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Bridging two languages: an investigation into Taiwan's English learning dynamics, attitude, and outcomes

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Abstract: This study investigates the enhancement of spoken English proficiency among students at Taiwan's technological and vocational education (TVE) universities. The focus is on the significant impact of positive learning attitudes and effective methodologies, using questionnaires and in-depth interviews to assess students' confidence and perceptions of spoken English. The research employs the spoken English confidence scale, covering five dimensions: 1) attitude and aptitude for English learning; 2) confidence in English usage within classroom settings; 3) personality in the context of the native language; 4) belief in potential English capabilities; 5) faith in current English proficiency. Key findings reveal gaps in confidence and English-speaking skills, suggesting the need for immersive English-speaking environments, confidence-boosting classroom activities, and personalised feedback. Therefore, the results of this study suggest interventions aim to cultivate a student-centred approach, addressing proficiency gaps and enhancing confidence in English communication.

Keywords: learning attitude; learning behaviour; spoken English; teaching strategy; technological; vocational education; Taiwan.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the decline in English proficiency among Taiwanese students has been a pressing concern for Taiwanese society and academia. Taiwanese students demonstrate a significant lag in their English language skills compared to students from other countries. Recognising the need to strengthen Taiwan's global competitive advantage and improve its citizens' English communication abilities, the National Development Council assumed a leading role in 2018, aiming to establish Taiwan as a 'bilingual nation' by 2030, with English designated as the second official language. Since 2019, Bilingual Education has been actively promoted to achieve the goal of a 'Bilingual Nation gradually'. Consequently, developing national bilingual teaching policies in alignment with international standards has become an ongoing pursuit. Specifically, within the realm of vocational education, reinforcing the bilingual policy involves not only enhancing the professional knowledge and English proficiency of vocational school teachers but also necessitates collaborative curriculum and activity design among schools. Through shared course planning and implementation, the objective is to enhance students' English proficiency in their respective fields (Wu, 2012). These efforts aim to foster the development of local talent with increased international competitiveness and collaborative skills. Within the higher education system, there is a notable disparity in English language proficiency concerns between students from technological and vocational education (TVE) backgrounds and their counterparts in conventional Universities. The adoption of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is presently emerging as a prominent trend in higher education institutions across non-English-speaking countries (Cao and Meng, 2017). To enhance the English language proficiency and professional competencies of Taiwan's young talents, colleges and universities are actively implementing comprehensive EMI programs to cultivate immersive English learning environments.

The TVE university students in Taiwan encounter specific challenges regarding their confidence in English speaking skills. With the growing significance of proficiency in spoken English, many students from TVE universities struggle to develop their oral communication abilities while preparing for their future careers. They often lack confidence and feel uncertain about effectively engaging in English conversations with non-native speakers. Several factors can explain this phenomenon. Firstly, students in TVE universities tend to prioritise acquiring specialised knowledge and skills, dedicating comparatively less time to practicing and applying English speaking proficiency. Secondly, some students may have limited opportunities for practical communication with individuals from foreign backgrounds, leading to restricted chances for practice and error correction. Additionally, some students may possess uncertainties regarding their English speaking abilities, fearing potential language errors or difficulties in

understanding (Ching et al., 2020). However, numerous TVE universities have recognised this concern and are committed to boosting students' English-speaking abilities. They provide English oral training courses, arrange public speaking contests, and offer practical opportunities to assist students in improving their oral communication skills. Furthermore, educational institutions actively encourage students to engage in English communication activities, including international exchange programs, English conversation corners, and academic conferences, intending to expand their opportunities to interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Universities hold significant importance in developing their English oral proficiency for effective future career communication (Luu et al., 2021). Despite the expectations within both Taiwan's industrial and academic sectors for university graduates to attain a high-intermediate level of proficiency in the general English proficiency test (GEPT), the reality indicates that fewer than 20% of university students are able to pass the elementary level which equates to junior high school proficiency (Hou and Yang, 2007). Additionally, research conducted by Ibrahim and Shahabani (2020) underscores that students in the electronics department of a public university in Malaysia struggle with self-confidence in English communication and often decline scholarship opportunities for studying abroad. Hence, enhancing the English oral confidence of Taiwanese TVE university students requires active participation and effort from the students themselves, along with the support and guidance of educational institutions and teachers. By providing appropriate learning resources, encouraging students to overcome challenges, and engaging in a regular practice of oral communication skills, their confidence in English speaking can be strengthened. Additionally, creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment plays a pivotal role. Within this atmosphere, students will better recognise the importance and value of acquiring English oral skills, thereby boosting their confidence in their speaking abilities. Based on the above points, the following research questions are proposed:

- 1 What is the current status of students' self-confidence and competence in spoken English within?
- 2 What types of English-speaking practice software and learning social media have already become available for students after classes?
- 3 What level of performance do students achieve after using/learning social media to practice their English-speaking abilities?
- 4 What strategies could be employed to foster and stimulate self-confidence in spoken English among students attending TVE universities in Taiwan?

1.1 Problem with the current global teaching situation

Taiwanese students at TVE university in business colleges struggle to develop proficiency in spoken English, hampering their communication skills, which are essential for their future careers (Luu et al., 2021). There are similar challenges of insufficient communication skills in vocational universities in India (Rana and Gida, 2017). In Malaysia, students majoring in business and management did not get the opportunity to get an overseas scholarship owing to insufficient confidence in English communication (Ghasemi et al., 2020). Those examples illuminate college students' challenges in improving their spoken English skills as a second language.

Several factors can explain the reason behind those challenges. First, poor pronunciation negatively impacts students' self-confidence in English communication (Zhou et al., 2020). Various psychological challenges – lack of confidence, motivation, nervousness, mental block, difficulty staying on topic, feeling confused and unprepared – highlight that both linguistic and psychological difficulties significantly affect fluency in English speaking (Chien et al., 2020). Second, other factors can be related to teaching and learning management, encompassing teacher techniques, classroom activities, extra-curricular activities, course syllabus, and individual factors like English exposure and personality traits (Aoyama and Takahashi, 2020). Finally, another reason behind students' difficulties in oral presentations was a lack of practice (Whai and Lai Mei, 2015).

2 Literature review

2.1 *Technological and vocational education*

The understanding of the term 'TVE' in Taiwan can be defined from two perspectives: the educational system and the educational content. From the educational system's perspective, TVE refers to the educational offerings provided by vocational high schools, junior colleges, technical institutes, and universities specialising in science and technology. The main objective of TVE in Taiwan is to meet students' employment needs and promote cooperation and interaction between educational institutions and industries (Yung, 2010). Consequently, the design of the TVE curriculum focuses on workplace skills rather than academic research. The curriculum is tailored based on the needs of the workplace and the characteristics of TVE university students in Taiwan, aiming to cultivate the abilities required by the industry and enable learners to apply their knowledge in practical contexts, becoming technical or professional talents in various fields and levels (Wu and Lin, 2010). Through the systematic provision of professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and concepts at various levels within the TVE university system, students are equipped with the pertinent vocational expertise and competencies requisite for specialised professions.

Understanding the TVE framework sets the stage for recognising the growing importance of English proficiency in today's technologically advanced and interconnected world, where the ability to speak English has become increasingly crucial for a successful career (Reddy, 2019; Renuka, 2020). Proficiency in spoken English offers numerous benefits to individuals (Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). Furthermore, communication skills play a pivotal role in developing interpersonal skills (Renuka, 2020), and improving English speaking skills has been recognised as a means to achieve this (Kumar and Divya, 2021).

As confidence is primordial when learning a second language, such as English, a university in Selangor, Malaysia, implemented public speaking activities in their Electronics Engineering HND program (Ibrahim and Shahabani, 2020). Additionally, modern TVE university in Taiwan has emphasised the importance of incorporating humanistic approaches to enhance speaking abilities in English (Jao et al., 2022). For instance, in India, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence showed that future engineers with enhanced humanistic perspectives can process information in seven different ways (Dastidar and Choudhury, 2018). Recognising the diverse approaches to enhancing

English speaking skills, such as public speaking activities and humanistic approaches, highlights the underlying factor of ‘learning attitude’, a key element in language acquisition and educational transformation.

2.2 Learning attitude

According to Dörnyei (2003), ‘attitude’ encompasses individuals’ predispositions, involving organised thoughts, emotions, and behaviours directed toward a psychological object. Attitudes significantly impact transformative processes, with attitudinal changes among the most influential transformations (Bektas and Nalcaci, 2012). Individuals perceiving change as personally relevant are likelier to initiate and embrace it. Successful initiatives require diverse groups actively collaborating and innovating in change management. Understanding ‘attitude’ as a combination of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours sets the foundation for exploring its profound impact on transformative learning processes.

Attitude involves evaluating specific targets and behaviour in one’s environment, arising from recognising and assessing events, resulting in consistent feelings and opinions (Bajrami et al., 2021). Attitudes encompass cognition, emotion, and behaviour components, varying in strength, scope, or content (Wan and Lee, 2017). Research has shown that student achievement and attitudes are closely linked to their attitudes (Synnott et al., 2016), while negative attitudes, potentially increased by internet addiction, can adversely impact learning (Scholes, 2019). The shape of these attitudes is also influenced by contextual factors, showing the importance of teachers in fostering positive attitudes (Geesa et al., 2020; Óturai et al., 2023). Understanding and addressing learning attitudes is critical in the context of second language (L2) acquisition, especially in educational settings like TVE university. Indeed, the challenges faced by L2 learners, such as disengagement and lack of concentration (Alnahdi and Schwab, 2023), show the necessity of this focus. Therefore, examining learning attitudes in English speaking among L2 students is essential.

In today’s educational landscape, the widespread integration of technology plays a crucial role in enhancing student engagement. At TVE university, technology can create a motivating English-speaking environment, considering varied student resources (Chen et al., 2022). Positive attitudes (Islam et al., 2022) are pivotal for effective communication habits and persistence in speaking activities. In conclusion, learning attitudes significantly influence outcomes, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of effective teaching. Educators must select suitable methods, address individual differences, and foster positive attitudes (Sánchez et al., 2021), accommodating diverse learning styles. Therefore, as we understand the crucial role of positive learning attitudes and the impact of technology in enhancing these attitudes, it becomes essential to explore how diverse teaching strategies can be tailored to individual learning styles, furthering the effectiveness of education at TVE university.

2.3 Teaching strategy

Every student possesses a unique learning style, independent of their intellectual abilities or academic achievements. Substantial research has highlighted the influence of learning styles on students’ preferred learning methods. For example, a study (Uyun, 2022) involving college students revealed that learning style preferences vary based on gender

and subject matter. Park and Lee (2013) emphasised the importance of adaptive teaching and that no universally optimal teaching strategy exists for all students. Instead, instructional activities and strategies should be tailored to individual differences to optimise learning outcomes. Among these individual differences, learning style has emerged as a prominent area of investigation in cognitive psychology research (Ayersman and von Minden, 1995; Reed et al., 2000). Furthermore, learning styles are key determinants of students' academic performance (Ledwaba et al., 2020; Memon et al., 2022).

As teachers acknowledge the diversity in learning styles and the need for adaptive teaching, the focus shifts to the instructional methodology of oral communicative tasks (OCT), which is structured to cater to these varied learning preferences. The instructional methodology of OCTs is categorised into three distinct segments: initial, core, and supporting tasks (Schreiber et al., 2012). Initial tasks are crucial in priming students and generating their awareness and engagement in OCT. Illustrative instances of these tasks include generating a list of ten profession-relevant activities, outlining five actionable steps, articulating interconnected ideas on specific subjects, and constructing responses grounded in real-life scenarios (Facella et al., 2005).

After establishing the groundwork through initial tasks that engage students, the methodology progresses to core tasks, which delve deeper into practical, interactive learning experiences. The core tasks in this study encompass comprehensive interview sessions, comparative tasks, narrative completions, role-playing exercises, and group discussions (Dos Santos, 2019; Putri and Sari, 2021). Role-plays and responses anchored in situational context replicate genuine real-world situations. The 'short answer sessions' task is designed to equip students to respond effectively in English, making it an essential support tool.

The transition from the practical application of core tasks leads to the assessment of proficiency levels, a crucial step in measuring the effectiveness of these instructional strategies in real-world contexts. Concurrently, the initial proficiency levels of both the control and experimental groups were evaluated using self-introduction as a pre-test measure. In contrast, a spontaneous presentation titled *The Best Gift I Have Ever Received* was designated as the evaluation after the experiment. This study underscores the integration of activity-oriented instruction, which holds significant importance within business and management curricula. This pedagogical approach advocates for activities rooted in context that allow learners to engage in English discourse actively, thus preparing them for analogous encounters they may face in their future professional pursuits (Shantha and Mekala, 2018).

As the study progresses from evaluating the effectiveness of core tasks to a deeper exploration of language proficiency and its impact, the following section delves into the relationship between active student participation, speaking confidence, and the challenges of language anxiety in educational settings.

2.4 *Spoken confidence and language anxiety*

Research findings show active student participation in the classroom has been linked to higher academic performance compared to passive students. Consequently, language teachers commonly encounter the challenge of fostering student engagement and promoting active speaking in language classes. In their work, Nazarova and Umurova

(2016) proposed that the most effective approach to enhancing English fluency involves regular communication with native English speakers on a wide range of topics with varying difficulty levels. To cultivate self-confidence in English language classrooms, activities encompassing materials such as dialogues, monologues, and questions accompanied by comprehensive answers are suggested (Muqorrobin et al., 2022). These materials provide essential content, explanations of intricate word definitions and expressions/sentences, and an extensive lexicon applicable to everyday subjects.

According to Hung et al. (2023), EFL teachers in Taiwan often rely on outdated lecture-based and memory-focused methods, resulting in reduced student motivation, confidence, and ability. To investigate the most effective learning elements for enhancing motivation, confidence, and ability through video conferencing (Tran, 2022), the researchers employed investigative methods; such as EFA analysis, SEM, and so on. Speaking proficiency in any acquired skill often hinges on the development of the self-confidence to apply that skill effectively (Hapsari and Wu, 2022). This principle also applies to language acquisition, and various discussions explore the elements influencing individuals' confidence and skill levels in a given language.

For example, reduced anxiety notably contributes to success in attaining proficiency in a second language (Suzukida and Saito, 2023). Moreover, research has shown that a substantial number of language learners, approximately one-third, experience various levels of anxiety related to language learning (Chen, 2022; Tsai, 2022; Wu et al., 2011). This unease is particularly pronounced within language courses (Cutrone, 2009; Cutrone and Datzman, 2015). Language learners' confidence emerges as a potential factor impeding the attainment of higher levels of English proficiency (D'Orazzi and Hajek, 2022). Instances abound where a deficiency in confidence leads to communication apprehension, subsequently causing learners to shy away from engaging in situations that could otherwise enhance their language skills (Zaim et al., 2023).

According to Qiu and Fang (2022) concerns and anxieties are context-dependent, thus leading to potential variations in speaking fluency among individual learners due to transient feelings of unease (Gonzales and Rincones, 2013) or speaking pressure (Baldwin et al., 2022). Certain scholars propose that addressing communication apprehension (Okyar, 2023), which encompasses an anticipated fear of speaking (Cutrone and Beh, 2018), can be achieved through activities emphasising oral expression within controlled environments. Moreover, divergent perspectives exist among researchers: some posit that doubts stem from perceived language proficiency, while others present evidence that self-confidence and perceptions of inadequacy contribute to language-related anxiety (Baharuddin and Rashid, 2014; Zabihi et al., 2021). Transitioning from the exploration of language anxiety and its effects on speaking fluency, Chapter 3, delves into the practical aspects of the study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants and sampling methods

This study consisted of two distinct phases: a questionnaire and subsequent interviews conducted with students enrolled in the School of Business and Management in Tainan, Taiwan. The primary aim of the initial phase was to investigate English-speaking

confidence, experience, and situations among business college students using English as their second language.

Participants aged between 18 and 21, focusing on undergraduate students within the School of Business and Management. The selection of participants was strategic – this age group typically represents young adults at a crucial stage of language acquisition and professional development. By focusing on this demographic, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the English-speaking confidence and experiences of students transitioning into the professional world. Moreover, the School of Business and Management was chosen due to its relevance to the study's aim, as business students are likely to encounter English in their professional lives, making their proficiency and confidence in the language particularly pertinent. Therefore, the selection of participants used purposive sampling from February to March 2023, allowing for a more targeted approach by selecting participants directly related to the research questions and objectives.

Following Nunnally and Berstein's 1994 guidelines, the sample size exceeded five times the questionnaire items (20 items), setting the minimum valid responses at 100. This study successfully gathered 337 valid and completed questionnaires.

3.2 Measurement tool

3.2.1 Questionnaire scale

This study utilised the statistical analysis software SPSS 23 and used five-Likert. The 'confidence in speaking English scale' instrument was employed to investigate how participants evaluated their self-confidence and attitudes when using spoken English in real-life scenarios. The 'confidence in speaking English scale' was chosen for its precise alignment with the study's objective to measure self-confidence and attitudes in spoken English. This scale effectively evaluates how participants perceive their English speaking abilities in real-life situations, aligning with the study's focus on practical language use. Drawing from insights gathered through a comprehensive literature review, the study identified five factors interconnected with English confidence:

- SEC1 Attitude and aptitude for English learning (Hwang and Son, 2021).
- SEC2 Confidence in English usage within classroom settings (Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021; Griffie, 1997).
- SEC3 Personality in the context of the native language (Muqorrobin et al., 2022).
- SEC4 Belief in potential English capabilities (Songsiri, 2007).
- SEC5 Faith in current English proficiency (Park and Lee, 2005).

3.2.2 Interview question

This study used interviews as supplementary data to complement the questionnaire findings. Interviews are valuable tools for uncovering participants' experiential narratives and providing in-depth insights into the subject matter. Specifically, a semi-structured interview format was employed, allowing flexibility in questioning and encouraging open-ended discussions beyond a rigid question-and-answer framework. This approach

was chosen to facilitate comprehensive exploration. Additionally, interviews were recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription of information.

Table 1 Summary of participants' background

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Age/gender</i>	<i>English class level</i>	<i>Course</i>
4	18/male	1A, 1B, 2C	Freshmen
2	18/female	1A, 1B	Freshmen
3	19/male	1A, 1B, 1C	Sophomore
4	19/female	3A, 1C	Sophomore
4	20/male	2B, 2C	Junior
4	20/female	1A, 1B, 2C	Junior
2	21/male	1B, 1C	Senior
2	21/female	1B, 1C	Senior

4 Data analysis and finding

4.1 Survey results

Table 2 provides the statistical results for each factor, where "attitude and aptitude for English learning" (SEC1) got the lowest mean, with a Cronbach's α value of 0.789, and "belief in potential English capabilities" (SEC4) got the highest mean with a Cronbach's α value of 0.956.

4.2 Person correlation analysis

Table 3 shows that all five factors are significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). It is interesting to note the strong positive correlation between SEC1 and SEC5, indicating that individuals with stronger abilities in learning English and optimistic behaviours usually tend to exhibit greater confidence in their English speaking ability. Similarly, SEC4 and SEC5 show a strong correlation, emphasising the association between students' self-assurance in the outlook of their abilities in spoken English compared to their actual level.

Summarising the findings concerning the first research question reveals several key insights. Firstly, a robust correlation exists among the five constructs: ability, confidence, potential, and personality in L1. This underscores a significant interdependency among these factors for the participants. Secondly, the average ratings for ability (SEC1) generally remain below a moderate level, with some even reaching the lowest level. Furthermore, participants exhibit comparatively lower confidence in spoken English (SEC2) when compared to their confidence in using their native language (SEC3), indicating a lack of assurance in English communication. Encouragingly, participants display optimism about their future potential in English (SEC4), surpassing the other four factors and indicating noteworthy progress over their current ability (SEC5).

Table 2 Five factors descriptive statistics (N = 337)

<i>Construction</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha (α)</i>
SEC1: attitude and aptitude for English learning	1.1 Having proficiency in spoken English.	2.54	0.97	0.789
	1.2 Acquiring knowledge in spoken English.	2.56	0.99	
	1.3 Being self-assured in speaking English.	2.46	1.05	
	1.4 Deriving satisfaction from speaking English.	2.81	1.17	
	1.5 Feeling anxious when speaking English.	3.07	1.35	
SEC2: confidence in English usage within classroom settings	2.1 You are asked a question by the teacher in front of the entire class.	2.62	1.13	0.857
	2.2 You are instructed by the teacher to find/select a partner.	3.23	1.28	
	2.3 You are requested by the teacher to engage in conversation with a partner.	3.25	1.29	
	2.4 The instructor asks you to join a group discussion.	3.26	1.33	
	2.5 You have a question to present before the entire class.	2.42	1.14	
SEC3: personality in the context of the native language	3.1 When it comes to searching for a restaurant in Taiwan with five friends and me, I am typically the proactive one who suggests various options.	3.53	1.31	0.916
	3.2 When it comes to planning a movie outing with a group of friends, I am usually the proactive one who takes the lead in suggesting which movie to watch.	3.53	1.30	
	3.3 When travelling with friends, I am typically the one who takes the lead in planning the itinerary.	3.45	1.31	
	3.4 During Chinese classes, I am proactive in raising my hand or answering when the teacher asks a question in Chinese.	3.05	1.27	
SEC4: belief in potential English capabilities	4.1 I am confident that I will eventually achieve a high TOEIC score.	3.55	1.36	0.894
	4.2 I have confidence that I will eventually speak English fluently.	3.54	1.38	
	4.3 I am confident that I will score either an A or A+ in the English class.	3.61	1.37	
SEC5: faith in current English proficiency	5.1 I have the ability to learn how to speak English.	3.85	1.22	0.956
	5.2 I have achieved proficiency in English speaking.	2.57	1.11	
	5.3 I have the capability to learn English proficiently.	3.65	1.18	

Table 3 Five factors correlations (N = 337)

	<i>SEC1</i>	<i>SEC2</i>	<i>SEC3</i>	<i>SEC4</i>	<i>SEC5</i>
SEC1	1				
SEC2	0.563**	1			
SEC3	0.309**	0.411**	1		
SEC4	0.551**	0.425**	0.401**	1	
SEC5	0.674**	0.496**	0.451**	0.788**	1

Note: ** $p \leq 0.01$.

4.3 Enhancing confidence in spoken English

Among the twenty-five interviewees, six indicated that their confidence in English speaking remained unchanged after entering university. Within these six negative responses, two interviewees were freshmen, thus expressing uncertainty about any alteration in their English oral skills within four months (Montafej et al., 2021). Meanwhile, another interviewee reported diminished confidence subsequent to commencing university studies, attributing this to having spent a year studying abroad and then facing difficulties in progress upon returning to a non-English environment.

On the contrary, some interviewees described an incremental confidence in spoken English after entering university. In these positive responses, three had previously studied English at a cram school (#9, #12, and #21); additionally, eight participants (#1, #2, #3, #6, #15, #16, #23, and #25) attributed their improved confidence to engagement in specific English-related activities, such as preparing for specialised English course activities. Furthermore, seven respondents (#1, #6, #7, #8, #17, #22, and #25) were regarded as engaging in self-directed learning, including interactions with foreign friends, participation in church activities, and watching videos or movies. Notably, no one emphasised the efficacy of conventional school English courses, a point worthy of exploration.

4.4 Building spoken English confidence through real-world experience

The participants' endeavours to boost their confidence in English oral communication can be classified into two primary domains: autonomous learning and institution-based learning. Concerning the institution-based learning experiences, a pivotal recommendation is delineated for students, alongside multiple proposals aimed at educators. Among the twenty-five participants interviewed, seven individuals accentuated the substantial import of meticulous preparation as an efficacious strategy. Engaging in diverse activities, encompassing obligatory course presentations, academic department gatherings, and institutional competitions, was perceived to contribute significantly to the cultivation of self-assuredness in English speech. These activities were discerned to influence students' confidence levels positively.

4.4.1 Self-learning

Self-learning is the acquisition of knowledge, skills, or understanding without direct external guidance (Lim et al., 2010). It involves independent exploration,

experimentation, observation, and personal engagement, rather than relying solely on formal education or explicit instruction. Self-learning entails a proactive approach to gathering information, adapting to new challenges, and continually learning and problem-solving. This concept spans various domains, such as education, technology, and personal development (Loyens et al., 2008). In the context of technology and artificial intelligence, self-learning refers to systems or algorithms that enhance their performance by learning from data and experiences, eliminating the need for explicit programming for every possible scenario.

- Watching videos or movies:

“...Watch YouTube videos as much as possible and be brave to talk.” (#D-3-4)

“Listen to English music and video self-learning.” (#H-5-7)

“Watch American drama and then practice the situation in minds like foreigner asks directions or course question answering.” (#I-4-0)

- Making friends with foreigners:

“I have met foreigners and found that they were very nice. ... Also, Google or mobile phone can help and therefore I don't have to fear.” (#B-5-0)

“I often participated in discussion-type..., chat-type live courses, including church English classes or friend gatherings.” (#C-6-2)

“English movies and daily dialogues helped.” (#D-7-5)

“I have visited the foreign server, met foreigners, and made friends.” (#G-3-2)

“Use life-like dialogue and talk to international students.” (#I-5-1)

- Cram school:

“...Recently, I liked English more because I started learning in a cram school and hope to be asked; then,... I can practice my English.” (#H-1-9)

4.4.2 Academic education for students

Academic education for students refers to the organised and formal learning process offered within educational institutions like schools or universities. It imparts knowledge, skills, and comprehension across diverse subjects. This education follows a structured curriculum aligned with educational goals, covering math, sciences, humanities, languages, and more subjects. Academic education aims to cultivate intellectual growth, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a holistic grasp of the world, which equips students for further academic pursuits and future professional endeavours.

- Well preparation:

“I need to be fully prepared... When I was in high school and prepared a report for half a year, I felt so assured when I was reporting.” (#B-1)

“Practice a few times helps.” (#B-3-3)

“...More preparation is required for different types of oral or speaking activities.” (#L-6-5)

“Talk as much as possible and... those who want to learn will find their own way.” (#D-5-7)

“Thanks to the activity ‘be my guests’ of the department party, it’s my first time interacting with foreigners... After 2-3 days of drafting and private practice, I went to invite the international students and got positive feedback, which enhanced my self-confidence.” (#F-1-1)

“...Since I was a child, I have been very happy to go on stage and receive awards. Now I am more afraid, but I must be fully prepared. (#G-6)
...Fortunately, this junior year’s English briefing, I spent a lot preparing, and it feels good.” (#H-1)

“Be fully prepared, even if I am still a little anxious.” (#J-6-2)

4.4.3 *Enhancing educational skills for educators in academic settings*

Enhancing educational skills for educators in academic environments focuses on refining teaching capabilities within schools, colleges, universities, and similar establishments. This encompasses strategies, methods, and professional development to elevate teaching, student involvement, and academic achievements. The goal is to improve educational standards, enhance student outcomes, and advance academic approaches.

- Repeating the cycle of correction and submission:

“There’s nothing teachers can do to make students feel more comfortable in a two-hour weekly course... But participating in E-Plus this semester, it is helpful to revise and hand in the homework repeatedly. But the weekly hours were 9-hour in-class plus 3-hour self-study (12 credits). It is quite long.” (#K-4-7)

- Forced English briefing:

“There was a 5-minute PPT presentation to introduce GoPro in the first semester of the third grade... I prepared it from scratch, by myself and shared what I wanted to say to everyone, so I felt very confident and proud.” (#C-1-0)

“There were two English briefing courses in the third grade. They were stressful but useful.” (#D-7-7)

“...One experience I felt very confident in speaking English was the Third grade English presentation practice, 5 mins PPT full English presentation... We had homework every week. The PPT and oral practice were revised for one hour every week;... therefore, we do not have to hand in a huge report at the end of the semester.” (#E-2-3)

4.5 *Experiences affecting confidence in English oral proficiency*

Participants identified several factors that negatively impacted their confidence in spoken English. These factors included peer pressure, unfamiliar situations, and the availability of self-directed English learning resources (Ariani, 2020). While peer pressure can sometimes lead to positive educational outcomes, participants frequently highlighted it as a significant obstacle, causing a decline in their confidence during English communication. Participants expressed discomfort about potential judgment by others, regardless of their familiarity with the audience. Using a second language in public contexts often triggers performance anxiety (Rahmah and Azhimia, 2022). This anxiety is linked to fears of potential embarrassment, limited proficiency in the language, and the risk of making mistakes (Sheeba and Karthikeyan, 2018).

4.5.1 *Interact with people/peer pressure*

- Fear of losing face:

“...During my freshman year, the teacher instructed us to deliver English speeches on stage. This made me feel a bit nervous,... and I was worried that some classmates might intentionally embarrass me.” (#G-7-4)
- Fear of weak English ability:

“Engaging with peers who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in English evokes a sense of inadequacy within me.” (#H-4-2)
- Fear of making mistakes:

“Mispronunciation and being corrected were very uncomfortable experiences for me when speaking English.” (#A-8-6)

“I encountered a foreigner who warmly greeted me, but I was afraid of making a mistake or misunderstanding, so I quickly apologised and walked away.” (#B-2-2)
- Fear of facing ostracism:

“If I have a question for the entire class, I’d pose it respectfully... out of concern for my own well-being.” (#E-3-1)

“During a past instance, I presented an English speech to my fellow classmates’ in Taiwan... Throughout this occurrence, I experienced the unease of being mocked and treated poorly due to the jealousy of my peers.” (#I-4-1)

“...While delivering my speech, I found myself unable to avoid anticipating the responses my classmates would have after my presentation. ...This encounter significantly contributed to a sense of discomfort regarding my proficiency in spoken English.” (#J-3-3)

4.5.2 *Participate in social interactions/managing unfamiliar situations*

- Familiarity:

“...I know them because they are my classmates. It’s okay; I won’t feel uncomfortable.” (#B-4-6)

“I’m comfortable with my classmates since we’re familiar with each other... However, if they were strangers, I’d feel more anxious. (#B-6-7)
- Fear tends to intensify when conversing with unfamiliar individuals:

“...When the teacher poses questions to me, if I don’t understand, I will ask the teacher for clarification... The accuracy of the grammar or vocabulary I use when answering the teacher’s questions are not crucial.” (#A-2-3)

“However, ...if there is limited interaction with the teacher during class, I refrain from answering questions due to the fear of making mistakes. On the other hand, if there is active interaction, I am more willing to engage.” (#C-3-6)

4.5.3 *Educational institution English self-learning centre*

- Negative opinion:

“The self-learning center that is characterised by obsession has negative consequences.” (#B-1-7)

- Neutral opinion:

“Offering free foreign language courses in the school’s self-learning center enhances self-confidence, initiative, and the willingness to engage in conversation. While our English proficiency didn’t see significant improvement, the courses did contribute to learning by highlighting areas for improvement. They can serve as a catalyst for learning.” (#A-3-3)¹

The comfort level that students experience when conversing with their dialogue partners significantly influences spoken confidence in the school environment. Among the interviewees, seven highlighted their ease in interacting with familiar individuals like instructors or classmates who are open to communication. These findings correlate with concerns about maintaining one’s reputation and are influenced by interpersonal interactions. Therefore, lots of scholars emphasise educators’ role in cultivating an inclusive (Aziz and Kashinathan, 2021; Park and Lee, 2005) and collaborative classroom (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Masutani, 2021) to encourage active student engagement (Ratnasari, 2020) in the target language. None of the students spontaneously mentioned the impact of the English self-learning centre on spoken confidence in the school context (Quinto and Macayan, 2019). Nonetheless, upon probing by the interviewer, two participants shared insights. They conveyed that the centre’s contribution to their learning progress is relatively limited. Despite facing pressure, one freshman still participated despite its detrimental effect (#B-1-7).

5 Suggestions for developing a positive learning path and behaviour

Based on the analysis of interview feedback, four recommendations have emerged from the participants’ experiences: deliberate practice, scaffolding, real-life application, and learning from mistakes. This section will start by delving into the specifics of these four aspects and evaluating them in terms of attitude and learning progression categories.

Firstly, the primary suggestion for boosting confidence in English speaking revolves around consistent and ample practice well before assignments are due. Students widely view increased practice as their fundamental approach to enhancing self-confidence in spoken English (Briones et al., 2023). Consequently, educators should offer enhanced practice opportunities to spoken English learners. Despite students recognising English’s significance for their academics and future careers, inherent human tendencies such as the fear of embarrassment (#G-7-4) or making errors (#A-8-6 and #B-2-2), coupled with a tendency to respond positively to external pressure (#E-3-1, #G-3-2, #H-1-9, and #H-5-7), present challenges when teaching English speaking in the classroom. Notably, instructors must remember that consistent practice throughout the learning journey is crucial despite initial resistance from students when introducing assignments and challenges. This approach can lead to eventual self-confidence development, akin to the saying ‘no pain, no gain’, albeit requiring significant effort from educators. Teachers must play multiple roles: a firm coach setting clear rules, a patient educator revisiting instructional content and clarifications, and a motivator providing support and encouragement. Moreover, the teacher’s astuteness in adopting the proper role at the right time is imperative. Teachers’ roles as facilitators, motivators, helpers, and encouragers

foster students' learning, encouraging a transition from negative to positive attitudes toward language acquisition (Yashima et al., 2004).

The second proposal emphasises that successful learning outcomes can be attributed to the intricate scaffolding meticulously established by the teacher (#E-2-3). An additional suggestion has been illuminated previously in the context of #K-4-7 within the iterative process of revising and submitting. Furthermore, as indicated in #D-5-7, the proposal to ensure the success of an on-stage presentation entails preliminary group discussions. Similarly, this example highlights the implementation of scaffolding skills, wherein students are diligently equipped for a public class report in advance, leading to a remarkable alleviation of anxiety.

The third suggestion centres around immersing oneself in authentic learning contexts, as highlighted by numerous interviewees who emphasised their motivation drawn from interactions with individuals from other countries (#B-5-0, #C-6-2, #D-7-5, #G-3-2, and #I-5-1). An authentic learning setting underscores its importance by cultivating students' interest in novel experiences, such as conversing with international peers on campus. Instructors can create opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to interact and build friendships. Prioritising authentic activities and materials (Aziz and Kashinathan, 2021) alongside task-based language teaching (Ellis et al., 2019; Howji et al., 2021) is strongly recommended to foster learners' self-assurance and motivation for successful language communication.

Finally, it is crucial to draw lessons from mistakes. The prevalence of psychological vulnerability has surged in the 21st century, leading our interviewees to hesitate to interact with unfamiliar individuals or even peers. While existing literature suggests educators should foster an inclusive environment that encourages students to engage and assures them of the acceptability of mistakes (Chang, 2018; Park and Lee, 2005), the present study advances these notions. Instructors should encourage students to embrace errors, highlighting that learning from personal experiential mistakes holds immense value. Such an approach enhances the retention of materials over an extended duration (Dweck, 2015). In parallel, learners should nurture self-motivation (Ratnasari, 2020; Nishida, 2013). Moreover, they periodically embrace a propensity for risk-taking (Araminta, 2018).

Summarising the findings relevant to the second research question, it is clear that learners prioritise 'sufficient preparation' as the primary learning attitude that contributes to heightened confidence in spoken English. Additionally, the study underscores the value of learning from mistakes. Furthermore, learners emphasise the importance of 'self-encouragement' (Wang and Roopchund, 2015) and the readiness to embrace 'risk-taking' (Araminta, 2018) as favourable mindsets. On the other hand, educators need to scaffold lessons by breaking up content into chunks to meet students' needs and to provide a supportive environment that promotes the acceptance of errors.

6 Conclusions

The statistical analysis offers valuable insights into participants' spoken English proficiency and confidence levels. Firstly, it reveals a significant interplay among factors like capability, comprehension, faith in oneself, and gratification in spoken English, suggesting a mutual impact between these variables. Secondly, engaging in private

conversations using participants' native language (L1) or within private settings seems correlated with higher confidence levels. Additionally, participants exhibit more assuredness in their outlook on English proficiency than their actual skill level.

However, the overall values deviate significantly below the median, causing educators' concerns about prospective students' English-speaking abilities upon graduation. The findings of this study offer a comprehensive understanding of strategies to enhance spoken English proficiency among participants. Analysing questionnaire and interview data sheds light on a paradox: while immediate attention is necessary due to concerns about participants' confidence and competence in spoken English, boosting their self-assurance in English speaking requires a long-term approach. The study emphasises the absence of quick-fix solutions for improving spoken English skills and underscores the importance of fostering a persistent learning attitude among participants. This involves meticulous preparation, embracing errors as learning opportunities, fostering self-encouragement, and encouraging a willingness to take risks. Educators are advised to adopt a growth-oriented mindset, recognising that learning is an ongoing journey demanding substantial time commitment. Otherwise, the recommended learning path includes various elements such as ample practice opportunities, scaffolded instruction, an authentic learning environment, and consistent motivation for learners to experiment and learn from mistakes. Lastly, an unexpected yet crucial reminder for course instructors is acknowledging learners' intrinsic conflict. While actively seeking challenges for personal growth, learners might also exhibit resistance. Recognising and addressing this internal conflict can lead to tailored instructional approaches that mitigate resistance and facilitate effective language learning.

The educational expedition begins with learners who foster favourable dispositions toward learning and educators who deploy efficacious instructional methodologies. Via proactive engagement in the educational trajectory, students demonstrate remarkable progress, culminating in the genuine cultivation of self-assurance grounded in their personal accomplishments. This newfound self-confidence capacitates them to wholeheartedly adopt and extract gratification from the application of spoken English. Notably, the research outcomes underscore the pivotal importance of deriving enjoyment from the learning process, given that it emerges as the most robust predictor of enduring enhancements in language proficiency.

In conclusion, the study's findings suggest practical applications for enhancing spoken English proficiency in educational settings. Educators are encouraged to develop individualised learning plans, focusing on practical skills and creating an environment where errors are seen as learning opportunities. It is primordial to align a long-term, growth-oriented approach with strategies focusing on student motivation and engagement. Therefore, educators and policymakers can align their teaching methods and policies with those insights. These recommendations aim to create a more effective and enjoyable language learning experience, fostering a persistent learning attitude and a genuine self-confidence improvement in spoken English.

7 Limitation

This paper has limitations that require recognition. Firstly, the use of non-probability sampling limits the generalisability of the findings to a broader population. It is important to note that this study adopts an exploratory rather than a confirmatory approach.

Secondly, relying solely on questionnaires may have restricted the depth of the findings, as the numerical results revealed only marginal distinctions among the five factors. Future research should strive to overcome these limitations by incorporating additional methods such as learners' or instructors' diaries and classroom observations. Employing triangulation of data will facilitate a more comprehensive comprehension of the subject matter.

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Notes

- 1 The school has established an English self-learning centre, where students are mandated to get credits by watching English films.