

Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning as a Non-Significant Predictor of Speaking Confidence in EFL Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract

Speaking confidence is an essential aspect of oral communication competence among EFL pre-service English teachers, as it influences their willingness to participate in classroom interactions and their readiness for future professional responsibilities. This study aimed to explore the relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers. A quantitative correlational research design was employed using an online questionnaire administered to 15 pre-service English teachers enrolled in an English Language Education Program at an Indonesian university. The questionnaire measured participants' perceptions of emotionally safe collaborative learning and their levels of speaking confidence using a five-point Likert scale. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation. The findings revealed that participants perceived moderate levels of emotionally safe collaborative learning ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.46$) and moderate levels of speaking confidence ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.33$). Furthermore, the correlation analysis indicated a weak positive relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence; however, the relationship was not statistically significant ($r = .285$, $p = .303$). These findings suggest that emotionally safe collaborative learning alone may not be a strong predictor of speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers. Future studies are encouraged to involve larger samples and examine additional factors that may contribute to the development of speaking confidence in EFL contexts.

Keywords motionally safe collaborative learning; speaking confidence; EFL pre-service English teachers; collaborative learning; quantitative correlational study.

A. Introduction

Speaking confidence is considered an important component of oral communication competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly among pre-service English teachers who are expected to become effective communicators and language models in their future classrooms (Bandura, 1997; MacIntyre et al., 1998). In teacher education programs, the ability to speak confidently may influence pre-service teachers' participation in classroom discussions, instructional delivery, and overall professional readiness (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Nevertheless, despite receiving years of English instruction, many pre-service English teachers still encounter difficulties in speaking confidently in academic contexts.

According to Daud et al. (2019), fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary knowledge, and concerns about negative evaluation were among the factors contributing to speaking-related anxiety among pre-service English teachers. Similarly, Kuluşaklı and Genç (2024) found that communication apprehension negatively affected pre-service English teachers' perceived communicative competence. These findings suggest that speaking confidence is influenced not only by linguistic ability but also by learners' emotional experiences during language learning.

One instructional approach that may help promote speaking confidence is collaborative learning. Collaborative learning encourages learners to work together to achieve common goals through interaction, mutual support, and shared responsibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Miftah, 2023). Through collaborative activities, students are provided with opportunities to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and practice speaking in less threatening situations (Vygotsky, 1978; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). Meilasari et al. (2024) reported that cooperative learning created a supportive learning atmosphere that reduced learners' reluctance to participate in speaking activities. Therefore, collaborative learning may serve as a valuable context for developing speaking confidence among EFL learners (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Meilasari et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2022).

In addition to collaboration, the emotional climate within the learning environment may also influence students' willingness to communicate. Emotional safety refers to learners' perceptions that they can express their opinions, ask questions, and make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or negative judgment, allowing them to participate more openly in classroom activities (Edmonson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017). According to Edmondson (1999), psychologically safe environments encourage individuals to engage in interpersonal risk-taking behaviors that facilitate learning and participation. In EFL classrooms, emotionally safe

collaborative environments may encourage students to communicate more confidently because they feel accepted and supported by their peers (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2022).

Previous research by Daud et al. (2019), Kuluşaklı and Genç (2024), Johnson and Johnson (2009), and Meilasari et al. (2024) has provided valuable insights into speaking anxiety, communication apprehension, and collaborative learning in EFL contexts. However, limited attention has been given to the relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence, particularly among EFL pre-service English teachers. Existing research has predominantly focused on general EFL learners or examined collaborative learning as an instructional strategy without considering learners' perceptions of emotional safety within those environments. This gap highlights the need for further investigations into how emotionally safe collaborative learning may relate to speaking confidence in teacher education settings.

Therefore, given the important role of speaking confidence in preparing competent future English teachers, identifying factors that may foster students' confidence has become increasingly important in EFL teacher education. (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2022) suggested that emotionally supportive learning environments enhance learners' engagement, willingness to communicate, and classroom participation. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on affective dimensions of language learning and collaborative learning practices. Furthermore, the results may provide practical implications for teacher education programs seeking to create supportive learning environments that foster future English teachers' confidence in speaking English. Based on the background above, this study addresses the research question: "Is there a significant relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers?"

B. Literature Review

1.1 Speaking Confidence in EFL Contexts

Speaking confidence refers to learners' beliefs in their ability to communicate effectively using the target language (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Woodrow, 2006). It influences learners' willingness to participate in oral activities, express ideas, and engage in classroom interactions (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). According to Bandura

(1997), individuals' confidence in performing a particular task is closely related to their self-efficacy beliefs, which affect their motivation, effort, and persistence. In EFL settings, speaking confidence plays a crucial role because learners who perceive themselves as capable speakers are more likely to engage in communication opportunities (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Sari et al., 2022).

Previous studies have identified several factors influencing speaking confidence among EFL learners. Daud et al. (2019) reported that fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and limited speaking opportunities contributed to anxiety among pre-service English teachers. Likewise, Kuluşaklı and Genç (2024) found that communication apprehension negatively affected pre-service teachers' perceptions of their communicative competence. These findings suggest that speaking confidence is shaped not only by linguistic proficiency but also by learners' emotional experiences and social interactions within educational environments.

Given the professional demands placed upon pre-service English teachers, speaking confidence becomes particularly important (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Richards, 2017). Future teachers are expected to communicate effectively, provide classroom instructions, and facilitate discussions using English. Therefore, understanding factors associated with speaking confidence may contribute to the development of more supportive teacher education practices.

1.2 Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is an instructional approach in which learners work together to achieve common learning goals through interaction and shared responsibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Through collaborative activities, students actively exchange ideas, solve problems, and construct knowledge collectively (Vygotsky, 1978; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). Within language learning contexts, collaborative learning has been associated with increased participation and opportunities for authentic communication (Storch, 2013; Meilasari et al., 2024).

However, the effectiveness of collaborative learning may depend on the emotional climate experienced by learners (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Miftah, 2023). Emotional safety refers to learners' perceptions that they can express opinions, ask questions, and make mistakes without fear of embarrassment, criticism, or rejection (Edmonson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017). Edmondson (1999) described psychological safety as a shared belief that individuals can take interpersonal risks within a group without experiencing negative consequences. When learners perceive their environment as emotionally safe, they may become more willing to participate actively in classroom activities (Frazier et al., 2017; Deaweale et al., 2022).

In EFL classrooms, emotionally safe collaborative learning environments may encourage learners to practice speaking more frequently and confidently. Meilasari et al. (2024) found that cooperative learning created supportive learning experiences that reduced learners' reluctance to participate in speaking activities (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2022). Therefore, emotional safety within collaborative settings may serve as an important factor influencing learners' speaking confidence.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

A growing body of research has examined affective factors related to speaking in EFL contexts. Daud et al. (2019) explored factors contributing to speaking anxiety among pre-service English teachers and identified fear of mistakes and negative evaluation as major challenges that reduced learners' confidence to participate in speaking activities (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Woodrow, 2006). Similarly, Kuluşaklı and Genç (2024) investigated communication apprehension among pre-service English teachers and reported that anxiety was associated with lower perceptions of communicative competence.

Research on collaborative learning has also demonstrated positive outcomes for language learners. Meilasari et al. (2024) found that cooperative learning strategies contributed to reducing speaking anxiety and promoting classroom participation. Additionally, Johnson and Johnson (2009) emphasized that collaborative learning environments facilitate positive interdependence and supportive peer interactions that enhance learning experiences.

Despite these contributions, limited studies have specifically investigated the relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence, particularly among EFL pre-service English teachers in Indonesia. Existing research has generally examined speaking anxiety, communication apprehension, or collaborative learning separately (Daud et al., 2019; Kuluşaklı and Genç, 2024; Meilasari et al., 2024). Consequently, there remains a need to understand how learners' perceptions of emotional safety within collaborative learning environments relate to their confidence in speaking English (Edmonson, 1999; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Addressing this gap may provide valuable insights for teacher education programs seeking to foster supportive learning environments that encourage future English teachers to communicate more confidently.

C. Research methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design. Correlational research aims to examine the nature and strength of the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them (Creswell, 2014). In the present study, the researcher sought to investigate whether there was a significant relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers.

A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted because the data were collected at a single point in time using an online questionnaire. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to explore naturally occurring perceptions and experiences within an authentic educational context without implementing any intervention (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Furthermore, the correlational design aligned directly with the third research question, which aimed to determine whether emotionally safe collaborative learning was associated with students' speaking confidence.

Participants and Setting

Participants were drawn from the English Language Education Program at an Indonesian university. The study involved 15 EFL pre-service English teachers enrolled in the undergraduate teacher education program. A purposive sampling technique was employed, meaning that participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) be enrolled in the English Education program, (2) have experienced collaborative learning activities in their English classes, and (3) voluntarily agree to participate in the study. All participants shared a relatively similar educational background as EFL learners and used Bahasa Indonesia as their first language, thereby minimizing potential contextual variations.

Although the sample size was relatively small, it was considered appropriate for a preliminary correlational study conducted within a single institutional setting. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that correlational studies in educational contexts often operate within practical constraints while still yielding meaningful insights into the relationships among variables. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Participants	Frequency	English competency	Education	Semester
Gender:				
Male	6	Intermediate/ B1 CEFR	English education	Fourth
Female	9	Intermediate/ B1 CEFR	English education	Fourth
Total	15			

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of 20 items measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section measured Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning, while the second section assessed Speaking Confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers.

The Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning section consisted of 10 items designed to capture participants' perceptions of emotional safety within collaborative learning environments. The items reflected dimensions such as peer support, freedom from negative evaluation, comfort in expressing ideas, mutual respect, and feelings of acceptance during group interactions.

The Speaking Confidence section consisted of 10 items measuring participants' self-perceived confidence in speaking English. The items assessed confidence in expressing ideas, answering questions, participating in discussions, communicating in front of peers, and managing nervousness during speaking activities.

To ensure content appropriateness, the questionnaire items were developed based on the relevant literature concerning psychological safety, collaborative learning, and speaking confidence in EFL contexts. Before the main study, the instrument was reviewed for clarity and comprehensibility. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above indicates acceptable reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted during the academic semester of 2026. The questionnaire was administered digitally via Google Forms to facilitate efficient distribution and response collection.

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained electronically before participants proceeded to complete the questionnaire.

Participants were asked to respond independently to all questionnaire items, which required approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Upon completion, all responses were automatically recorded and exported from Google Forms for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using JASP statistical software. Descriptive statistics were first employed to address the first and second research questions. Specifically, mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated to determine the levels of emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among participants.

Before conducting inferential analysis, the normality of the data distribution was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which is recommended for relatively small sample sizes (Ghasemi & Zahedias, 2012).

To address the third research question, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was employed to examine the relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence. Pearson correlation analysis is appropriate when investigating the strength and direction of relationships between two continuous variables (Creswell, 2014). The significance level for all statistical analyses was set at $p < .05$. If the assumption of normality was violated, Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was utilized as a non-parametric alternative. In addition to statistical significance, the magnitude of the relationship was interpreted based on the correlation coefficient values proposed by Cohen (1988).

D. Results and Discussion

Results

Prior to conducting the primary inferential analysis to answer the research questions, the assumptions underlying parametric testing were evaluated. The normality of the score distributions was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is appropriate for relatively small sample sizes. The results indicated that the distributions of Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning and Speaking Confidence did not significantly deviate from normality. Consequently, the assumption of normality was considered to be met, and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was employed to investigate the relationship between the two variables.

Table 2. Shapiro–Wilk Test of Normality

Variable	W	p-value	Interpretation
Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning	0.90	.092	Normal Distribution
Speaking Confidence	0.91	.125	Normal Distribution

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that both variables met the assumption of normality ($p > .05$). Therefore, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was deemed appropriate for the subsequent analysis. Regarding the levels of perceived emotionally safe collaborative learning among EFL pre-service English teachers, descriptive statistics were computed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Category
Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning	15	3.49	0.46	Moderate

Note: Scale interpretation: 1.00–2.33 = Low; 2.34–3.66 = Moderate; 3.67–5.00 = High.

As shown in Table 3, the participants demonstrated a moderate level of emotionally safe collaborative learning ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.46$). This finding suggests that the participants generally perceived their collaborative learning experiences as emotionally supportive and respectful. However, there is still potential to further strengthen emotional safety within collaborative classroom environments. Concerning the levels of speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted. The findings are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Confidence

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Category
Speaking Confidence	15	3.39	0.33	Moderate

Note: Scale interpretation: 1.00–2.33 = Low; 2.34–3.66 = Moderate; 3.67–5.00 = High.

Table 4 shows that the participants exhibited a moderate level of speaking confidence ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.33$). This result indicates that the participants generally perceived themselves as reasonably confident when speaking English, although they may still encounter uncertainty or hesitation in particular speaking situations. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was performed to determine whether there was a significant relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation between Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning and Speaking Confidence

Variables	r	p-value	Interpretation
Emotionally Safe Collaborative Learning and Speaking Confidence	.285	.303	Weak Positive, Not Significant

The results in Table 5 revealed a weak positive relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence ($r = .285$). However, the relationship was not statistically significant because the significance value ($p = .303$) exceeded the established alpha level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that there was no significant relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers in the present study.

Although the relationship was not statistically significant, the positive direction of the correlation suggests that participants who perceived higher levels of emotional safety within collaborative learning environments tended to report slightly higher levels of speaking confidence.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers. The findings indicated that participants perceived a moderate level of emotionally safe collaborative learning. This result suggests that although learners generally experienced supportive and respectful collaborative interactions, the learning environment may not have fully fostered a strong sense of emotional safety. Emotional safety is important because it enables learners to express opinions, ask questions, and participate in classroom activities without fear of embarrassment or negative evaluation (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, enhancing emotional

safety within collaborative settings remains an important consideration for teacher education programs.

The findings also revealed that participants demonstrated a moderate level of speaking confidence. This suggests that pre-service English teachers were relatively willing to engage in English-speaking activities, although they might still experience hesitation, nervousness, or concerns about making mistakes. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that speaking confidence among EFL learners is influenced by affective factors such as anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension (Daud et al., 2019; Kuluşaklı & Genç, 2024). Since pre-service teachers are expected to become effective communicators in their future classrooms, strengthening speaking confidence should remain a priority within teacher education programs.

Contrary to the researcher's expectation, the findings demonstrated that there was no statistically significant relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among the participants. Although the correlation coefficient indicated a positive relationship, the strength of the association was weak and failed to reach statistical significance. This finding suggests that emotionally safe collaborative learning alone may not sufficiently explain variations in speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers.

Several explanations may account for this result. First, speaking confidence is likely to be influenced by multiple factors beyond emotional safety, including learners' self-efficacy beliefs, language proficiency, previous speaking experiences, personality characteristics, and exposure to authentic communication opportunities. Bandura (1997) emphasized that individuals' confidence in performing specific tasks is shaped by various sources of efficacy beliefs, including mastery experiences and social persuasion. Therefore, emotionally safe collaborative learning may represent only one aspect of a more complex process contributing to speaking confidence.

Second, the relatively small sample size employed in this study may have affected the statistical power of the analysis. With only fifteen participants, the study may have been limited in its ability to detect a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Consequently, future studies involving larger samples across diverse educational contexts are recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers.

Despite the absence of a significant relationship, the positive direction of the correlation should not be overlooked. The findings suggest that participants who perceived greater emotional safety within collaborative learning environments tended to report higher levels of speaking confidence. Therefore, teacher educators are encouraged to continue creating supportive classroom climates characterized by peer acceptance, mutual respect, and constructive feedback, as these practices may contribute positively to learners' emotional well-being and participation in speaking activities.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study explored the relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers. The findings revealed that the participants perceived both emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence at moderate levels. Specifically, the participants reported a moderate level of emotionally safe collaborative learning ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.46$) and a moderate level of speaking confidence ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.33$).

Furthermore, the correlation analysis demonstrated a weak positive relationship between emotionally safe collaborative learning and speaking confidence. However, the relationship was not statistically significant ($r = .285$, $p = .303$). Therefore, the findings suggest that emotionally safe collaborative learning may not be a strong predictor of speaking confidence among EFL pre-service English teachers within the context of the present study.

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by providing insights into the emotional dimensions of collaborative learning within EFL teacher education. Although emotional safety alone did not significantly predict speaking confidence, fostering emotionally supportive learning environments remains pedagogically valuable for encouraging participation and reducing learners' fear of negative evaluation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample drawn from a single educational setting and relied exclusively on self-report questionnaire data. These factors may limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, employ mixed-method approaches, and examine additional variables that may influence

speaking confidence, such as speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, language proficiency, and previous speaking experiences.

In conclusion, while emotionally safe collaborative learning appears to have a positive association with speaking confidence, its influence may be limited when considered independently. Further research is needed to better understand the complex interplay of factors that shape EFL pre-service English teachers' confidence in speaking English.

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