

Impact of Teachers' use of Language on Students' Emotion

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ABSTRACT: *Language is a very powerful tool in the classroom. It has the power to build or destroy students both emotionally and psychologically. The present study investigated the teachers' use of language on students' emotion. The study employed convergent mixed methods guided by a pragmatic paradigm. The data were collected through survey, interview and classroom observations from three schools in Samtse dzongkhag (district). Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 23, and thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data (Braun & Clark, 2018). The finding revealed that positive language used by teachers have a positive impact on students' emotions, as well as their behaviour, motivation, and cognitive abilities. In contrast, the teacher's negative use of language has a detrimental impact on the students' emotions, conduct, and cognitive ability. The findings also highlighted that student prefer polite language. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers must be aware of the importance and necessity of using positive language. Without this consideration, schools may produce students who are emotionally, psychologically or cognitively unsound.*

KEYWORDS: Impact, emotions, teacher, student, positive, negative, language.

→ Received 16/11/2024 → Revised manuscript received 12/6/2025 → Published 19/9/2025.

1. Introduction

Language is an indispensable and powerful tool for teachers in the classroom. Teachers use language in the classroom for different purposes such as imparting knowledge, to inspire, motivate and dissuade. Teachers have a central role in advancing social interaction and creating a positive atmosphere in their classes. Therefore, the kind of language a teacher uses in the classroom has both immediate and far-reaching effects. Podobińska (2017, p.6) stated “the words the teachers say to their pupils can be blissful, inspiring, opening new doors but unfortunately they can be the opposite as well and shut many doors forever.” Additionally, Teacher plays a pivotal role in creating positive atmosphere in the classroom. Laine *et al.* (2019, p.7) positions “in the classroom, interaction occurs between the teacher and the pupils, and between the pupils themselves. In this interaction, the teacher is more central as he or she decides who is allowed to talk and what to talk about”. The use of formal, polite, encouraging and appropriate level of language can create conducive atmosphere and stimulate children's interest in learning, whereas, the use

of colloquial, slang, abusive and grammatically incorrect language de-motivate learning and affect children's emotions (Podobińska, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Drawing on my experience of teaching for almost decades, I have observed that when I use polite, encouraging remarks, praises, requests, positive warning, suggestions and inspiring words/language, my students exhibit happy faces with lots of smiles and energy and also show the signs of forwardness in doing the activities assigned in the class. hey also participate in the classroom actively making an elevated difference in their performance. Conversely, when I use impolite, negative warnings, discouraging words, some students show their anger, temper tantrum showing their rebellious behaviour which suggest that my words hurt their emotions. Furthermore, once on a bus journey, my seat mate mentioned that his brother did not complete his studies because he was offended by the way his English teacher spoke to him. His sibling dropped out of school because he was ashamed in front of his classmates. Therefore, it indicates that the kind of language a teacher uses in the

class has corresponding impacts on the emotions of the students. Although there is literature on the teachers' use of language and its impacts on students' emotion in the international context, there is no study carried out on this topic in the Bhutanese context. Hence, it is imperative to conduct research on this topic. The findings from the study may benefit different teachers in being cautious with the use of words with students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main research question

What are the impacts of teachers' use of language on students' emotion?

Sub-questions

1. What are the positive impacts of teachers' use of language on students' emotion?
2. What are the negative impacts of teachers' use of language on students' emotion?
3. What kind of teachers' language do students prefer?

2. Literature review

Emotion

Emotions are a part of who we are as humans. Among other feelings, they experience love, hatred, joy, shame, guilt, despair, and revenge. Individuals and civilizations can be brought together or torn apart by emotions. When steps are done to meet one's biological and transactional requirements, emotions are triggered in persons (Turner, 2007). Rinchen (2014) states that humans' fundamental emotions can be triggered at three different levels of intensity: low, medium, and high. Further, our bodies are never the same and our minds secure unused experiment with each moment that passes. We are flux, in steady change" (Goleman, 2004, p.77).

The diverse emotions that students may experience during learning activities can cause different affective reactions in students. Emotions have an impact on learning. "Emotions play a fundamental role in our existence. As human beings, our emotions, as well as those of others around us, influence our conduct, attitudes, and thinking" (Ruiz, 2016, p.73). Despite the fact that positive feelings appear to generate student motivation, research has pointed out that teachers' care is an important motivational generator for

students (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). The feeling component reflects the subjective experience that is often equated with emotion. Collin's 2004 study (as cited in Rinchen, 2014), "emotional energy is generated when there is synchrony in body movements, facial expressions, and vocalisations of actors involved in the interactions". Emotions are central for activating a reduction of the discrepancies between students.

Teacher's use of language in the class

The primary role of the teacher in a multidimensional language class is to establish conditions and develop activities so that students are able to practice the language in a meaningful context. Fillmore (2000) states that teachers use language in the class for different purposes such as to teach, lecture, ask questions, coordinate discuss and give verbal answers to questions. Laine *et al.* (2019) states that teachers have a central role in advancing social interaction and a positive atmosphere in their classes. The use of formal, polite, encouraging and appropriate level of language can create a conducive atmosphere and stimulate children's interest in learning, whereas, the use of colloquial, slang, abusive and grammatically incorrect language de-motivate learning and affect children's emotions. The language used by the teachers in the classroom can be categorized as request, command, apology, suggestion, warning - both positive and negative, and acknowledgement (Giri, 1999; National Institute of Education [NIE], 2003).

Effect of language on students' emotion

Teachers need to be sensitive to students 'emotion. Take a look at what you do from time to time". Language is an exceedingly powerful tool. When educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions, they fail to appreciate a critical force in students.

Lindquist *et al.* (2015) also put forward that language is particularly likely to be involved in emotion because concepts of emotion such as frustration, disgust and fear are expressed and abstract representations that form conceptual information. Fredrickson (2001) supports that teachers' use of language can create positive emotions such as joy that urges to play, expand boundaries, interest that generates an urge

to explore, absorb new information, self-development, contentment allows one to savour positive events and pride that urges to share accomplishments, which provokes a greater interest in the subject matter and makes the student more participatory because of enthusiasm from the teacher.

Positive impacts of teachers' language

Students' emotions are greatly influenced by their relationships with teachers. Positive teacher language has a significant impact on students' emotions. As Denton (2007) states: when delivered in a calm voice, a teacher's words send the idea that he or she feels they are willing to listen, learn, and perform good work. This increases the likelihood of students behaving properly. They are more willing to listen and cooperate if they feel valued. Positive language teaches how to alter language so that it comes across as positive and constructive, rather than abrasive, hostile or confrontational. Bacal (n.d.) agrees that use of positive language tends to reduce conflict, improve communication, reduce defensiveness in others and helps show the speaker as convincing and decent. So, teachers' positive language has lots of power to change students' emotion. When focused on using positive words with children, they have less tantrums, whine less, and exhibit fewer problematic behaviours overall (Brogle & Giacomini, 2013).

Denton (2007) also contends that words, tone, pacing, listening are the powerful tools that can nurture children's self-control, build their sense of belonging, and help them gain academic and social skills. Further, Podobińska (2017) express that the teacher's positive language makes students feel safe and motivated, and it also empowers a child to make the correct decision on his or her own, which can boost self-esteem. Thus, teachers express will affect whether the message is received positively or negatively.

Negative impacts of teachers' language

Teachers are aware that emotions have important influence upon students in the learning process. The choice of words and the language selections are critical to the self-esteem, academic success, and healthy mental and emotional development of the students.

Bradley (2021) states that negative phrasing and language characteristics such as subtle tone of blame, words as such can't, won't, unable to, doesn't stress positive actions that would be appropriate, or positive consequences which in return cause high emotional stress to the learners. In addition, emotions play a fundamental role in our existence. Pekrun *et al.* (2002) investigated in depth the impacts of emotions upon learning and concluded that negative deactivating language used by the teacher takes a negative toll in the classroom, and positive activating language renders a positive effect on student learning.

Kind of language students' prefer/Students' Preference of teacher' language

Teachers have a significant and lifelong impact on their students. This impact involves not only the teaching of particular academic skills, but importantly, the kind of language teachers' use. The kind of language that students prefer are praise, positive feedback, good tone, humours and confirmation which are elaborated below.

Praise: Praise is an expression of approval, commendation, admiration or praise is communication about someone's good work or qualities. Brainy (n.d.) argue, "Nothing is more effective than sincere, accurate praise, and nothing is lamer than a cookie cutter compliment" (p.19). Praise is delivered contingently upon students' performance of desirable behaviours or genuine accomplishment, provides information to students about their competence, encourages students to appreciate their accomplishments for the effort they expend and their personal gratification.

Feedback: According to the definition of Cambridge Dictionary, feedback refers to helpful information or criticism that is given to someone to say what can be done to improve a performance, product, etc. Feedback is essential in teaching for motivating students. While, Stenger (2014) explains that feedback will increase motivation, build on existing knowledge, and help students reflect on what they have learned. Ovando (1994) agrees, "Students of teachers who emphasize teaching behaviours such as praise and encouragement tend to learn more than students of teachers who emphasize criticism

and punishment” (p.105).

Tone: Tone matters especially with the teacher when communicating with students. It is one of the most important ways to influence students’ learning environment. Saint Joseph College [SJC] (2009) shares:

Tone can range from sarcastic to humorous, from serious to informal, or from questioning to persuasive or informational. However, the tone that the students prefer is a polite and good tone which will help them to be approachable at any time. Podobińska (2017) supports: The right tone of voice is as important as the words teachers use for the simple reason that it also helps effectively pass the information and teach. It’s a professional voice which often differs from ordinary speaking voice.

Confirmation: Learning will be accomplished most successfully in a classroom in which a climate of “unconditional positive regard” is established. In an educational context, this concept refers to the teacher’s complete acceptance of his/her students, a respect for their worth and value as individuals. Morgan *et al.* (2007, p.4), point out, “The confirming teacher indicates that students’ responses are appreciated, listens to students, is available outside of class”. So students like teachers using this kind of language.

Morgan *et al.* (2007, p.4), further explains: Features of the confirming teacher such as giving constructive written or oral feedback on students’ work, demonstrates that he/she knows students’ names, communicates that he/she is interested in whether students are learning, makes an effort to get to know students, provides oral or written praise or encouragement on students’ work, establishes eye contact during class lectures, communicates that he/she believes that students can do well in the class, smiles at the class.

Humours: According to Podobińska (2017) contents: Humour as a universal communication phenomenon and therefore it is necessary to incorporate into classrooms to facilitate teaching and learning process. Humour lowers students’ anxiety, engages them, and often helps show the teachers as more approachable and more human communicators.

Moreover, the skills associated with effective

classroom management are only acquired with practice, feedback, and a willingness to learn from mistakes (Podobińska 2017). However, this is often easier said than done. Certainly, a part of this problem’s solution should come from the teachers themselves as they are trained in child psychology during the training and also being matured enough.

3. Methodology

Research design

Mixed methods research involves the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, and integrating the two sets of results at some point in the research to draw inferences from the quantitative and qualitative results. This design has enabled gaining an in-depth understanding of the impacts of the teachers’ language on the students’ emotion within an inclusive setting, and thus provided insight into the experiences of the participants. During the data collection, the researcher interacts socially with participants, using semi-structured interviews to gain a thorough knowledge of the impacts of teachers’ use of words on students’ emotions.

Data collection procedures

This study used survey, observation and interview as the data collection tools. A discussion of each tool is provided in the following section.

Survey. According to O’Leary (2014) ‘Surveying’ is the process by which the researcher collects data through a questionnaire” (p.107). A ‘questionnaire’ is the instrument for collecting the primary data (Cohen, 2013). ‘Primary data’ by extension is data that would not otherwise exist if it were not for the research process and is collected through both questionnaires and interviews, (O’Leary, 2014).

The impact of teachers’ use of language on students’ emotion was measured using statements with five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5=Strongly agree). The questionnaire was administered to students in their classroom by the researcher. Students were also informed of the purpose of the research before they started responding to the questionnaire and also

to comment on the items that were difficult to understand and confusing so that researchers can rephrase the statement later.

An ‘interview’ is typically a face-to-face conversation between a researcher and a participant involving a transfer of information to the interviewer (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researcher conducted semi-structured interview. Unstructured format or semi-structured interview stimulates prompts or probes that remind the interviewer about topics to discuss. The interview participants were both teachers and students. Each interviewee took approximately 10-30 minutes. All interviews were recorded

after seeking approval from the participants.

Class observation

The study used direct observation to collect the data. The researcher observed three classrooms, which added in-depth information to the study. The researcher observed the teacher’s use of language and its impact on students’ behaviour, motivation, and cognition. Perceptions of these themes were gathered using guiding questions.

Sampling and sampling size

The researcher used the purposive random sampling strategy. The participants of the study were teachers and students. For the survey, students were the participants, and for the

Table 1. Name of the School and Respondents

Name of the school	Class	Total Population	Total Respondents
SA	IX	70	57
	X	71	20
SB	X	113	38
	XI	195	30
	XII	92	42
SC	IX	224	80
	X	132	90
Total		897	356

Table 2. Demographic Information of the Interviewees

School	Numbers of interviewees	Teachers	Students
SA	5	1	4
SB	5	2	3
SC	4	2	2
Total	14	5	9

Data analysis procedure

Table 3. Scale to Measure Mean and Standard Deviation

5 point Likert scale	Range	Level of opinion
Strongly disagree	1.00-1.80	Very low
Disagree	1.81-2.60	Low
Neutral	2.61-3.40	Moderate
Agree	3.41-4.20	High
Strongly agree	4.21-5.00	Very high

(Adapted from Vagias & Wade)

interview, both teachers and students participated. The study region chosen was Samtse dzongkhag. Although the participants were chosen at random, the researcher purposefully included students in grades ix-xii. The researcher employed voluntary sampling since some students were eager to participate in the interview. The study used the pseudonym for the names of the school such as SA, SB and SC. Researcher involved 356 students for the survey. Researchers conducted one-on-one or personal interviews. Nine students were chosen at random for qualitative data employing random sampling, regardless of their grades. The five teachers chosen for the interview were not only English teachers, but also those who taught other disciplines. The researcher was only able to observe one class each of two teacher interviewees. The sample for the survey questionnaire was determined based on Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ Where 'n' = is the sample size, 'N' is population size and 'e' is the acceptable sampling error at all levels 0.05 (p.1886). Thus, 356 respondents were selected out of 897 students. As to maintain reliability and reliability researcher had analysed the item's reliability and validity with the help of the instrument Cronbach alpha (.798) as the reliable measuring instrument does contribute to validity. Further, member checking was done right after the transcription was done to explore the credibility of the result.

The quantitative data analysis, data was entered into SPSS, version 23. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard Deviation and correlation were used to describe and summarize the demographic information in the form of table as show in table 3. Thematic analysis were used for qualitative data. Findings from the two methods were integrated.

4. Results

Teachers' use of language

Teachers' use of language relates to the language used by the teachers in the classroom which include both positive and negative language. Each of these components is discussed in the following sections.

As evident from Table 4, the overall mean ($M=3.798$) and standard deviation ($SD=.9068$) indicate a high students' opinion on teachers' language. Of the 9 items, "The language used for teaching is good" and "My teachers use clear and understandable language" with the highest score further indicates that teachers' use of positive language with the students. Similarly, in the interview most of the students shared that their teachers use polite, caring, soft, inspirational, kind language and praises. For example, S1 said, "They [teachers] talk politely, caringly, they talk softly, they ask in a very polite manner, and obviously our feelings change." Additionally, S9 expressed, "...They [teacher] speak comforting

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers' positive use of Language

No		Mean	SD	Level of Opinion
1	My teachers' way of talking doesn't affect me.	3.58	1.132	High
2	I can talk to my teacher about my problem.	3.57	1.092	High
3	I like talking to my teacher.	3.94	.886	High
4	I understand my teachers' instructions well.	3.90	.754	High
5	The language used for teaching is good.	4.234	.7498	Very High
6	My teachers smile at me.	3.67	.873	High
7	My teachers use clear and understandable language.	4.08	.822	High
8	My teachers are friendly to me.	3.58	.924	High
9	My teachers are aware of different learners' emotions.	3.64	.929	High
	Overall	3.798	.9068	High

language like praising words, encouraging words.” Similarly, all the teachers expressed that they use positive language with their students. For example, T1 said, “I have use encouraging words that will make the children happy.”

As shown in Table 5, the overall mean (2.8122) and standard deviation (.82373) indicate moderate level of opinion. This shows that participants have somewhat agreed that teachers use negative language. In the interview, some of the students have indicated that their teachers use harsh words. For example, S1 said, “I sometimes feel sad with the harsh words.” Similarly, S4 expressed, “Some teachers speak in a polite way, others harsh way but I prefer polite way.” In a similar manner, T5 articulated, “When we use negative words, they try to skip participating in the assigned tasks.”

Positive affectivity

Positive affectivity in the context of this study refers to the positive impact of teachers’ use of language on students’ behaviour, motivation and intellect. During the observation also, it was found that the teachers used requests, suggestions, positive warnings and praises. The analysis of the data showed that when teachers use polite language, it entails a positive impact on students’ emotion. This impact pertains to their behaviour, motivation and cognition. These different spheres of impact are discussed in the following sections.

Behaviour

As shown in Table 6, the mean and standard deviation of $M=4.44$ and $SD=.808$ indicate a very high level of opinion. This shows that participants have highly agreed that teachers’ positive use of language has an impact on their behaviour, specifically it encourages them to be good students. The interview data revealed that the majority of the teachers have reported that their positive use of language has a positive impact on students’ behaviour. For instance, line T4 shared “...Because of my language use it brings an immediate change in them, they become very active, they engage well.” Similarly, some of the students also highlighted that when teachers use positive language in the classroom, it promotes a more conducive environment. As a result, they feel at ease and enjoy coming to class, which minimizes absenteeism. Students also claimed that the teacher’s calm and pleasant language rejuvenated them and relieved tension, resulting in a shift in their attitude toward hard work.

Teachers also reported that a means of utilizing positive disciplining techniques is for them to use positive phrases to suppress negative attitudes when students exhibit a bad attitude in the middle of a lesson. The statement by S7 supports this point: “The use of positive language will make the class room silent because students will concentrate”.

Motivation

Table 7 provides the mean and standard deviation of impact of teachers’ use of language

Table 5. The Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers’ negative use of Language

No.	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of opinion
1	Sarcastic words are frequently used in the classroom.	2.92	1.099	Moderate
2	My teachers get angry at me.	2.67	1.032	Moderate
3	My teachers raise their voices or shout at me.	2.64	1.084	Moderate
4	The way my teachers’ speak really affects my emotions.	3.01	1.347	Moderate
Overall		2.8122	.82373	Moderate

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation of Impact of Teachers’ use of Language on Students’ behaviour

No.	Item	Mean	SD	Level of Opinion
1	Positive language of the teacher encourages me to be a good student.	4.44	.808	Very High

on students' motivation.

As evident in Table 7, the overall mean and standard deviation of $M=4.28$ and $SD=.82366$ indicate a very high level of opinion. This shows that participants have highly agreed that the teacher's language impacts their motivation. This finding is corroborated by the finding from the interview. Most students have articulated that their teachers' language impacts their motivation. This notion is represented in the quote by S5 "The teacher's encouraging language and motivational phrases have aided us in becoming emotionally strong and expressive, particularly the poor achievers, in boosting our self-esteem, being a good human being, responsible, and genuine." Similarly, most teachers also opined that their language impacts students' motivation. For example T3 said, "Some of the motivational words are: I say you just try to live up to your expectations, good enough, well tried, excellent, outstanding."

Cognition

The impact of teachers' language on students' cognition is provided.

The overall mean and standard deviation of $M=4.37$ and $SD=.7715$ shows a very high level of opinion which depicts that participants have highly agreed that their teachers' language impacts their cognition. Similarly, in the interview, most teachers have expressed that when they use encouraging words, students are motivated

to work hard which leads to their intellectual enhancement. . For instance, T5 pronounced: I have been teaching the same class for the last three years looking at their performance. When we use encouraging words their performance and participation do increase...

Majority of students support this opinion. They indicated the positive impacts of teachers' use of language on their cognition. This view is represented in the quote by S9: We feel more comfortable talking to the teacher and are happier as a result of the teachers' use of positive language of respect and friendliness. It motivates us to maintain positive ties with their teachers and demonstrate enthusiasm for the studies or learning excitement.

A moderate positive correlation was found between positive language ($r=.510$; $p=.001$) and positive impact ($r=.510$; $p=.001$). This indicates that positive use of language by the teachers has a positive impact on students' emotions. The interview data too revealed that positive language has positive impacts on students' emotion. For instance, T1 said, "... Good words and encouraging make the children feel glad." Similar opinion was shared by T2 who said, "I often use positive words after every task in the class, after completion of those tasks we [teachers] make sure that they are given positive words to encourage them so that they participate in the following activity". Correspondingly, some of the students added that the positive language

Table 7. Mean and Standard Deviation of Impact of Teachers' use of Language on Students' motivation

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Level of Opinion
1	I value my teachers' words.	4.44	.808	Very High
2	I feel motivated when my teachers use encouraging words.	4.36	.805	Very High
3	My teachers' language change my mind	4.04	.858	High
	Overall	4.28	.82366	Very High

Table 8. Positive Language Impact of Teachers' use of Language on Students' cognition

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Level of Opinion
1	I feel motivated to do my best in school.	4.26	.750	Very High
2	My teachers encourage me to work hard.	4.49	.793	Very High
	Overall	4.37	.7715	Very High

Table 9. Correlation between Positive Use of Language and Positive Impact

		Positive language	Positive impact
Positive language	Pearson Correlation	1	.510**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	356	356
Positive impact	Pearson Correlation	.510**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	356	356
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed).			

Table 10. Negative Impact of Teachers' negative use of the Language on Students' emotion

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Level of Opinion
1	I feel nervous when I talk to my teacher.	3.48	1.149	High
2	I get totally hurt when my teachers talk in a harsh way.	3.65	1.264	High
3	When the teachers shout at me I feel uncomfortable.	3.84	1.155	High
4	Negative language used by the teacher makes me feel bad.	3.84	1.341	High
Overall		3.621	1.2272	High

used by the teachers motivates them to come to school and study whatever they [teachers] have taught.

Negative affectivity

Negative affectivity is conceptualised as the negative impact of teachers' use of language on students' emotion.

As illustrated in Table 10, the overall mean rating for the items on the negative impact of teachers' use of negative language is 3.621 and the standard deviation is 1.2272 which corresponds to a high level of opinion. This indicates that participants' agreement that teachers' negative use of language has negative impact on their emotion. The qualitative data analysis showed that most teachers have identified that their negative use of language has negative impacts on their students' emotion. It makes them feel worthless and unimportant. For example, T1 stated: "Yes, I guess the language of the teachers can impact students' emotions because when teachers talk harshly with the students they feel sad, they don't get interested in studies. They [students] start to hate his subject and all then they don't score well also. Their studies are

affected."

Moreover, a few students echoed the voice of the teachers. For example, S1 expressed, "I feel humiliated in front of others and sometimes in frustration, I get angry." Similarly, students have shared that when their teachers use negative language, they get angry (S2), feel disheartened (S4, S5, S6), feel sad (S8) and get hurt (S7).

Behaviour.

The mean and standard deviation for the item "When the teachers shout at me, I feel uncomfortable" of M=3.84 and SD=1.155 correspond to a high level of opinion. This indicates that participants have agreed that teachers' negative use of language negatively impacts their behaviour. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that almost all of the students voiced out that when their teachers use harsh language, they develop bad feelings and behaviours. For example, S9 opined, "I really feel bad and I don't like to come in front of that teacher because I feel ashamed of coming in front of that teacher." Further, the students also expressed that teachers' negative use of language causes sadness and that they are reluctant to

come to school. Teachers also expressed that when they use negative language, it has negative impact on students' behaviour.

Cognition.

The negative words used by teachers have a direct impact on the intellectual or cognitive growth of students, according to the viewpoints of teachers and students. This view is demonstrated by S8: "Students feel sad, they don't get interested in studying. We start to hate his subject and then they don't score well also. Our studies will be affected". Similarly teachers have also identified the negative impacts of language on students' cognition. For instance, T4 said:

This negative use of language shouldn't be happening in the beautiful process of teaching learning because teaching learning involves growth because growth intellectual growth and moral growth too. Especially with young people we should be mindful. We should restrict ourselves and minimize our negative use of language as per my experience..

The quote by T1 demonstrates this view, "Negative way of speaking makes students become angry, sad. They [students] do not feel interested in studies. They [students] have disregard for the teacher." "Overall, the findings indicate that teachers' negative use of language has a negative impact on students' emotion.

A moderate negative correlation was found between the themes negative language ($r=.403$; $p=.001$) and negative impacts ($r=.403$; $p=.001$). This indicates that negative use of language by the teachers has a negative impact on students' emotions. The interview data too suggested

that. Almost all the teachers expressed the same concern from their personal experiences. For instance, T1 said, "So it does it in a negative way that students become angry, sad. They [students] do not feel interested in studies. They have disregard for the teacher." Additionally, T2 uttered:

The negative language the words that we use really affects because when we were students we were given lots of words. We were described with so many nicknames so I still remember the names given to us by our teachers...

Some of the students were of the similar opinion. For example S6 expressed "I feel that the language of a teacher can impact students' emotion because when teachers start harsh words, it will make us feel upset and disappointed." S7 also shared "Speaking in harsh way we don't feel like studying."

Language preference

The analysis of the qualitative data showed that students have identified a repertoire of language that they prefer. They shared that they like when their teachers use polite, caring and soft language. For instance, S5 said, "It's not only my opinion but it's others opinion too. Most of the students, even me, prefer politeness." In addition, S8 expressed, "I like the polite way of speaking. When they speak politely, we feel like studying." Students justified by stating that when teachers use polite language, they feel motivated. The student participants further pointed out by the students that they prefer teachers who speak realistic and truthful words. This view is demonstrated in the following quote by S5:

Table 11. Correlation between Negative Use of Language and Negative Impact

		Negative language	Negative impact
Negative language	Pearson Correlation	1	.403**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	356	356
Negative impact	Pearson Correlation	.403**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	356	356
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

I had one ex- teacher, ex- Dzongkha teacher when I was studying in Class X. He used to speak Zheysa (honorific terms) even to the students. Even when he is scolding in a polite way, so we don't feel like he is scolding us, we just feel he is just saying something good to us and when we go deep into the meaning he is just saying harsh words but in the polite way. So, we didn't feel emotional or angry.

This view is echoed by the teachers who expressed, "Teachers who tend to use language in a very assertive tone, and assertiveness helps to see themselves in a better way." Teachers articulated that when they use praises it motivates the students. Overall, students indicated that they prefer positive use of language by the teachers.

5. Discussion

Use of language

One of the findings of the study is that teachers use both positive and negative language.

Teachers' positive use of language

The quantitative data analysis showed the overall mean ($M=3.79$) and standard deviation ($SD=.906$) which indicates that teachers use positive language. The qualitative finding showed that most of the students shared that teachers use polite, caring, soft, inspirational, kind and praises. The teachers also said that they are careful in using the language. Additionally, the observation data also showed that teachers used requests, suggestions, praises and feedback in the classroom. This finding is consistent with literature that shows that teachers use positive language (Muir & Rarr, 2012). Additionally, literature stated that teacher's use positive language at school to help children become more confident and independent (Brogle et al., 2013). The finding indicates that teachers use positive language with the students. Use of positive language in the class is imperative as it would entail many positive effects on the students.

Teachers' negative use of language

The overall Mean (2.812) and Standard Deviation (.823) indicate moderate level of opinion. This shows that participants have somewhat agreed that teachers use negative language. In the interview, some of the students

indicated that their teachers use harsh words. This could be because teachers might be reluctant to share since they do not want to expose themselves and students may be thinking of the repercussions for sharing their teachers' negative use of language in the classroom.

Positive affectivity

The finding of the study reveals that the positive use of language by the teachers have positive impact on the students specifically on their behaviour, motivation and cognition. The finding for each of these aspects are discussed in the following sections;

Behaviour.

Teachers that employ positive language have a favourable impact on their students' behaviour. The item "Positive language of the teacher inspires me to be a good student" scored very high ($M = 4.44$, $SD=.808$) in the positive affectivity on behaviour findings. The analysis of the interview data revealed that the majority of the teachers elucidated that their positive use of language has a positive impact on the students' behaviour. Teachers stated that their good and encouraging words made the students happy and encouraged which resulted in their engagement in the activity. This finding is in line with the study by Bacal (n.d.) that showed that the use of positive language tends to reduce conflict, improve communication, reduce defensiveness in others and helps show the speaker as convincing and decent. Thus, the finding shows that the teachers' positive use of language positively impacts students' behaviour.

Motivation.

The finding of the study suggests that teachers' positive use of language positively impacts students' motivation. The quantitative finding on the positive use of language and impact on students' motivation showed an overall $M=4.28$ and $SD=.823$, which indicate a very high level of opinion. This shows that participants have highly agreed that the teacher's language impacts their motivation. This finding is corroborated with the interview. Most teachers also opined that their language impacts students' motivation. This result is consistent with those of other studies (Moorman & Weber, 1989; Pranowo,

2009). Moreover, Podobińska (2017) stated the teacher's positive language makes children feel safe and motivated. This finding suggests that teachers' positive language can impact students' motivation. Motivation is essential in everything that the students do.

Cognition.

The results of the present study indicates that teachers' positive use of language positively impacts students' cognition. The overall mean and standard deviation of ($M=4.37$, $SD=.771$) exhibited a very high degree of opinion, indicating that participants strongly agree that their teachers' language influences their cognition. Similarly, in the qualitative data, most teachers have expressed that when they use encouraging words, students are motivated to work hard which leads to their intellectual enhancement. This opinion has been concurred and supported by the majority of the students who have indicated positive impacts of teachers' use of language on their cognition. Consistent with this finding, Pajares (1992) noted that teachers' word choices and discourse structuring play a significant effect in developing students' self-concept and academic achievement. Similarly, Denton (2007) pointed out that words, tone, pacing, and listening are important tools that can help children develop self-control, sense of belonging, and academic and social abilities. Hence, the current finding highlights the correlation between teachers' use of language and students' cognition leading to their academic achievement.

Negative affectivity

The study indicates that teachers' negative use of language has negative impacts on the students' emotion and behaviour. These findings are elucidated in the following sections.

Emotion.

The finding of the study revealed that negative use of language by the teachers have negative impact on students' emotion. The quantitative finding on the negative impact on students' emotion owing to the use of negative language by the students showed a Mean of is 3.621 and the Standard Deviation of 1.2272 which corresponds to a high level of opinion. This indicates that participants have agreed that teachers' negative

use of language has a negative impact on students' emotion. The qualitative data analysis showed that most teachers have identified that their negative use of language has a negative impact on their students' emotion; it makes them feel worthless and unimportant.

Moreover, a few students echoed the voice of the teachers. This result is in agreement with Chen (2016 as cited in Pekrun et al. (2002) where students experienced a list of seven distinct emotions as a result of the teacher's bad language: anger, anxiety, embarrassment, guilt, boredom, sadness, and fear. Similarly, studies have also shown the negative impact of negative teachers' language on students' emotion (Bacal, n.d; Rinchen, 2014). The finding implies the correlation between teachers' negative use of language and negative impacts on students' emotion. It is, therefore, important for teachers to refrain from using negative language as the emotional dent caused by it may not be repairable.

Behaviour.

The finding suggests that negative use of language by the teachers has a negative impacts on students' behaviour. This finding is confirmed by the overall ($M=3.621$, $SD=1.227$), as well as the $M=3.84$ and $SD=1.155$ for the item "When the teachers shout at me, I feel uncomfortable," which indicates a high degree of opinion. This indicates that participants have agreed that teachers' negative use of language negatively impacts their behaviour. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that almost all of the students have voiced out that when their teachers use harsh language, they develop bad feelings and behaviours. S9 pronounced, "I really feel bad madam and I don't like to come in front of that teacher because I feel ashamed of coming in front of that teacher." Teachers also expressed that when they use negative language, it has a negative impact on students' behaviour. Corroborating the finding, Podobińska (2017) stated that when teachers yell it can provoke harmful emotions of guilt, anguish, shame, and inferiority in students.

Similarly, Pekrun., et al(2002) agreed that negative deactivating language used by the teacher takes a negative toll in the classroom.

Additionally, name –calling [bad names] can stir negative feelings that lead to undesirable consequences such as low self-esteem, depression, loss of friends, loss of confidence, withdrawal, aggression, revenge, poor grade, and leaving school incomplete, if it continues over a period of time (Fredrickson, 2013). The finding suggests that negative use of language by the teachers impacts students' behaviour. If this process persists, it might entail detrimental impact on the other domains of students' emotion and behaviour.

Kind of language students prefer

The finding of the study reveals that students prefer polite, caring, soft and humorous language. Majority of the students shared that they like when their teachers use polite, caring, humorous and soft language. The students justified by stating that when teachers use polite language, they feel motivated. This has relevance to Saint Joseph College, (2009) study which found that tone can range from caustic to light-hearted, from serious to casual, and from inquisitive to persuading or informative. However, the students prefer a friendly and pleasant tone that allows them to be approachable at any moment. Teachers articulated that when they use praises it motivates the students. The use of praise is an expression of approval, commendation, admiration or praise is communication about someone's good work or qualities coheres with the findings of Brainy (n.d.) who found that nothing works better than genuine, correct praise, and nothing works worse than a generic compliment.

Humour has the ability to heighten attention and interest than non- humour. Students also stated that their teachers employ humour in class and that one of them has become their role model. Furthermore, according to Podobiska (2017), good humour lifts students up and helps them feel relaxed and comfortable, whereas sarcasm may merely mock and dismiss them. Hence, they must be cautious with the type of words/language used in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

The study's finding demonstrated that teachers' positive language use has positive impacts on the students. This finding is crucial since it

provides insights into the effect of teachers' use of language and its consequences on the students. Further, the finding signifies that teachers have to be mindful of the language and use positive language.

The study also discovered that positive language use has a positive impact on students' behaviour. Students were motivated to attend the classes. This study shows that good, pleasant and polite words can boost students' spirits, reduce absenteeism, stimulate them to work hard, and keep them focused on their academics. As a result teachers must always utilize and capitalise on the power of positive words to garner positive behaviour from the students. Thus, teachers must use positive words to fuel students' motivation which could have a cascading effect on other domains of students' life and learning today and in future.

Other the other hand, the study suggested that teachers' negative use of language had negative impact on students' emotions. Students experience sadness, disappointment, and feeling of insignificance when they are showered with negative language by the teachers. Teachers must, therefore, be cautious with the language used in the classroom.

Given the numerous negative impacts of teachers' negative use of language, they must be cautious with the words as they have the power to damage the students. So, use of language by the teachers can either develop or destroy different aspects of students' emotion and psychology, they must be mindful in the use of language because the damage done during the school days cannot be remediated; its footprints can be seen and felt throughout the students' lives.

The study also recommended for future researchers to employ a sequential explanatory mixed methods in which the qualitative data would help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results. Additionally, since the study area and sample size are small, the findings cannot be used for generalization. Moreover, relevant stakeholders must create awareness for the teachers on the importance and the necessity for using positive language.

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Debate Technique and Teacher Encouragement as Pedagogical Strategies to Enhance Speaking Confidence in Vietnamese College English as a Foreign Language Learners

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates how structured debate and teacher encouragement contribute to speaking confidence among Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) college learners. Conducted over 15 weeks with 80 students in two intact classes at a public college in Southern Vietnam, the study adopted a mixed-methods design combining speaking tests, questionnaires, and reflection journals. Quantitative analyses included paired-samples t-tests and regression modeling, while qualitative reflections provided complementary insights. Findings showed a substantial increase in speaking confidence from pre- to post-test (Cohen's $d = 1.27$). Regression analysis indicated that debate ($B = 0.429$, $\beta = 0.496$, $p < 0.001$) had the strongest association with students' post-test confidence, followed by teacher encouragement ($B = 0.194$, $\beta = 0.211$, $p = 0.037$). Debate was reported to help students construct arguments and manage peer interaction under pressure, while encouragement reduced fear of reprimand and fostered a safer classroom environment. Interactive tasks and individualized adjustments were positively perceived but not significantly correlated with confidence. These results highlight the value of participatory, constructivist strategies in fostering learner confidence. Limitations include the one-group pre-/post-test design, single-site sample, and the dual role of the researcher as instructor and assessor, although the post-test was rated independently with a high interrater reliability ($ICC = 0.97$). Future studies should employ multi-site, controlled designs with external or blinded raters and develop multi-item validated measures of encouragement and debate participation.*

KEYWORDS: EFL, speaking confidence, debate, college students, teacher encouragement, pedagogical strategies.

→ Received 03/8/2024 → Revised manuscript received 25/6/2025 → Published 19/9/2025.

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, English is one of the seven foreign languages taught in educational institutions and is the most commonly chosen foreign language by students. Students are required to study English continuously from primary to tertiary education, and it is also a compulsory component of the national high school graduation examination. As Vietnam increasingly integrates into the global community, English has become an essential tool that can significantly support learners' future careers if mastered effectively. Among the four language skills, speaking deserves particular attention, as it is widely regarded as the most salient marker of language ability in real-life

communication (Ur, 1996).

Despite more than a decade of instruction, many Vietnamese students still lack confidence and competence in speaking. Prior research attributes this gap to exam-oriented curricula that prioritize grammar and reading over communicative skills, leaving learners with limited opportunities for authentic practice (Ho & Truong, 2022). Speaking activities in Vietnamese classrooms often consist of scripted dialogues or mechanical drills, restricting spontaneous interaction (Bui & Newton, 2021). As a result, learners frequently report difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation; more critically, they struggle with anxiety, fear

of mistakes, and low speaking confidence. Recognizing these challenges, national initiatives have sought to improve English proficiency across the education system. However, evaluations indicate that outcomes in speaking and writing remain below expectations (Pham & Bui, 2019; Tran & Marginson, 2018). This highlights the need for more effective classroom-level interventions that foster both linguistic competence and psychological readiness to communicate.

Although numerous studies have sought to enhance the speaking confidence of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Vietnam, most have focused primarily on university students, leaving college learners relatively underexplored. This group often exhibits lower self-confidence and more passive participation in English-speaking activities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. While general classroom strategies have been examined, little research has systematically explored the combined potential of debate techniques and teacher encouragement in fostering speaking confidence. Building on my earlier work that investigated debate as a standalone intervention (Dao, 2024), the present study extends this line of research by examining how structured debate activities, supported by teacher encouragement, can improve college learners' confidence in speaking English. In doing so, it contributes theoretically by clarifying the interplay between competence and confidence in speaking (Pham *et al.*, 2021) and practically by aligning with recent calls for learner-centered approaches in EFL pedagogy (Ghafar, 2023).

2. Literature review

2.1. The Importance of Speaking Skill in Language Learning

Speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most important skills for second language acquisition. The fact that humans learn to speak before learning to read and write emphasizes the centrality of speaking among the four language skills. Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, speaking requires learners to actively produce language, often under time

pressure, making it both cognitively and socially demanding (Zhang, 2021). Similarly, speaking is often viewed as the most salient marker of language ability, since people who know a language are usually referred to as *speakers* of that language (Fan & Yan, 2020).

Beyond its linguistic value, speaking carries significant personal and professional benefits. Effective oral communication empowers learners to express ideas, engage in social interactions, and access wider employment opportunities (Fan & Yan, 2020). In the Vietnamese context of rapid globalization, English speaking competence enables participation in international exchanges and global labor markets. Yet, despite years of study, Vietnamese students often underperform in speaking due to test-driven curricula that prioritize grammar and reading comprehension (Ho & Truong, 2022).

Research highlights that Vietnamese EFL classes frequently lack communicative tasks. Prior studies show that students are often engaged in controlled practice such as repetition, reading aloud, or memorized dialogues. While these activities may support accuracy, they offer limited opportunities for spontaneous interaction; consequently, speaking continues to lag behind other skills despite years of English instruction (Bui & Newton, 2021; Ho-Minh & Suppasetserree, 2025; Tran & Marginson, 2018).

2.2. Self-confidence as a Factor Influencing Speaking Performance

Self-confidence, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to overcome obstacles, make sound decisions, and achieve goals, is closely linked to Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy and plays a pivotal role in second language acquisition. Learners with strong self-efficacy are more willing to engage in speaking tasks, thereby enhancing their oral proficiency. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, higher confidence reduces affective barriers, allowing learners to receive and process comprehensible input more effectively. Similarly, Horwitz, *et al.*, (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, highlighting how fear of negative

evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety can undermine learners' willingness to communicate and their overall confidence.

In language learning, self-confidence plays a crucial role in enabling learners to articulate and express their ideas effectively through spoken communication. Learners with higher confidence are more willing to take risks, initiate interactions, and sustain conversations in English (MacIntyre, *et al.*, 1998). Conversely, low confidence often leads to communication apprehension, hesitation, and avoidance of speaking opportunities. Confidence is therefore as important as competence in speaking and listening (Pham *et al.*, 2021), and recent empirical findings confirm a strong correlation between self-confidence and success in English language learning, particularly in speaking and overall academic performance (Chen & Zhang, 2022; Ghafar, 2023).

In the Vietnamese EFL context, students frequently experience fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, and anxiety when speaking in front of peers, which limits participation and oral development (Le & Pham, 2023). Strengthening learners' self-confidence is therefore crucial, and Bandura (1997) suggests that teachers' encouragement, constructive feedback, and opportunities for mastery experiences or observational learning can significantly enhance students' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate.

2.3. Debate technique as a pedagogical tool

Debate-based activities have been shown to enhance both linguistic and affective outcomes in EFL contexts. By requiring learners to express opinions, defend positions, and respond spontaneously, debate develops fluency, argumentation, and critical thinking (Lumbangaol & Mazali, 2020). Unlike controlled speaking tasks, debates encourage learners to move beyond memorized phrases, fostering deeper processing of language and ideas. The approach is grounded in constructivist learning theories, which emphasize active knowledge construction through interaction (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, as Bandura (1997) notes, successful

performance in challenging tasks provides mastery experiences that strengthen self-efficacy. Within Krashen's (1982) framework, debates can reduce the affective filter by reframing speaking as purposeful communication rather than error-prone performance. Recent studies show that debate assists learners in integrating vocabulary and grammar into meaningful use (El Majidi *et al.*, 2021), promotes risk-taking, and reduces fear of mistakes (Chen & Zhang, 2022). Beyond linguistic benefits, debates also enhance transferable skills such as persuasion and teamwork, further contributing to learners' confidence (Linh, 2024). Recent studies among Asian EFL learners suggest that debate can reduce speaking-related anxiety while simultaneously fostering oral proficiency and critical thinking (Ali, 2021; El Majidi *et al.*, 2021; Tarigan & Lubis, 2024).

Despite this evidence, debate remains underused in Vietnamese EFL classrooms, where speaking practice is often limited to scripted dialogues and teacher-led question-answer sessions (Ly, 2020; Tran & Trung, 2022). When debates are attempted, they tend to be informal or unstructured, diminishing their pedagogical effectiveness. Thus, there is limited empirical evidence on the systematic use of debate to enhance speaking confidence in Vietnam, especially among college learners.

In a previous study, Dao (2024) demonstrated that structured debate alone significantly improved the speaking confidence of Vietnamese college learners, confirming its value as a targeted intervention. However, that study did not consider affective supports, which the broader literature suggests are equally important in reducing fear of mistakes and fostering self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Chen & Zhang, 2022). This gap points to the need to examine how debate may be strengthened when paired with teacher encouragement as a form of socio-affective support, an area that remains underexplored in the Vietnamese college context.

2.4. Teacher Encouragement in Enhancing Speaking Confidence

Teacher encouragement has long been recognized as a key affective factor in

lowering anxiety and facilitating risk-taking in communication (Bandura, 1997; Krashen, 1982; Chen & Zhang, 2022). In the literature, encouragement is often described broadly, encompassing praise, supportive teacher comments, and in some studies even corrective feedback. In the present study, however, encouragement is conceptualized more narrowly as praise and supportive teacher comments, while constructive feedback—especially gentle pronunciation correction—is treated as individualized adjustment, and interactive activities (e.g., games and group discussions) are considered separately as activity-based supports for motivation.

In the process of learning a foreign language, especially speaking skills, teachers not only act as knowledge transmitters but also serve as important sources of motivation. According to Dörnyei (2001), learners' motivation is strongly influenced by teachers' attitudes, teaching styles, and interpersonal support. Positive teacher behaviors such as praise, empathetic responses, and supportive comments can significantly enhance students' confidence and willingness to engage (Sun, 2021). More recent studies confirm that teacher encouragement, caring behavior, and praise improve learners' engagement and self-confidence in EFL contexts (Sun, 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2023), while supportive teacher–student relationships serve as external sources of motivational change, fostering more dynamic and participatory learning environments (Ma *et al.*, 2017; Chen & Zhang, 2022).

In Vietnam, however, classroom practices often emphasize error correction and strict evaluation. Many students report anxiety about being reprimanded or criticized, which discourages them from speaking (Ho & Truong, 2022). This teacher-centered orientation limits opportunities for encouragement and contributes to learners' low confidence. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of encouragement, little empirical research has systematically examined how it may work in combination with structured debate to foster speaking confidence in Vietnamese college learners. This gap provides the rationale for the present study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate how debate techniques and teacher encouragement foster speaking confidence in Vietnamese EFL learners. While the dataset was originally collected during a semester-long intervention, the present analysis extends prior work by introducing teacher encouragement as an additional independent variable and by applying both statistical and thematic analyses to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

The study was conducted over a period of 15 weeks, amounting to 33.75 instructional hours, with the participation of 80 students from two intact English classes at a public technical college in Southern Vietnam. Out of four first-year classes, these two were randomly assigned to the researcher by the academic department for teaching allocation. The researcher, who also served as the instructor for these two classes, was therefore well acquainted with the learners' English proficiency levels and their attitudes toward language learning. No control group was included because the remaining classes were taught by other instructors, which would have made instructional comparisons inconsistent. Including them as controls would likely have introduced confounds rather than reduced bias. The present design therefore emphasizes ecological validity by investigating the intervention under authentic classroom conditions. Nevertheless, the two study classes were comparable in size, curriculum, and student background to the other first-year classes. All participants were non-English majors with several years of prior English instruction but limited oral proficiency. While this arrangement allowed close observation and consistent implementation of the intervention, the lack of a control group necessarily limits causal inference.

During the first three weeks, students engaged in informal speaking tasks to reduce initial anxiety. To trace students' development across the intervention, debate sessions were structured at three stages: the pre-speaking test (week 4), a mid-stage session (week 8), and a later session

(week 12). Before the final post-test (week 15), students were provided with a topic for each debate stage and required to prepare ideas at home. In class, students were assigned to random groups and required to defend their positions.

Each stage had a distinct pedagogical focus. The first session mainly encouraged students to overcome hesitation and raise their voices. The second session emphasized expressing ideas in their own words with reduced dependence on prepared notes. By the third session, the focus shifted to refining pronunciation, fluency, and coherence through the use of linking words.

Performance in each debate was categorized into four achievement levels (Good, Average, Pass, Fail) based on observable behaviors. Students rated as *Good* were able to speak loudly and clearly, generate and defend ideas, and interact with peers with limited reliance on notes, eventually demonstrating fluency, coherence, and accurate pronunciation. *Average* students could contribute more than one opinion and defend their stance, but their delivery was often constrained and heavily dependent on prepared notes. *Pass* students managed to express isolated ideas, usually with long pauses and strong reliance on notes, producing only short or disconnected contributions. *Fail* students struggled to produce complete ideas, often speaking too softly or uttering only single words, and remained almost entirely reliant on notes across sessions. This progressive design allowed the debate activities not only to function as communicative practice but also to serve as a scaffolded intervention, with increasing expectations for autonomy, fluency, and confidence at each stage.

Teacher encouragement was systematically integrated throughout the course. This included verbal praise, motivational statements, and supportive comments before and after speaking activities. Individualized adjustment, by contrast, consisted of gentle pronunciation correction and personalized feedback. Students' perceptions of both were later captured through surveys and reflection interviews, enabling their quantification alongside debate participation.

For the post-test, each student chose a previously covered topic and delivered a

presentation within a time limit. They were asked to focus on a more specific issue due to time constraints. Students were assessed according to five speaking dimensions based on the IELTS speaking band descriptors, with some adjustments to accommodate college students' proficiency levels. As the purpose of this study was to enhance speaking confidence, the researcher added *stage control* as the fifth dimension to capture confidence-related behaviors (e.g., body language, audibility, and audience engagement). The rubric therefore included fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range, pronunciation, and stage control, each rated on the same four-band scale (see Table 1, adapted from Dao, 2024). Although grammar did not emerge as a salient source of anxiety in the pre-course scale, it remained an essential dimension of oral proficiency assessment.

To ensure content validity, the rubric was reviewed by two senior EFL lecturers. Behavioral indicators were refined to clarify note reliance, voice projection, and audience engagement for each band.

Formative debate-session performances were rated by the researcher also the instructor of these classes solely for pedagogical feedback and descriptive tracking; these scores were not used in statistical analyses. In contrast, the final speaking test (week 15), which served as the primary summative outcome, was independently scored by another instructor using the standardized rubric (Table 1).

3.2. Research Instrument

Data were collected through multiple sources to ensure triangulation:

- Pre- and post-speaking tests were video-recorded. The pre-test was scored by the instructor-researcher to establish a baseline, while the final post-test (the main outcome) was rated by an independent instructor using the standardized rubric. To assess reliability, 20 randomly selected videos (25% of the sample) were double-rated by the independent rater and the instructor also the researcher after a calibration session, yielding excellent agreement (ICC = 0.97, 95% CI [0.93, 0.99], $p < 0.001$;

Table 1. Post-Speaking Test: Categories and Description (Adapted from Dao, (2024))

Result	Fluency & Coherence	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range	Pronunciation	Stage Control
Good (8–10)	Willing to speak at length; minor repetition, self-correction, or hesitation; ideas well-organized and coherent.	Sufficient vocabulary to express and clarify ideas on familiar topics.	Produces basic and complex sentences with reasonable accuracy	Generally clear and intelligible; only occasional mispronunciation	Confident presentation; uses body language, voice projection, and linking words to engage audience, speaks mostly without notes, only using them for brief prompts.
Average (6.1–7.9)	Maintains flow of speech but relies on some repetition or self-correction; ideas mostly organized but may lack smooth transitions.	Vocabulary range adequate for topic but limited flexibility; some word-finding pauses.	Produces mostly simple but grammatically correct sentences; occasionally attempts complex structures, though these often contain errors. Demonstrates some ability to self-correct	Occasional mispronunciations of complex words or clusters, but overall intelligible.	Attempts audience connection; occasional misused linking words; audible voice, occasionally checks notes but able to speak independently for several sentences.
Pass (5–6)	Speaks with long pauses; limited ability to link simple sentences	Vocabulary very limited; struggles to find words and repeat basic terms	Relies heavily on simple sentences with frequent grammar errors; complex structures rarely attempted and mostly incorrect. Limited or no self-correction	Frequent mispronunciations, but some words are still understandable.	Minimal body language; weak audience connection; low but audible voice, heavily dependent on notes and struggles to sustain speech without reading.
Fail (<5)	Unable to present effectively	Only isolated words or memorized phrases	Cannot consistently produce accurate basic sentences; grammar errors severely limit intelligibility.	Frequent and severe mispronunciations difficult to understand	Shows no body language or eye contact; voice too soft to be heard clearly; relies entirely on notes or reads verbatim, unable to sustain speech.

Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.986$), confirming consistent use of the rubric.

- Interviews and reflections: Ten students representing different confidence levels were interviewed pre- and post-intervention. Written reflections were collected throughout.

- Questionnaires: Administered before and after the course to measure students' anxiety sources and perceived confidence.

- The pre-course questionnaire was developed based on interviews with 10 randomly selected students (Table 2). These insights were consistent with existing validated scales of speaking anxiety in Vietnam (Ho & Truong, 2022) and were used to generate an initial pool of eight items. Reliability analysis indicated that the items on remembering grammar tenses and feeling calm when being called by the teacher displayed weak and negative item-total correlations, respectively, thereby reducing the internal consistency of the scale. Excluding these items improved the internal consistency of the scale to an acceptable level, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.752$. Accordingly, the final validated scale consisted of six items representing students' speaking anxiety

- The post-course questionnaire was developed by combining qualitative insights with theoretical grounding. Follow-up interviews with the same ten students who had been interviewed at the pre-course stage generated preliminary themes (Table 6), which were then refined through consultation with a peer instructor. This process identified four key factors influencing learners' speaking confidence that were not arbitrarily chosen but reflected both students' voices and constructs well-established in the literature: (1) **Teacher encouragement** captured praise and supportive comments, identified as affective scaffolding that may reduce anxiety and foster willingness to communicate (Bandura, 1997; Sun, 2021; Chen & Zhang, 2022). (2) **Individualized adjustment** referred to personalized feedback, particularly gentle pronunciation correction, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolding framework (Le & Pham, 2023). (3) **Debate** represented structured speaking practice with authentic communicative stakes, recognized as a mastery experience that

promotes oral proficiency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; El Majidi *et al.*, 2021; Linh, 2024). (4) **Interactive tasks** included games and group discussions that increase engagement and reduce classroom anxiety (Wang & Jiang, 2023; Ghafar, 2023). Each factor was operationalized as a single Likert-type item rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Table 7). Based on prior classroom-based studies (Sun, 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2023), single-item measures were adopted to minimize response burden. While these items were not validated as a multi-item psychometric scale, their construct validity was established through triangulation with student interviews and alignment with established constructs in the literature. Given the single-item format and modest sample size ($N = 80$), factor analysis was not applicable.

- Observation of debate sessions: Class performance records were analyzed to track progress over time.

This classroom-based study was embedded in a credit-bearing course and followed routine teaching and assessment procedures. A detailed teaching plan, including staged debates and a video-recorded final speaking task, was reviewed and endorsed by the department before the semester began. At the start of the course, students were briefed on the teaching approach, the use of in-class recordings for feedback and moderation, and the possibility that de-identified course data would be analyzed for scholarly reporting; students agreed to proceed. Debate sessions and the final speaking test were recorded to enable instructor feedback and cross-marking. For analysis and reporting, all student names were replaced with codes, and no personally identifying information is presented. Files were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the instructor and retained according to college policy. In line with institutional guidance for scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning projects that use normal educational practices, formal IRB approval was not required.

3.3. Data Analysis

We estimated multiple linear regression models to predict post-confidence and post-

proficiency while controlling for baseline scores. Standardized coefficients (β), 95% confidence intervals, and p-values were reported. Regression assumptions were checked (normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and independence), and no serious violations were detected. Multicollinearity was acceptable, with all variance inflation factors (VIFs) below 2. To examine the hypothesized synergy between debate and teacher encouragement, an interaction term (Debate \times Encouragement) was included. Robustness checks comprised (a) a reduced model retaining only significant predictors and (b) sensitivity analyses using alternative scaling of the confidence measure. Analyses of primary outcomes relied on independent rater scores from the final post-test; in cases of double rating, the independent rater's score was retained after reliability checks. In addition to significance testing, effect sizes (Cohen's d for pre-post comparisons) and model fit indices (R^2 , adjusted R^2 , and f^2) were reported. Consistent with the one-group pre-/post-test design, regression coefficients were interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

4. Results

4.1. Findings on Low Speaking Confidence

Prior to the commencement of the course, students were asked to conduct a self-assessment of their confidence in speaking English (Fig. 1). Subsequently, ten students were randomly selected from different confidence groups (Table 2) to participate in interviews exploring the factors influencing their speaking confidence in English classes. The insights obtained from these interviews were further examined in consultation with other English lecturers and subsequently developed into a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Higher mean scores indicate a greater frequency of anxiety experienced by students.

Table 3 illustrates the factors contributing to students' self-reported anxiety when speaking English in class. The mean anxiety score across items was $M = 3.10$ ($SD = 1.25$), suggesting a moderate level of speaking anxiety with substantial variability across students.

The strongest sources of anxiety were fear of being reprimanded by the teacher ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.21$), fear of peers' judgment ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.39$), and lack of vocabulary ($M = 3.66$, SD

Table 2. Pre-class Interview

Name	Confidence level	Elements Affect Confidence
A	Strongly unconfident	It terrified me because of my limited vocabulary and I'm unable to express my ideas
B	Strongly unconfident	I can't understand what teacher is saying and unable to remember all grammar tense to use
C	Unconfident	I feel embarrassed with my intonation and pronunciation
D	Unconfident	I feel nervous whenever I have to speak English. I think friends will make fun of me
E	Neutral	I don't have enough vocabulary to understand and communicate and I'm afraid to upset teacher if making mistake
F	Neutral	I usually find it difficult to form a full sentence and my pronunciation is terrible
G	Confident	Teacher's anger and classmates teasing are those that make me uncomfortable when speaking
H	Confident	I'm afraid teacher will scold me if I make pronunciation mistakes
I	Strongly confident	I sometimes hesitate to talk because I don't recall which tense to use.
J	Strongly confident	I feel calm when teacher call me to speak English

Table 3. Students Anxiety Rate When Speaking in Classroom

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am deeply embarrassed by my pronunciation and prosody.	80	2.2625	1.2802
It frightened me because of my lack of vocabulary that makes me struggle to articulate my ideas.	80	3.6625	1.2006
It makes me anxious when I have no idea what my teacher is saying in English.	80	3.575	1.2904
I worry that my teacher will get angry and reprimand me when I make errors.	80	3.9	1.2076
I often struggle to put together a complete sentence.	80	2.825	1.1111
I'm afraid when I speak English, my classmates will make fun of me.	80	3.6	1.3870
AVERAGE		3.10	1.2451

= 1.20). Stress arising from not understanding teacher instructions was also prominent ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.29$). Students additionally reported moderate difficulty in forming complete sentences ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.11$). By contrast, pronunciation and intonation ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.28$) were rated as less anxiety-provoking.

Overall, the findings suggest that students' speaking anxiety stemmed primarily from psychological and social pressures—such as fear of negative evaluation and limited vocabulary—rather than linguistic accuracy alone. The relatively large standard deviations further highlight individual differences in confidence and language learning experiences.

4.2. Improvement in Students' Speaking Confidence and Performance

Speaking confidence increased between pre- and post-test, as seen in Fig. 1. Between the pre- and post-test periods, the percentage of students reporting extreme insecurity declined, while the proportion reporting confidence increased significantly to 35%, nearly a nine-fold increase, and the percentage of people who were strongly confident grew from 1% to 8%. The degree of insecurity also dropped by 30%.

Despite their higher confidence level (43%), many students continued to struggle with grammar and pronunciation (52%). Pronunciation and intonation had been rated as less anxiety-provoking in the pre-course scale (Table 3),

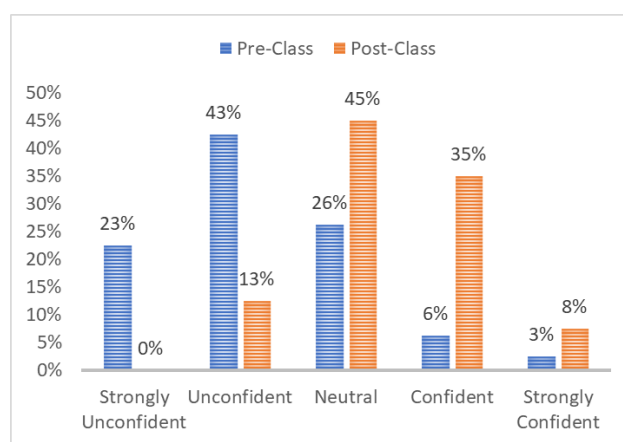


Figure 1. Confidence level between Pre- and Post-class

yet they re-emerged in post-test reflections as persistent weaknesses affecting performance accuracy. Grammar, although excluded from the validated anxiety measure due to weak reliability, was still perceived by students as a frequent source of error in actual speaking tasks. These findings suggest that while learner-centered methods helped reduce anxiety and enhance confidence, underlying linguistic limitations in grammar and pronunciation remained to be addressed.

To assess the progress, pre- and post-tests were administered. From 56% of students who failed in the pre-speaking test, it was reduced to only 1% in the post-test (Fig. 2). The proportion of good results also surged almost 9 times from 9% to 44%.

A paired-samples t-test (Table 5) confirmed

Table 4. Students' Reflections on their Post-course Speaking Proficiency

Proficient Level	N	%
I'm able to present fluently with good intonation and minor pronunciation errors	22	28
I'm able to present logically without pausing but still have some minor pronunciation errors	16	20
I'm able to present with logical structure, but still make lots of grammar and pronunciation errors.	42	52
I'm unable to speak	0	0
Total	80	100

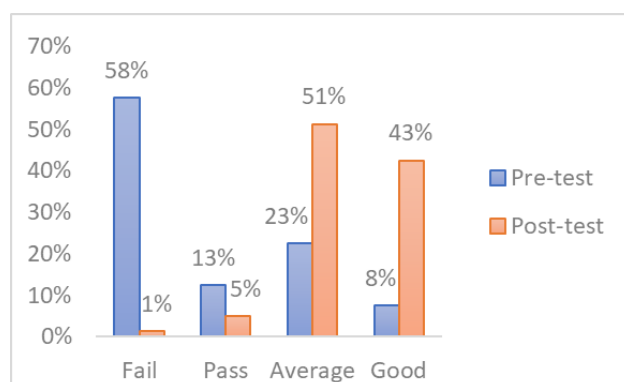


Figure 2. Speaking results in Pre- and Post-test

significant gains: pre-test $M = 3.91$ ($SD = 2.76$), post-test $M = 7.61$ ($SD = 1.31$), $t(79) = -12.86$, $p < .001$. While the p-value indicated statistical significance, the large effect size, Cohen's $d = 1.27$, further demonstrated that the observed improvement was practically meaningful, not merely a product of sample size.

4.3. Students post-reflection

After the research, the previous ten students were interviewed again to determine which

Table 5. Mean Comparison between Pre-and Post-test Results

Paired Samples Statistics						
			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Pair 1	Pretest	3.9100	80	2.75679	0.30822
		Posttest	7.6125	80	1.30717	0.14615
Paired Samples Test						
Paired Differences						
Pair 1	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean Lower	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest - Posttest				Upper		
	-3.70250	2.57387	0.28777	-4.27529	-3.12971	0.000

Table 6. Post-class Interview Previous Students

Name	Pre-Confidence Level	Post-Confidence Level	Pre-test	Post-test	Reason
A	Strongly unconfident	Confident	4	5.5	Combined games and interactive tasks make class more enjoyable
B	Strongly unconfident	Confident	0	9	Discuss and debate many topics, then have teacher corrected pronunciation
C	Unconfident	Strongly Confident	0	9	Through debate sessions and presentations

Name	Pre-Confidence Level	Post-Confidence Level	Pre-test	Post-test	Reason
D	Unconfident	Confident	7	8	Teacher encourage every time I have to speak
E	Neutral	Confident	7	10	Listen to English songs and do fill in blank exercises to improve vocabulary
F	Neutral	Neutral	0	7	Teacher gently corrected pronunciation errors.
G	Confident	Strongly confident	0	8	Teacher use gentle and soft voice to communicate with student
H	Confident	Neutral	4	8	Through many debate sessions
I	Strongly Confident	Strongly confident	7	9	The teacher patiently addresses students' pronunciation errors during speaking practice.
J	Strongly Confident	Strongly Confident	9	10	Teacher gently corrected pronunciation errors

elements influence their confidence. Their responses were then considered with problems in Table 4 from which drawn out four elements. Those were then transferred to a Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), for 80 students to rate.

In addition to these interviews, students were also asked to indicate which language skills they feared most before the class and which they perceived as most improved after the class. As shown in Fig. 3, speaking (40%) and listening (42%) were identified as the most feared skills prior to the course, while speaking (56%) emerged as the most improved skill afterwards, followed by reading (19%) and listening (18%).

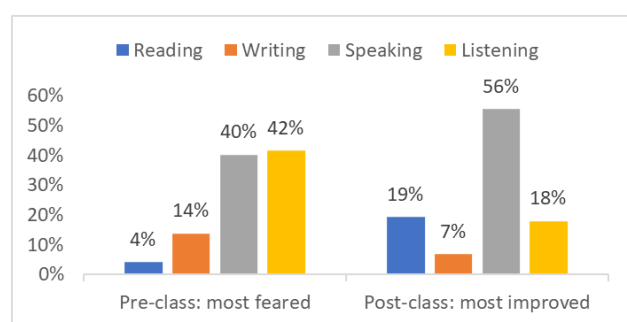


Figure 3. Students' Perceptions of Skills before and after the Class

Table 7 shows students' awareness of debate sessions, teacher encouragement, adjustments

based on individual levels, and interactive tasks. Among these factors, interactive tasks received the highest mean score ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.72$), with low variation, suggesting that most students strongly agreed such activities made learning more effective and less stressful. The debate technique also received positive evaluations ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.93$), indicating that debate is a useful tool for improving speaking skills, although the level of agreement was slightly less consistent than for interactive tasks. Teacher encouragement obtained a mean score of 3.98 ($SD = 0.87$), suggesting that motivational support from teachers plays an important and relatively consistent role in boosting students' confidence. By contrast, adjustment to individual levels received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.58$) and the highest standard deviation ($SD = 1.09$), reflecting more divided opinions: while some students found personalized correction helpful, others did not perceive its impact as strongly.

The result of the Pearson correlation analysis shows that the independent variables are correlated with the dependent variable (post-confidence) and, therefore, will be included to explain the dependent variable in the next regression analysis step.

The regression model was significant, $F(2, 77) = 23.94$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 38.3% of the

Table 7. Students' Reflections about their Improvements

Category	Survey Item	N	Means (M)	Std Deviation (SD)
Encouragement	My teacher often encourages/praises me when I participate in speaking.	80	3.98	0.871
Individualized Adjustment	Gentle pronunciation correction from my teacher helps me feel more confident next time	80	3.58	1.09
Debate	Participating in structured debates has improved my speaking.	80	4.11	0.93
Interactive tasks	Interactive activities help me grasp content without feeling overwhelmed.	80	4.38	0.72

Table 8. Pearson Correlation with Post-confidence

	Encouragement	Individualized Adjustment	Debate	Interactive Tasks
Pearson Correlation	0.431**	0.150	0.589**	0.280**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.183	0.000	0.006
N	80	80	80	80

** Note: Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9. Regression Coefficients for Post-confidence

Model Summary							
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate			
1	0.619a	0.383	0.367	0.63750			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Encouragement, Debate							
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)				2.172	0.033	0.70	1.610
Encouragement	0.194	0.092	0.211	2.118	0.037	0.012	0.377
Debate	0.429	0.086	0.496	4.972	<.001	0.257	0.600

variance in post-confidence ($R^2 = 0.383$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.367$). The overall effect size was large (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.62$), indicating that the predictors together had a substantial impact on students' speaking confidence. Both debate and teacher encouragement were positively associated with speaking confidence:

- Encouragement ($B = 0.194$, $\beta = 0.21$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.38], $t = 2.12$, $p = 0.037$)
- Debate ($B = 0.429$, $\beta = 0.50$, 95% CI [0.26,

0.60], $t = 4.97$, $p < 0.001$)

Accordingly, the regression equation can be expressed as:

$$Y = 0.840 + 0.194 * \text{Encouragement} + 0.429 * \text{Debate},$$

where **Y** represents students' speaking confidence.

Encouragement: Teacher encouragement when answering or speaking

Debate: Participation in debate sessions.

5. Discussion, Limitations and Recommendations

5.1. Interpretation of Results

The validated six-item scale indicated a moderate overall anxiety level ($M = 3.10$). Socio-affective pressures (teacher reprimand and peer judgment) and difficulties with vocabulary or comprehension were rated as the strongest sources, while pronunciation and sentence formation were much less salient. Grammar, though initially included, was removed during validation due to weak correlation with the construct. This finding diverges from Ho and Truong (2022), who reported that Vietnamese university freshmen often attributed their anxiety to grammar knowledge and linguistic accuracy. In contrast, the present study's college learners expressed much less concern about pronunciation or sentence formation, focusing instead on socio-affective pressures such as teacher reprimand and peer judgment. Such differences may reflect contextual variations between university and college students, with the latter being more sensitive to classroom climate than to linguistic precision.

Taken together, these pre-intervention findings suggest that students' reluctance to speak was driven more by fear of evaluation than by linguistic competence. This pattern aligns with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory and Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, highlighting how fear of negative evaluation can obstruct participation. Prior studies (Sun, 2021) have similarly emphasized the critical role of teacher feedback in shaping learners' willingness to engage.

Following the 15-week intervention, students' speaking confidence significantly improved, with a large and practically meaningful effect (Cohen's $d = 1.27$). Although 52% still reported pronunciation difficulties, nearly half of the students delivered fluent and confident presentations. This may indicate that confidence develops faster than linguistic accuracy, as learners become more tolerant of imperfections while sustaining communication. From a constructivist perspective (Piaget, 1970), debates provided opportunities for students to actively

construct knowledge through interaction, while from a sociocultural scaffolding perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), teacher encouragement appeared to lower affective barriers and create conditions for risk-taking.

Regression analysis ($R^2 = 0.383$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.367$, $f^2 = 0.62$, indicating a large effect) suggested that debate ($B = 0.429$, $\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$) was a stronger predictor of speaking confidence than teacher encouragement ($B = 0.194$, $\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.037$). Debate may have provided opportunities for repeated mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997), requiring students to construct arguments, respond to peers, and perform under authentic communicative pressure. Teacher encouragement, in contrast, appeared to be associated with reduced fear of reprimand and perceptions of a safer classroom climate, consistent with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis. Together, these results align with prior findings that debate and supportive feedback jointly foster willingness to communicate and greater self-confidence (Linh, 2024; Chen & Zhang, 2022; Ghafar, 2023).

Beyond quantitative predictors of confidence, perception data also revealed important shifts in how students viewed their own skills. Speaking and listening were initially rated as the most feared skills before the course, yet afterwards were reported as the most improved (Fig. 3). This transformation aligns with Horwitz *et al.*'s (1986) framework of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and illustrates how scaffolded opportunities (debates, feedback, and encouragement) allowed students to turn difficult areas into domains of measurable progress.

Interestingly, while interactive tasks and individualized adjustments were rated positively by students (Table 7), consistent with evidence that learners value supportive and learner-centered practices (Sun, 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2023), they did not show significant correlations with post-confidence. This suggests that such activities may primarily promote cognitive engagement and scaffolding rather than directly lowering affective barriers in the short term. In contrast, teacher encouragement appears to function as immediate socio-affective support,

while debate provides structured practice with authentic communicative stakes, producing clearer and more measurable effects within a 15-week period. Debate may therefore offer opportunities that combine cognitive challenge with affective support, helping to explain its stronger association with confidence.

Beyond the primary analyses, an additional regression indicated a significant positive association between students' post-test performance and their post-course confidence ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$). Although exploratory, this finding resonates with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, highlighting the reciprocal link between performance outcomes and confidence. Such results suggest that linguistic competence and affective confidence may reinforce each other, creating a positive cycle in learners' oral development.

Taken together, the findings indicate that addressing both psychological barriers (e.g., fear of evaluation) and practical needs (e.g., opportunities for authentic practice) is important for fostering greater confidence. This interpretation is consistent with constructivist and sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasize scaffolded, interactive, and socially situated learning experiences as critical for both cognitive and affective growth.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that structured debate should be a regular feature of speaking classes, as it creates authentic opportunities for interaction and provides mastery experiences that build learners' self-efficacy. Likewise, teacher encouragement through praise and motivational support plays a crucial role in reducing fear of evaluation and fostering active participation (Sun, 2021; Chen & Zhang, 2022). Interactive tasks such as games and group discussions can further enhance engagement in low-pressure contexts, while individualized adjustments, such as gentle pronunciation correction, may support learners at different proficiency levels even if their short-term impact on confidence is modest. Taken together, these approaches highlight the value of combining debate, encouragement, and

supportive activities in line with constructivist and sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978).

5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the one-group pre/post design without a control group limits causal inference, as improvements may partly reflect maturation or external factors. Second, the sample was restricted to 80 students from a single technical college, constraining the generalizability of the findings. Third, although formative debate-session ratings were teacher-scored, they were used only for descriptive tracking and instructional feedback, not for hypothesis testing. The main outcome measures were the pre- and post-speaking tests, with the final post-test independently rated and demonstrating excellent reliability ($ICC = 0.97$). Nonetheless, the absence of rater blinding means that some expectancy effects cannot be completely ruled out. Future research should address these limitations by conducting multi-site replications with larger and more diverse samples, adopting randomized or quasi-experimental designs with control or comparison groups, and employing external or blinded raters for both formative and summative assessments. In addition, developing validated multi-item measures of constructs such as teacher encouragement and debate participation would strengthen psychometric robustness and provide deeper insights into their contributions to speaking confidence.

6. Conclusions

This study examined Vietnamese college EFL students' speaking confidence and the effects of debate, teacher encouragement, interactive tasks, and individualized adjustments. At baseline, reluctance to speak was driven more by fear of evaluation than by linguistic competence. After 15 weeks, both confidence and speaking performance improved markedly, as shown by quantitative tests and qualitative reflections. Debate and teacher encouragement showed the strongest associations with post-course confidence, while interactive tasks and

individualized adjustment provided additional support. Overall, learner-centered, constructivist approaches appear effective for enhancing oral proficiency, reducing anxiety, and fostering self-efficacy. An exploratory regression also indicated a positive association between post-test performance and post-course confidence ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$), suggesting a reciprocal link between competence and confidence that merits further investigation.

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Acknowledgement

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