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The Relationship between Pre-service EFL Teachers' self-confidence and language performance

La relación entre la autoconfianza de los futuros docentes de Inglés y su desempeño en el idioma

Kerly Jacquelin Chimbo Jácome

Kchimboj@uteq.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2023-7867>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador - Quevedo

Jardel Coutinho dos Santos

jcoutinhod@uteq.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8626-7229>

Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador – Quevedo

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between self-confidence and linguistic performance in pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Self-confidence influences participation, anxiety, and communication in language learning. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, observations, and interviews, the study examines the experiences of students in their seventh level of training at a public university in Ecuador. Findings show that many struggle with speaking English in public due to fear of making mistakes, leading to hesitations, reduced participation, and difficulties with fluency and pronunciation. Personal experiences, emotions, and external feedback shape their confidence levels. While some show resilience, others experience linguistic insecurity, affecting their overall performance. The study highlights the need to create supportive environments that encourage risk-taking, offer constructive feedback, and promote collaborative learning. It also emphasizes addressing emotional factors in teacher training programs to help future educators develop their linguistic competence with confidence, ultimately benefiting their students' language learning.

Keywords: self-confidence, language performance, pre-service EFL teachers

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza la relación entre la autoconfianza y el desempeño lingüístico en docentes en formación de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). La autoconfianza influye en la participación,

la ansiedad y la comunicación efectiva en el aprendizaje de idiomas. Mediante un enfoque mixto, que incluye encuestas, observaciones y entrevistas, se examinan las experiencias de estudiantes en el séptimo nivel de formación en una universidad ecuatoriana. Los hallazgos revelan que muchos enfrentan dificultades para hablar inglés en público debido al miedo a cometer errores, lo que afecta su fluidez y pronunciación. Las experiencias personales, las emociones y la retroalimentación externa impactan sus niveles de confianza. Mientras algunos muestran resiliencia, otros experimentan inseguridad lingüística. El estudio destaca la importancia de fomentar entornos de apoyo que incentiven la toma de riesgos, brinden retroalimentación constructiva y promuevan el aprendizaje colaborativo. Además, subraya la necesidad de abordar factores emocionales en la formación docente para fortalecer la competencia lingüística de los futuros profesores y sus estudiantes.

Palabras clave: autoconfianza, desempeño lingüístico, docentes en formación de EFL

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INTRODUCTION

Trust has gained prominence as a value and social dynamic and as an object of research; on the one hand, its importance for social cohesion, coexistence, human development, and social and political democratization is also sufficiently recognized., especially for improving educational processes (Peña et al., 2018).

Emotions can both stimulate student participation and thought processes and get in the way of their speaking. Negative feelings, including melancholy, worry, anger, and low self-confidence, might interfere with student's ability to learn (Nadila, 2021). When it comes to studying a second foreign language, students typically feel more discouraged than encouraged (Nadila, 2021). Lack of confidence is one of the emotional states that makes this kind of activity challenging. Students' emotional conditions, such as low self-esteem, can provide distractions throughout the language-learning process (Nadila, 2021).

Consequently, one personal attribute that helps people succeed in learning a foreign language is self-confidence. According to investigations, mastering a foreign language will not be possible without self-confidence, which can either help or hinder academic progress (Abdulhussain et al., 2017). Learners of foreign languages who are generally confident in their abilities tend to do well and think highly of themselves. (Abdulhussain et al., 2017)

In the context of learning a foreign language, Nadila (2021) explains that students frequently encounter more discouraging than supportive emotions. One key emotional challenge is the need for self-confidence, which disrupts the learning process. Feelings of tension, anxiety, and nervousness can significantly hinder students' ability to perform well in a foreign language classroom (Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, enhancing students' self-confidence is essential to improving their success in learning a new language

Research carried out in Ecuador by Santos et al. (2022) highlights the scarcity of this type of article in the country in the period from 2010 to January 2020. For this reason, the present research will try to fill in this gap. Thus, the research question that guides this study is: What is the Relationship between Pre-service EFL Teachers' self-confidence and language performance?

Literature Review

Self Confidence

Confidence is a social use category that has evolved into the cornerstone of all human interactions. It forms the basis of educational relationships since they embrace a contract, whether tangible or intangible, which ensures the safety of people individually and collectively. (Buitrago & Sandoval-Estupiñán, 2022) Self-confidence is an attitude or feeling of confidence in the ability of oneself so that the person concerned is not too anxious in his actions (Nety et al., 2020).

Kansil et al. (2022) state that the ability to execute to a positive degree is described by terms like "perceived competence," "perceived capability," "self-efficacy," and "self-confidence",

Kansil et al. (2022) believe that self-confidence, or assurance of one's skills, abilities, and judgment, is regarded as one of the most powerful motivators and behavior regulators in people's daily lives.

Abdulhussain et al. (2017) describe language learning as a complicated process affected by cognitive and affective factors that constitute the main source of individual differences in foreign language learning. Emotional mastery is the emotional side of human behavior and involves various personality aspects such as emotion, attitude, motivation, personality, anxiety, and self-confidence. In the context of learning a foreign language. Nadila (2021) explains that students frequently encounter emotions that are more discouraging than supportive. Among all these, self-confidence is one of the most influential variables affecting learning. Therefore, it is one of the central impulses in humans and can influence a person's life for better or worse. (Abdulhussain et al. 2017).

Self-confidence can provide learners motivation and energy to become positive about their learning (Nety et al., 2020). A student must take risks and engage in the learning activities, and those who have self-confidence are assured of their abilities and are setting goals for themselves and working hard to achieve their goals without worrying about the outcomes (Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020).

Al-Hebaish (2012) notes that lacking self-confidence can disrupt students' language learning. Feelings of tension, worry, and nervousness hinder their performance in a foreign language classroom. This silence stems from fear, shyness, limited vocabulary, poor grammar, and incorrect pronunciation, which collectively undermine their confidence and willingness to speak. (Al-Hebaish, 2012).

In this study, we define self-confidence as the perception or positive attitude we have of our own abilities or talents. We are confident of our ability to meet our goals, targets, or tasks effectively. This does not imply that we are superior to other people but rather gives us the security that despite the circumstances or obstacles, we can learn, adapt, and advance.

Language Performance

Universities aim to recruit qualified graduates who can positively serve the community, mainly through effective communication (Nugroho, 2017b). For EFL students preparing to become teachers, self-confidence is crucial to achieving better language performance. Given that pre-service teachers play a vital role in the language development of their future students, it is essential to understand the factors that influence linguistic performance to improve professional growth and effectiveness. (Nugroho, 2017b)

The Ecuadorian English language curriculum (2016) defines language competence as the ability to communicate effectively. That is, although knowledge of language [systems] will be present [grammar, lexis, etc.], these should not be the main focus of the learning process. Rather, the emphasis should be on the performative aspects of language to engage in purposeful

communicative interaction and make sense. This is accomplished through several activities to support live interaction, raise students' awareness and skills, and create a positive commitment to support intrinsic motivation for learning English.

Using language exclusively on specific occasions and for specified purposes is one of the main potential issues experienced by EFL students (Akbari, 2016). This makes EFL students more likely to experience learning difficulties than other students who use English as their first language daily, like ESL students.

A study done by Mosha (2014) investigated African pre-service students' language performance; the author used interviews, classroom observation, questionnaires, and document review to collect data. The findings demonstrated that while students were highly motivated to learn English, their academic performance was impacted by the shortage of English teachers and their lack of preparation or training. This was further compounded by the limited practice of the English language both at the institution and at home, as well as the lack of educational materials and financial resources on the part of the students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the phenomenological research approach to analyze human behavior, what they say, and what they do, in this case, to analyze the pre-service teachers' experiences related to self-confidence and language performance. Umanilo (2019) describes that the phenomenological approach aims to deeply understand the structure of the consciousness of the people in a particular situation and to understand the reasons and meaning of actions related to the purpose of survival.

Method

A mixed method was used because, according to Dawadi et al. (2021) this method helps to understand the situation through indicative results by exploring through tools like participant observation and interviews, whereas quantitative methods help derive objective findings using surveys. Also, it is a rigorous method that provides a deeper meaning of the phenomenon and enhances its validity (McKim, 2017).

Context and Participants

This study was conducted during the first term of the academic year 2024 - 2025 at a public University located in Quevedo. The participants of the quantitative part were pre-service teachers at the 7th level from the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Language career, in contrast, purposive sampling was used to select two pre-service teachers from the quantitative phase, focusing on those with significant self-confidence challenges in language performance. This ensured diverse perspectives and deeper insights into the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Instruments

The data were collected in two sections, the first section was quantitative, while the second phase was qualitative and both were conducted in Spanish to reduce language barriers, and to provide comfort to the participants so that they can express themselves more clearly in their native language. Through verification, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to address a particular research issue may improve validity; complementary findings draw attention to various facets of the phenomena (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

Survey

The questionnaire method, widely recognized for its ability to collect precise information from a large group of individuals (Thomas et al., 2018), was employed in this research. The designed questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, utilizing a four-point Likert scale ranging from "1 - strongly agree" to "4 - strongly disagree." It was structured into three sections: the first gathered demographic data such as gender and the length of time participants had been studying English; the second focused on self-confidence, and the third addressed linguistic performance. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms in the participants' native language (Spanish), with a one-week deadline for completion.

Observation

One of the few social science methodological approaches that emphasizes in-person behavior observation is participant observation (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977), which was conducted over a one-week period to monitor the progression of the phenomenon being investigated. The observation focused on two participants, one of whom, in contrast to the other, exhibited a lack of self-confidence, particularly during activities involving public speaking. To carry out this activity, a checklist was used along with a notebook for taking notes, allowing us to collect data with greater precision.

Interview

As an interview is fundamentally an organized and intentional dialogue, where the spontaneity of the interview is the enriching foundation of data collection (Bampton & Cowton, 2002), a set of five pre-prepared questions was used, focusing on the participants' level of self-confidence, the strategies they employ to cope with feelings of insecurity, specific experiences that have positively or negatively impacted their linguistic performance, how making mistakes when speaking English has affected them emotionally, and how they perceive their level of preparation as future teachers influence their confidence in teaching English. The interviews were conducted in Spanish with the participants to ensure they felt more comfortable expressing their ideas. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes per participant.

Visual Narrative

Visual narratives are highly stimulating for the development of research practices due to their ability to foster a deeper understanding of the human experience (Cohn, 2020). For this

reason, the two participants were asked to draw their perspective on self-confidence when speaking English in public or in front of their class.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The analysis was conducted using the statistical program SPSS 25, a widely recognized and utilized tool in research for processing and analyzing quantitative data (Pacheco, et al., 2020). Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies were applied, which allowed for a general and detailed overview of the student's beliefs regarding various aspects of language learning and their self-confidence. This approach helped identify common trends among the participants and highlighted potential individual differences in their perceptions and attitudes toward language learning. In this way, the analysis provided a solid foundation for interpreting the data and drawing meaningful conclusions.

Qualitative Data

A key step in qualitative research is theoretical sampling, which entails gathering, coding, and analyzing data. Based on the concepts and categories that emerge from the initial analysis, the researcher consciously chooses which more aspects need to be investigated as the theory evolves (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). In line with this approach, during the interview process, several important concepts emerged that highlight the participants' perceptions and behaviors regarding the relationship between Pre-service EFL Teachers' self-confidence and language performance, including the following:

Ethical Considerations

It is crucial for any research to protect human participants by applying the proper ethical norms. Given the intricacy of the research process, ethical issues are especially relevant in qualitative studies (Arifin S, 2018). Considering this, the present article ensured that all participants voluntarily signed the informed consent form, as a prior explanation about the nature and purpose of the research was provided before starting the investigation. It is important to note that participants were free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Additionally, data confidentiality was respected, guaranteeing anonymity and the secure storage of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data

To engage with the research's purpose of understanding the relationship between pre-service EFL teachers' self-confidence and language performance, the questionnaire was divided into two sections, each with eight questions. It utilized a Likert scale of four levels: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

Table 1
Self-confidence

Self-confidence		1	2	3	4	Mean	Std Dev.
	Statement						
	I feel confident in my ability to teach English effectively.	0	3	27	7	9,25	12,18
	I trust my knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.	0	4	29	4	9,25	13,30
	I feel confident speaking English in front of others.	0	15	18	4	9,25	8,62
	I trust in my ability to plan and deliver English lessons.	0	3	28	6	9,25	12,74
	I believe that I can handle unexpected challenges while teaching English.	0	7	28	2	9,25	12,84
	I feel confident with my pronunciation and fluency while teaching English.	0	10	21	6	9,25	8,85
	I trust in my ability to evaluate students' linguistic performance accurately.	0	5	29	3	9,25	13,33
	I trust in my skills to catch students' attention during English lessons.	0	3	31	3	9,25	14,57

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

According to the first section, the participants' responses indicated that nearly half of them do not feel confident speaking English in front of others. 40.5% agreed with the following statement: "When presenting, I started to freeze, which caused me to forget everything I had prepared in advance." This suggests that, due to their lack of self-confidence, no matter how much they prepare, they will not feel secure speaking in public. There are various reasons behind this lack of confidence, including the emergence of doubts about their abilities, forgetting vocabulary, or experiencing both simultaneously. These factors are significant in understanding why students struggle to feel confident speaking in public. The majority of students reported that their insecurity stems from doubts about their skills. (Tahir & Korompot, 2023)

Additionally, another factor closely tied to this situation is the lack of confidence in their pronunciation and fluency in English. 27% of participants stated that making mistakes while speaking affects them emotionally, causing anxiety and leading them to question, "What level am I at? Is it high or low?". This emotional distress can be understood through the lens of insecurity. Insecurity is a generalized uneasiness or anxiety that arises from the linguistic skills meet the national standards for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. feeling vulnerable or findable, threatening one's ego or self-image, and leading individuals to doubt their own worth (Merryanti et al., 2024).

Table 2
Language performance

Language Performance						
Statement	1	2	3	4	Mean	Std Dev.
I can express ideas clearly and effectively in English.	0	11	24	2	9,25	10,94
I can use a wide range of vocabulary appropriate for teaching contexts.	0	11	23	3	9,25	8,90
My understanding of English grammar allows me to teach it effectively.	0	7	25	5	9,25	9,44
I receive positive feedback on my linguistic skills from colleagues and supervisors.	1	4	30	2	9,25	12,03
I am capable of conducting full lessons in English without resorting to the students' native language.	0	7	25	5	9,25	9,44
I effectively correct my own linguistic errors while teaching.	1	2	29	5	9,25	11,50
I feel comfortable using English in both informal and formal teaching contexts.	0	6	26	5	9,25	9,93
My linguistic skills meet the national standards for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers.	0	9	28	0	9,25	11,43

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

As shown in the second section, 29.7% of participants revealed that they struggle to express their ideas clearly and effectively in English, with some even feeling nervous when doing so. One potential factor contributing to this difficulty is the presence of cultural barriers, which may hinder students' willingness to voice their opinions in class—especially when there are disagreements within the group. These barriers, along with the challenges of clearly expressing ideas, have been identified as key factors affecting students' communication (Barker, 2016). This difficulty can be further understood in the context of a statement made by some participants: “A teacher has to be very specific about what they are going to say.” Beghetto (2007) suggests that whether students view classroom conversations as valuable opportunities to take intellectual risks for creative expression can significantly influence their anxiety about revealing their limitations. To mitigate this, teachers must work diligently to foster a classroom environment that encourages students to take these risks with confidence. Additionally, teachers need to remain open to the diverse viewpoints of their students, even when these perspectives seem only marginally relevant to the discussion.

Qualitative Data

Joseph

Joseph has a high level of confidence. The reason behind this is because he is always prepared for what he needs to do. During the interview, he mentioned, "my confidence level is high, I am always sure of what I'm going to say (Interview). According to Ghafar (2023) self-confidence has been linked to a positive impact on one's degree of English language proficiency. Higher levels of self-confidence are positively correlated with improved English language

proficiency. Persistence and effort enable maintaining focus to tackle the simplest to the most complex activities. This reflects the participants' ability and commitment to face challenges and adapt to the adversities they encounter (Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004).

All students naturally make mistakes and face setbacks as part of their learning processes. A cognitive-constructivist, knowledge-based approach to education assumes that errors can be addressed and learned from (Tulis, 2013). For Joseph, his nervousness drives him, and his mistakes help him realize that the learning process is not always perfect. According to Zander et al. (2014), the constructive handling of mistakes improves learning outcomes and requires both an affective and a cognitive dimension: a positive learning orientation toward errors and a low fear of making mistakes. In this context, students who feel confident that they will not be ridiculed for their mistakes are more likely to report lower negative feelings and adopt more positive attitudes toward errors. On the other hand, if teachers overlook or judge students' mistakes, these students are more likely to avoid taking risks and may even conceal their mistakes rather than share their misunderstandings (Tulis, 2013).

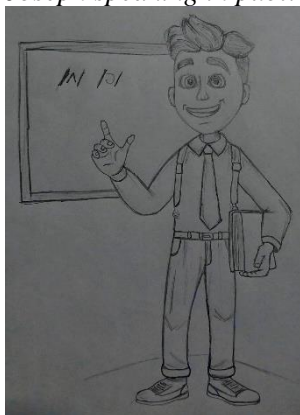
Joseph's growing confidence is further strengthened by receiving constructive feedback, which allows him to improve and feel more assured in his abilities. Proper feedback motivates students to build their knowledge and tackle more complex tasks. It helps learners identify areas for growth, guiding them when facing challenges. Al-Ghamdi (2017) highlights that teacher feedback increases student engagement and supports their learning journey. By focusing on areas of improvement, students can develop the necessary skills for future success.

However, some argue that feedback can have negative effects on students' performance. For example, overly critical feedback may create anxiety and hinder the learning environment. Negative feedback can lower a student's self-esteem, causing them to feel anxious or discouraged, ultimately affecting their confidence (Al-Ghamdi, 2017). This is why feedback must be constructive and supportive, helping students feel empowered and motivated to continue learning.

This approach can be seen in the visual narrative of Joseph, who speaks confidently in front of an audience. Their facial expression is warm and assured, and their open body language suggests a deep comfort with the situation. The way they dress balances professionalism with approachability, giving the impression of competence and relatability. As they engage with their audience through hand gestures and use a whiteboard, they demonstrate preparedness and certainty, portraying someone who enjoys speaking in public and does so with confidence.

Figure 1

Joseph speaking in public



Joseph's confidence is not only reflected in his visual narrative but was also demonstrated during the observation process, in which he gave several presentations. In all of them, he remained calm and confident in the information he conveyed. Moreover, his statement was confirmed: "I find public speaking fun; it's like a challenge." This declaration reinforces his positive attitude toward public speaking, seeing it not as a source of anxiety but as an opportunity for growth and personal challenge.

Steve

Unlike Joseph, Steve has a low level of confidence because he frequently compares his English proficiency to that of his classmates. He acknowledged this struggle by stating, "I always try to do my best; however, the biggest mistake I face as a student is comparing myself to others with a higher level" (Interview). According to Merryanti et al. (2024), insecurity is the feeling of uncertainty about one's abilities or a lack of self-confidence. This often stems from negative past experiences or constant comparisons with others. In an educational setting, insecurity can manifest as a lack of confidence in one's skills, feelings of inadequacy when performing tasks, and excessive concern about others' opinions. Furthermore, ongoing pressure from family, particularly from parents, can significantly impact a student's academic performance.

One specific form of insecurity in language learning is linguistic insecurity, which refers to the anxiety or lack of confidence experienced by speakers and writers who feel their language use does not conform to standard norms. As Daftari and Tavil (2017) explain, this type of insecurity is often linked to a negative self-perception of one's speech or language variety. It tends to arise when individuals compare their pronunciation and grammar to what is perceived as the "correct" way of speaking, further reinforcing feelings of self-doubt and discouragement.

The experiences and emotions of both students and teachers play a crucial role in shaping the quality of learning, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships. Throughout the learning process, students may face difficult experiences that influence their emotional responses, ultimately affecting their ability to progress. For instance, Steve shared a personal experience; he commented, "An experience that affected my self-confidence was when I had a presentation, and

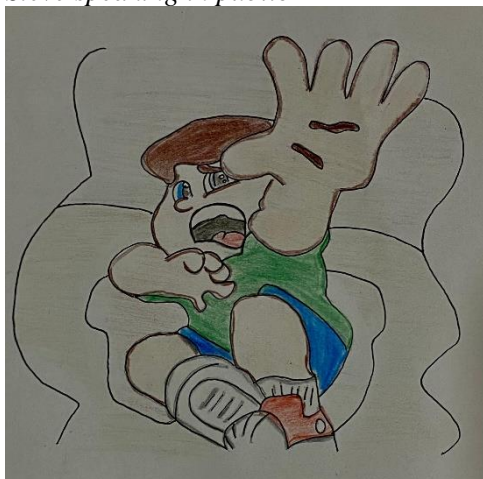
when it was time to present, I froze, which caused me to forget everything I had prepared in advance". These emotions can vary depending on the challenges encountered, such as struggling with complex concepts or receiving criticism. Additionally, the inherent power imbalance in the student-teacher relationship can shape how students perceive and react to these emotional experiences. Negative experiences, if not addressed constructively, may lead to feelings of insecurity, discouragement, or fear of making mistakes, all of which can hinder learning and personal growth (Rowe & Fitness, 2018).

Torretti (1962) points out that the experience of sensory errors leads us to question our understanding of what things truly are. This often stems from doubts about our ability to know, which arise from the need to define the limits of knowledge. Steve, similarly, lacks confidence in his abilities and frequently questions his knowledge, even asking, "What level of English do I have?" (Interview). This insecurity prevents him from trusting his abilities, limiting his personal growth and development.

By observing the visual narrative created by Steve, it's easy to deduce that he feels anxious and vulnerable. His wide eyes and open mouth suggest he's overwhelmed, while his defensive hand gesture and hunched posture indicate he wants to protect himself. His curled body and lack of eye contact add to the feeling of insecurity, as if he fears connecting with others. These signs reflect someone struggling with fear and self-doubt in a challenging situation.

Figure 2

Steve speaking in public



We can confirm the previously mentioned, as he displayed clear signs of insecurity and fear during the observation stage. This was evident through his body language—he moved his hands and feet excessively while presenting, hesitated on certain words, and experienced noticeable sweating in his hands just minutes before speaking in public. Steve mentioned, "The strategy I use to overcome these feelings is breathing." Deep breaths helped him calm his nerves and gave him a sense of control, allowing him to feel more confident when facing the situation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between pre-service EFL teachers' self-confidence and their language performance. Using a mixed-method approach, surveys, classroom observations, and interviews provided deeper insights into this dynamic. The findings indicate that self-confidence significantly influences language learning, impacting not only speaking skills but also listening, reading, and writing.

Students with higher self-confidence demonstrated better fluency, pronunciation, and engagement in oral tasks, while those with lower confidence experienced hesitation, fear of mistakes, and avoidance of speaking activities. Similarly, confident students showed greater comprehension in listening tasks, actively participated in reading exercises, and produced more structured and accurate written work. In contrast, those with lower confidence struggled with understanding spoken messages, avoided reading aloud due to fear of evaluation, and displayed limitations in writing fluency and grammatical accuracy. These findings suggest that self-confidence is a key factor in overall communicative competence, as it affects performance across all four skills.

To address this issue, EFL educators should create a supportive learning environment that fosters confidence in all language areas. Incorporating collaborative activities, constructive feedback, and balanced practice of the four skills can help reduce anxiety and strengthen students' confidence. This research highlights the need for teaching strategies that support students' emotional well-being, ultimately preparing future teachers to communicate effectively and help their students develop language skills with confidence and fluency.

This research, however, is subject to one limitation. Participants might feel embarrassed to identify themselves or admit to lacking self-confidence. For this reason, for future studies, it is recommended to do a longitudinal study to understand more in-depth the self-confidence of students and its influence on their learning process.

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