



Assessment of Students' Confidence in Speaking English: A Case Study of Anshun University, Guizhou Province, China

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were threefold: 1) To examine the level of non-English major students' confidence in speaking English at Anshun University in Guizhou Province, China; 2) To investigate the factors influencing their confidence; and 3) To analyze the predictive effects of speaking self-efficacy, foreign language speaking anxiety, and external learning factors related to English speaking on students' confidence in speaking English. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 400 students through stratified random sampling, with 392 valid responses collected for analysis. The data collected were analyzed by descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression.

The results indicated that: 1) non-English major students demonstrated a moderate level of English-speaking confidence ($M = 3.08$; $S.D. = 0.68$); 2) Correlation analysis showed that speaking self-efficacy and external learning factors were positively and significantly related to English-speaking confidence ($r = .61$ and $.53$), while speaking anxiety was negatively associated with it ($r = -.49$); 3) Multiple regression analysis further revealed that all three predictors jointly explained 56% of students' English-speaking confidence, with speaking self-efficacy was the strongest predictor (46%). The findings suggest that enhancing students' self-efficacy, reducing speaking anxiety, and creating supportive learning environments can effectively improve students' confidence in speaking English.

Keywords: English speaking confidence; self-efficacy; foreign-language speaking anxiety; external learning factors; non-English-major undergraduates; Anshun University.



1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and international mobility, the ability to communicate effectively in spoken English has become an essential competence for university graduates. English proficiency, particularly oral communication ability, plays an important role in academic development, international collaboration, and professional competitiveness. In China, higher education institutions have increasingly emphasized the development of communicative competence in English in order to meet the demands of global engagement and cross-cultural communication (Zhang & Wang, 2025). As a result, improving students' English-speaking ability has become a major objective of College English education in Chinese universities.

Despite these policy initiatives and curriculum reforms, many Chinese university students continue to encounter significant difficulties in developing effective oral English skills. Previous studies indicate that students often demonstrate limited vocabulary range, inaccurate pronunciation, and insufficient fluency, which restrict their ability to express ideas clearly in spoken English (Jiang & Zhou, 2022). In addition to linguistic limitations, affective factors also play an important role in shaping learners' oral communication behaviors. Research has shown that many students experience psychological barriers when speaking English, including fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and anxiety during public speaking situations (Liyanage et al., 2014). These challenges are often associated with traditional examination-oriented learning environments that prioritize grammar and reading over communicative interaction.

From a psychological perspective, learners' beliefs about their own abilities can strongly influence their willingness to engage in communication. Self-efficacy, which refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to successfully perform specific tasks, has been widely recognized as an important factor affecting language learning behaviors. Students with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to participate more actively in speaking activities and persist in communication tasks even when they encounter difficulties (Onoda, 2013). Conversely, learners with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid speaking opportunities and may perceive oral communication as stressful or threatening.

Another important affective variable influencing oral performance is foreign language speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety refers to feelings of nervousness, worry, or fear when individuals are required to communicate in a foreign language. Previous research has shown that anxiety can significantly reduce students' willingness to communicate and negatively affect their confidence in speaking English (Manipuspika, 2018). Students who experience high levels of anxiety may hesitate to answer questions



in class, avoid participating in discussions, or remain silent during oral activities. Such behaviors may limit their opportunities to practice and further hinder the development of their speaking competence.

In the Chinese context, these challenges may be particularly evident among non-English-major university students. College English courses in China are mainly designed for students whose major fields are not related to English, and these learners often receive limited opportunities to practice spoken communication in authentic contexts. As a result, many non-English majors may complete years of English study but still feel reluctant to speak English in classroom situations (Du & Guan, 2016). Empirical studies have also demonstrated that speaking anxiety can negatively influence students' oral English performance and learning outcomes among Chinese EFL learners (Liu, 2018).

Although previous studies have examined various psychological and contextual factors affecting English-speaking performance, relatively limited research has focused on students in regional universities in southwestern China. Universities located in less developed regions may face additional challenges, such as fewer learning resources, limited exposure to authentic English environments, and more traditional teaching approaches. These conditions may further influence students' confidence in speaking English and their willingness to participate in oral communication activities.

Therefore, it is important to investigate the level of English-speaking confidence among non-English-major students and to explore the factors that influence their confidence in speaking English. By examining students' psychological characteristics and learning conditions in a specific institutional context, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence that can support the improvement of College English teaching and help enhance students' oral communication competence. Specifically, this study was aimed to: 1) examine the level of non-English major students' confidence in speaking English at Anshun University in Guizhou Province, China; 2) investigate the factors influencing their confidence; and 3) analyze the predictive effects of speaking self-efficacy, foreign language speaking anxiety, and external learning factors related to English speaking on students' confidence in speaking English.

2. Literature Review and Research Related

Speaking confidence has become an increasingly important topic in research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in contexts where students have limited opportunities to use English for authentic communication. In many EFL settings, learners may possess adequate linguistic knowledge but still hesitate to



participate in oral communication due to psychological or contextual constraints. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence students' confidence in speaking English is essential for improving language teaching and learning outcomes.

One of the most influential theoretical perspectives for understanding learners' confidence is self-efficacy theory, proposed by Bandura (1997). Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform specific tasks successfully. In language learning contexts, speaking self-efficacy reflects learners' perceived capability to communicate orally in the target language. According to social cognitive theory, learners with higher self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater effort, persistence, and willingness to engage in challenging tasks. Empirical research has consistently confirmed the positive role of self-efficacy in language learning outcomes. For example, Raofi, Tan, and Chan (2012) reviewed a large body of research and concluded that language self-efficacy is positively associated with academic achievement, learner autonomy, and engagement in communicative tasks. Similarly, Wang, Patterson, and Long (2024) reported that self-efficacy significantly predicts student engagement and participation in foreign language learning contexts.

More specifically, studies focusing on speaking skills indicate that speaking self-efficacy is strongly associated with oral performance. Zhang, Ardasheva, and Austin (2020) found that Chinese university students' self-efficacy in English public speaking significantly predicted their speaking performance during a semester-long course. Likewise, Demirel, Türkel, and Aydin (2020) demonstrated that university students with stronger speaking self-efficacy beliefs tended to report more positive speaking experiences and greater willingness to participate in speaking activities. These findings suggest that learners' perceptions of their own abilities play a crucial role in shaping their confidence and behavior during oral communication.

Another important affective variable influencing speaking confidence is foreign language anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with language learning and communication. Their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) identifies three major components of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. In speaking contexts, anxiety often arises when learners worry about making mistakes, being misunderstood, or receiving negative feedback from teachers and peers. Such emotional reactions may reduce learners' willingness to communicate and negatively affect their perceived competence.

Subsequent research has further confirmed the negative impact of anxiety on language learning. Amengual-Pizarro (2018) found that foreign language classroom



anxiety significantly influences students' performance and participation in English for Specific Purposes courses. Similarly, Chen (2024) reported that speaking anxiety among Chinese university students was negatively associated with spoken English proficiency and self-perceived competence. Meta-analytic evidence also indicates that language anxiety is consistently related to lower language achievement, particularly in productive skills such as speaking (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020). These findings highlight the importance of addressing learners' emotional experiences when attempting to enhance speaking confidence.

Beyond individual psychological variables, research in second language acquisition also emphasizes the broader role of affective factors. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis proposes that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can influence how effectively learners process language input (Krashen, 1982). When learners experience high levels of anxiety or low confidence, the affective filter becomes stronger and limits language acquisition. Conversely, positive emotions and supportive learning environments can lower the affective filter and facilitate language learning.

Building on this perspective, later research has explored how affective variables interact with learners' willingness to communicate (WTC). MacIntyre and colleagues proposed that communication confidence—consisting of perceived competence and low anxiety—plays a central role in determining learners' willingness to initiate communication in a second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Classroom environment and social interaction can further influence learners' communicative behaviors. For instance, Peng (2012) demonstrated that teacher support, classroom climate, and peer interaction significantly shape students' willingness to communicate in Chinese EFL classrooms. Similarly, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) highlighted the complex relationship between positive emotions, enjoyment, and anxiety in foreign language learning.

In addition to psychological variables, external classroom factors also play an important role in shaping students' speaking confidence. Instructional methods, opportunities for oral practice, and teacher feedback can significantly influence learners' confidence and participation in speaking activities. Research suggests that communicative and task-based teaching approaches provide more opportunities for meaningful interaction and therefore help students develop greater confidence in speaking English. Studies conducted in Chinese EFL contexts have shown that supportive classroom environments, collaborative activities, and constructive feedback



can enhance students' confidence and encourage active participation in oral communication tasks.

Recent empirical studies also suggest that speaking confidence is closely related to students' actual speaking performance. AlSaqqaf, Xin, and Sharif (2023) found that Chinese non-English-major students with higher self-confidence in oral English tended to perform better in speaking assessments. Similarly, Xu et al. (2022) demonstrated that scaffolded speaking activities and strategy training could significantly improve both students' speaking self-efficacy and language proficiency. These findings indicate that speaking confidence is not a fixed trait but can be strengthened through effective instructional practices.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that speaking confidence in EFL contexts is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors, including learners' self-efficacy beliefs, foreign language anxiety, affective experiences, and classroom learning conditions. Higher self-efficacy and lower anxiety tend to promote greater participation in oral communication and better speaking performance, whereas negative emotional experiences and limited speaking opportunities may undermine learners' confidence. These findings highlight the importance of examining both internal psychological variables and external learning environments when investigating students' confidence in speaking English.

Based on these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, the present study investigates the level of speaking confidence among non-English-major students at Anshun University and examines how speaking self-efficacy, foreign language speaking anxiety, and external learning factors jointly influence students' confidence in speaking English.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships among speaking self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, external learning factors, and students' confidence in speaking English. The design was appropriate for identifying patterns of association and determining the predictive contribution of multiple independent variables to a single dependent variable. By applying statistical modeling techniques, the study aimed to evaluate both the strength and direction of relationships among psychological and contextual factors.



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3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of four major scales: speaking confidence, speaking self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, and external learning factors. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The speaking confidence scale assessed students' perceived comfort, participation, and adequacy in English-speaking situations. The self-efficacy scale measured students' beliefs about their ability to successfully complete speaking tasks, such as answering questions or giving short presentations. The speaking anxiety scale evaluated emotional tension and fear of negative evaluation during oral communication. The external learning factors scale captured students' perceptions of classroom support, speaking opportunities, teacher feedback, and peer interaction.

Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. All four scales demonstrated acceptable reliability levels, indicating satisfactory internal consistency for subsequent statistical analysis.

3.4 Reliability of the Instrument

Prior to further statistical analyses, the internal consistency reliability of the research instrument was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability Coefficients of the Research Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Speaking Confidence	9	0.894
Speaking Self-efficacy	9	0.901

Speaking Anxiety	9	0.887
External Learning Factors	11	0.912
Overall Instrument	38	0.936

As shown in Table 1, all constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.887 to 0.912, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. The overall reliability of the instrument reaches 0.936, indicating excellent internal consistency among the questionnaire items.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to determine the overall levels of speaking confidence, self-efficacy, anxiety, and external learning factors. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the variables.

To further evaluate the predictive effects of the independent variables on speaking confidence, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using the enter method. Speaking confidence was treated as the dependent variable, while speaking self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, and external learning factors were entered simultaneously as predictors. Prior to interpreting the regression results, statistical assumptions were examined. Correlation coefficients among predictors were below the commonly accepted multicollinearity threshold, and collinearity diagnostics (tolerance and variance inflation factor values) indicated no multicollinearity concerns. The Durbin-Watson statistic suggested independence of residuals. The level of statistical significance for all analyses was set at $p < .05$.

4. Research results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Major Variables

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the overall levels of speaking confidence, speaking self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, and external learning factors.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of the Major Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Speaking Confidence	3.08	0.68	Moderate
Speaking Self-Efficacy	3.22	0.63	Moderate
Speaking Anxiety	3.41	0.72	Moderate–High
External Learning Factors	3.15	0.66	Moderate

The results indicate that students show a moderate level of speaking confidence and self-efficacy, while speaking anxiety appears relatively higher. External learning factors are perceived as moderately supportive of students’ speaking development.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the four major variables.

Table 3. Pearson Correlations Among Major Variable

Variable	1	2	3	4
Speaking Confidence	1			
Speaking Self-Efficacy	.61***	1		
Speaking Anxiety	-.49***	-.44***	1	
External Learning Factors	.53***	.58***	-.36***	1

***p < .001

The correlation analysis reveals significant relationships among the variables. Speaking self-efficacy and external learning factors are positively correlated with speaking confidence, whereas speaking anxiety shows a negative relationship with speaking confidence.

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which speaking self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, and external learning factors predict students' speaking confidence.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients for Predicting Speaking Confidence

Predictor	B	SE B	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.62	0.14	-	4.43	< .001
Speaking Self-Efficacy	0.46	0.04	.43	11.50	< .001
Speaking Anxiety	-0.24	0.03	-.25	-8.02	< .001
External Learning Factors	0.31	0.04	.29	8.06	< .001

The regression results indicate that speaking self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of speaking confidence, followed by external learning factors, while speaking anxiety negatively predicts speaking confidence.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The present study examined the level of speaking confidence among non-English-major undergraduates at Anshun University in Guizhou Province, China, and investigated the predictive roles of speaking self-efficacy, speaking anxiety, and external learning factors. The findings indicate that students' overall speaking confidence remains at a moderate level. Although learners demonstrate a basic willingness to participate in oral English activities, their confidence is not sufficiently strong to support spontaneous and sustained communication in academic settings.

Among the three predictors, speaking self-efficacy emerged as the most influential factor in shaping students' confidence. This finding reinforces the theoretical assumption that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities play a central role in regulating academic behavior. Students who perceive themselves as capable of organizing ideas and expressing opinions in English are more likely to approach speaking tasks with assurance. The strong predictive effect of self-efficacy suggests that confidence is not merely a reflection of linguistic competence but is deeply rooted in learners' cognitive self-perceptions.



Speaking anxiety was found to negatively predict confidence, confirming the constraining role of emotional tension in oral communication. When students experience fear of negative evaluation or apprehension during public speaking, their willingness to communicate decreases. Anxiety appears to undermine students' self-assessment of competence, which in turn weakens their overall confidence. This result highlights the importance of addressing affective barriers alongside cognitive skill development in English instruction.

External learning factors also demonstrated a significant positive influence on speaking confidence. Supportive classroom environments, meaningful speaking opportunities, and constructive teacher feedback contribute to students' perception of readiness to communicate. However, the moderate level of external support observed in this study indicates that classroom conditions may not fully maximize students' confidence growth. This suggests that institutional and instructional adjustments remain necessary to create more interaction-oriented learning contexts.

Taken together, the findings underscore that speaking confidence is shaped by the combined influence of cognitive beliefs, emotional states, and environmental conditions. Rather than functioning independently, these factors interact dynamically to influence students' oral communication behavior. For regional universities such as Anshun University, strengthening students' mastery experiences, reducing evaluative pressure, and fostering supportive classroom climates may be essential steps toward enhancing speaking confidence. The study contributes empirical evidence to understanding oral English development in western Chinese university contexts and provides a foundation for further research integrating psychological and contextual perspectives.

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