students' self-confidence in speaking classes.[6]

The selected studies were compared according to three main aspects: (1) factors associated with fear of making mistakes, (2) the relationship between fear and self-confidence, and (3) classroom factors that may support learners' willingness to speak. The findings were then synthesized thematically in order to identify common patterns across the reviewed studies.

Results and Discussion

Fear of Making Mistakes and Self-Confidence

The reviewed literature indicates a close relationship between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence in EFL speaking. Salihoğlu argues that fear of making mistakes can negatively influence learners' self-confidence and their willingness to produce language. When learners are concerned

about making errors or receiving negative evaluation, they may become more hesitant to participate in speaking activities.

Similarly, Fadillah et al. found that students experienced nervousness and hesitation during English presentations because of concerns about making mistakes, being judged, and having insufficient vocabulary. These emotional reactions were associated with lower confidence and reduced participation.[7]

The findings of Asnaini et al. further support the importance of psychological factors in speaking confidence. Their study found that students' confidence was shaped by previous experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and emotional states. Therefore, fear of making mistakes may be understood as part of a wider affective process in which learners' perceptions of their own speaking ability influence their willingness to communicate.[8]

Factors Contributing to Fear and Low Confidence

Several factors appear repeatedly across the reviewed studies. One important factor is limited language knowledge. Fadillah et al. reported that students' concerns about vocabulary and language ability contributed to nervousness during speaking presentations. When learners believe that their linguistic resources are insufficient, they may become more worried about producing incorrect language.[9]

Another factor is fear of negative evaluation. Students may be concerned that teachers or classmates will judge their English negatively. Salihoğlu discusses fear of evaluation as an important element associated with language anxiety and fear of making mistakes.

Previous experiences may also influence confidence. Asnaini et al. found that mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and emotional states contribute to students' self-confidence. Repeated negative experiences or negative feedback may therefore weaken learners' perceptions of their speaking ability.

These findings suggest that fear of making mistakes is not caused by linguistic knowledge alone. It may develop through the interaction of linguistic difficulties, previous experiences, social evaluation, and emotional states.

Classroom Environment and Support

The reviewed studies also emphasize the role of the classroom environment. Fadillah et al. highlight the importance of peer support and teacher involvement in students' motivation and willingness to speak. A classroom environment in which mistakes are treated as a natural part of learning may make students more comfortable participating in speaking activities.

Salihoğlu similarly emphasizes the role of teachers and classroom conditions in reducing negative emotional barriers. Supportive feedback and appropriate classroom practices may help learners maintain their confidence while developing their language skills.

Asnaini et al. also demonstrate that social persuasion and psychological conditions influence students' speaking confidence. This indicates that teachers can play an important role in creating conditions in which learners feel sufficiently secure to participate and practice speaking.

Therefore, reducing fear of making mistakes does not necessarily mean eliminating mistakes from the learning process. Instead, the classroom should provide learners with opportunities to make mistakes, receive constructive feedback, and continue communicating.[10]

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that fear of making mistakes and self-confidence are closely connected in EFL speaking. Fear of making errors, negative evaluation, limited language proficiency, previous negative experiences, and emotional difficulties may contribute to lower confidence and reduced participation in speaking activities.

At the same time, the reviewed studies show that self-confidence can be supported through positive learning experiences, constructive feedback, peer support, regular speaking practice, and supportive classroom environments. Therefore, fear of making mistakes should be considered not only a linguistic issue but also an affective factor in EFL speaking.

Overall, the literature suggests that creating a classroom environment where mistakes are accepted as a normal part of language learning may help learners become more confident and willing to communicate. Further research could investigate this relationship among different groups of EFL learners and in different educational contexts.

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