



Teachers Emotional Intelligence as a Strategy to Encourage Students' Speaking Confidence and Performance

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-25	<i>Emotional factors play an important role in students' participation and performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking classrooms. However, the emotional dimension of speaking instruction is often overlooked in teaching practices, particularly in vocational school contexts where students frequently experience low confidence and speaking anxiety. This study aims to explore how teachers' Emotional Intelligence (EI) is implemented as a pedagogical strategy to encourage students' speaking confidence and performance. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed in a vocational high school in Indonesia involving three English teachers and six eleventh-grade students. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed using an interactive thematic analysis model. The findings show that teachers applied EI through emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathetic communication, and supportive feedback. These strategies helped create a supportive and psychologically safe classroom environment that reduced students' speaking anxiety and encouraged active participation. As a result, students demonstrated greater confidence, improved fluency, and stronger willingness to communicate. This study highlights the importance of Emotional Intelligence as a practical pedagogical competence that supports both students' emotional well-being and speaking development in EFL classrooms.</i>
Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Speaking Confidence; EFL Vocational Learners; Affective Support; Speaking Performance	
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1. Introduction

Speaking is widely recognized as a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in vocational education where communication competence is closely related to students' future professional needs. Vocational school students are expected to develop the ability to express ideas clearly and interact effectively in workplace-related situations. However, many EFL learners still encounter difficulties when participating in speaking activities. These difficulties often include low confidence, speaking anxiety, and fear of making mistakes, which may limit students' willingness to communicate in the classroom (Horwitz, 2016; Marwan, 2022). As a result, students frequently avoid speaking opportunities, which slows the development of their communicative competence.

Recent studies in applied linguistics emphasize that language learning is not determined only by cognitive ability but is also strongly influenced by emotional factors. Learners' emotional conditions, such as confidence, anxiety, and motivation, play an important role in shaping their participation and performance during speaking activities (Oxford, 2017; Dewaele, 2023). When students feel anxious or insecure, they tend to remain silent and hesitate to express their ideas. Conversely, when the classroom environment is emotionally supportive, students are more willing to participate and practice speaking. Therefore, addressing the emotional dimension of language learning is essential in improving students' speaking engagement.

One concept that has received growing attention in this context is Emotional Intelligence (EI). Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). In educational settings, EI is considered an important factor that supports positive interpersonal relationships and effective communication. Teachers with strong emotional intelligence are better able to manage classroom interactions, respond to students' emotional needs, and create a supportive learning atmosphere.

In EFL classrooms, the role of teachers' emotional competence becomes particularly significant because teachers influence the emotional climate of the learning environment. When teachers demonstrate empathy, patience, and supportive communication, students tend to feel more comfortable participating in speaking activities. Previous research indicates that emotionally supportive teaching practices can reduce students' speaking anxiety and increase their willingness to communicate (MacIntyre & Dewaele, 2020; Mercer & Kostoulas, 2021). These findings suggest that Emotional Intelligence is not only a personal trait but also an important pedagogical resource that can support students' emotional readiness to speak.

Students' willingness to communicate (WTC) is often influenced by their perception of emotional safety in the classroom. Learners who feel supported and

respected by their teachers are more likely to express their ideas and participate actively in discussions (Dewaele & Li, 2021). On the other hand, classrooms characterized by criticism, pressure, or lack of emotional support may increase students' anxiety and discourage participation. These challenges are frequently observed in vocational schools where students may have limited exposure to English and varying levels of language proficiency.

Although Emotional Intelligence has been widely discussed in educational psychology, its application in EFL speaking instruction remains relatively underexplored, especially in Indonesian vocational school contexts. Many previous studies focus on measuring students' emotional intelligence quantitatively or examining general correlations between EI and academic achievement (Yin, 2021; Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023). However, fewer studies investigate how teachers actually implement EI in classroom practice and how these emotionally informed strategies influence students' speaking confidence.

Understanding how teachers apply Emotional Intelligence in real classroom interactions is important because emotional support can directly affect students' confidence and participation. Teachers may demonstrate EI through various practices, such as recognizing students' anxiety, providing supportive feedback, using encouraging language, and maintaining positive interpersonal communication during speaking activities. These strategies may help students overcome fear and build greater confidence in expressing their ideas.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore how Emotional Intelligence is implemented by English teachers as a strategy to encourage students' speaking confidence and performance in a vocational school context. Specifically, this research addresses three questions:

1. How is Emotional Intelligence implemented during speaking instruction?
2. How does Emotional Intelligence influence students' confidence in speaking?
3. In what ways does Emotional Intelligence contribute to students' speaking performance?

By examining teachers' emotionally responsive practices in real classroom situations, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the role of Emotional Intelligence in supporting students' speaking development. The findings are expected to contribute to both theoretical discussions and practical strategies for creating emotionally supportive EFL classrooms, particularly in vocational education settings.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore how teachers' Emotional Intelligence (EI) is implemented as a strategy to encourage students' speaking confidence and performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows the

researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom interactions, teachers' emotional practices, and students' responses during speaking activities. The study focused on examining naturally occurring classroom situations to identify how emotional support and communication strategies influence students' participation in speaking tasks.

The data were collected from one vocational high school in Indonesia. The participants consisted of three English teachers and six eleventh-grade students who were actively involved in speaking activities during English lessons. The teachers were selected because they regularly conducted speaking practices in their classrooms, while the students were chosen based on their participation in classroom speaking activities. The study focused on classroom interactions that occurred during speaking practice sessions. These sessions provided opportunities to observe how teachers demonstrated emotional awareness, empathy, and supportive communication while encouraging students to participate in speaking tasks.

Data were collected over a two-month period from September to October 2024. Three main techniques were used in this study: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. First, classroom observations were conducted to examine how teachers implemented emotional intelligence strategies during speaking instruction. The observations focused on teachers' verbal and non-verbal responses, emotional support, and classroom communication patterns.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers and students to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding emotional support in speaking activities. The interviews allowed participants to describe how emotional interactions in the classroom influenced students' confidence and willingness to speak. Third, documentation such as lesson plans and classroom activity records was collected to support and contextualize the observational data. These documents helped provide additional information about the structure and objectives of the speaking lessons.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed several steps. First, all observation notes and interview transcripts were carefully reviewed to obtain a general understanding of the data. Second, relevant segments of the data were coded to identify patterns related to teachers' emotional practices and students' responses during speaking activities. The coding process involved grouping similar responses and behaviors into categories such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathetic communication, and supportive feedback.

These categories were then examined to identify broader themes that explain how Emotional Intelligence strategies influenced students' speaking confidence and participation. To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study applied data triangulation by comparing information obtained from different data sources, including classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. The

triangulation process helped confirm the consistency of the findings across multiple perspectives. In addition, the researcher conducted careful data review and interpretation to ensure that the identified themes accurately reflected participants' experiences and classroom practices.

3. Result

This section presents the findings of the study regarding how teachers' Emotional Intelligence (EI) was implemented during speaking instruction and how it influenced students' confidence and participation. The results are organized into three main themes derived from the data analysis.

1. Emotional Awareness in Classroom Interaction

The first theme identified in the data was teachers' emotional awareness during classroom interaction. Teachers demonstrated an ability to recognize students' emotional conditions when they were hesitant or anxious about participating in speaking activities. During observations, several students showed signs of nervousness such as avoiding eye contact, speaking softly, or refusing to volunteer answers. In response to these situations, teachers attempted to reduce students' anxiety by acknowledging their emotional state and encouraging them to participate gradually. For example, instead of forcing students to speak immediately, teachers often invited them to respond with short answers or simple expressions. This strategy helped students feel less pressured and more comfortable participating in speaking tasks.

Interview data also confirmed that students felt more confident when teachers showed understanding toward their difficulties. One student explained that supportive responses from the teacher made them feel less afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. These findings indicate that teachers' awareness of students' emotional conditions played an important role in creating a supportive environment for speaking practice.

2. Empathetic Communication and Supportive Feedback

The second theme relates to the use of empathetic communication and supportive feedback during speaking activities. Teachers frequently used encouraging language to motivate students to express their ideas. Instead of focusing on students' errors, teachers tended to provide positive reinforcement before giving corrections. Observation data revealed that teachers often used phrases such as encouragement, praise, and reassurance when students attempted to speak. These responses helped maintain students' motivation and prevented them from feeling embarrassed when making mistakes.

In addition to verbal encouragement, teachers also demonstrated supportive behavior through their tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. These non-verbal signals contributed to a positive classroom atmosphere where students

felt more comfortable expressing themselves. Students also reported that supportive feedback helped them become more confident during speaking activities. When teachers responded positively to their attempts, students felt more motivated to continue practicing English.

3. Emotional Regulation and Classroom Climate

The third theme identified was teachers' ability to regulate emotions and maintain a positive classroom climate. Teachers demonstrated emotional regulation by remaining patient and calm when students struggled with speaking tasks. During observations, teachers avoided showing frustration when students made repeated mistakes or took longer to respond. Instead, they maintained a supportive tone and encouraged students to try again. This approach helped prevent negative emotional reactions that could discourage students from participating.

A positive classroom climate was also created through collaborative speaking activities such as pair discussions and group conversations. These activities allowed students to practice speaking in smaller groups, which reduced anxiety and increased participation. Overall, the findings suggest that emotional regulation and supportive classroom interaction contributed to a learning environment that encouraged students to participate more actively in speaking activities.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers' Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in supporting students' speaking development in EFL classrooms. Emotional awareness, empathetic communication, and emotional regulation were identified as key strategies that helped reduce students' anxiety and encourage active participation in speaking activities. One important finding is that teachers who recognized students' emotional difficulties were able to provide more supportive responses during speaking tasks. This supports previous research indicating that emotional support from teachers can significantly influence students' willingness to communicate in a foreign language (MacIntyre & Dewaele, 2020). When students perceive the classroom as emotionally safe, they are more likely to participate in communicative activities.

The results also highlight the importance of empathetic communication in language learning. Teachers who used positive reinforcement and encouraging feedback created a classroom environment where mistakes were treated as part of the learning process rather than as failures. This finding aligns with Mercer and Kostoulas (2021), who emphasize that emotionally supportive teaching practices can strengthen students' confidence and motivation. Another important aspect identified in this study is teachers' emotional regulation. Teachers who remained patient and calm when students struggled with speaking tasks helped reduce pressure and embarrassment among learners. Previous studies have shown that

emotionally supportive classroom environments contribute to lower levels of foreign language anxiety (Dewaele & Li, 2021). The findings of this study further confirm that emotional regulation by teachers can influence students' comfort in speaking situations.

In addition, collaborative speaking activities were found to support students' participation. Pair and group discussions allowed students to practice speaking in a less intimidating setting. This result is consistent with communicative language teaching approaches that emphasize interaction and peer communication as effective strategies for developing speaking skills. From a broader perspective, the findings suggest that Emotional Intelligence should be considered an important pedagogical competence for language teachers. While traditional language teaching often focuses on linguistic knowledge, this study demonstrates that emotional support also plays a crucial role in facilitating students' speaking engagement. Integrating emotionally responsive teaching practices may help create more inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for language teaching and educational practice. First, teacher training programs should emphasize the development of Emotional Intelligence as part of professional competence. Teachers who are able to recognize and respond to students' emotional needs may be more effective in encouraging participation in speaking activities. Second, classroom practices should incorporate strategies that promote emotional safety, such as supportive feedback, collaborative speaking tasks, and constructive responses to students' mistakes. These strategies can help reduce speaking anxiety and increase students' confidence. Third, future research in language education should further explore the relationship between emotional factors and communicative competence, particularly in contexts where students experience limited exposure to English.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved a relatively small number of participants, including three teachers and six students from a single vocational school. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent all EFL classroom contexts. Second, the data were primarily based on classroom observations and interviews conducted over a limited period of time. Longer-term observations may provide deeper insights into how Emotional Intelligence strategies influence students' speaking development. Future studies could involve larger samples, different educational contexts, and longer observation periods to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Emotional Intelligence in language learning.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how teachers' Emotional Intelligence (EI) functions as a pedagogical strategy in enhancing students' speaking confidence and performance in an EFL vocational classroom. The findings demonstrate that EI plays a central role in shaping a psychologically safe learning environment where students feel emotionally supported, respected, and encouraged to participate in speaking activities. Through emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and supportive interpersonal communication, teachers were able to reduce students' speaking anxiety and foster positive emotional engagement during classroom interactions.

The study further reveals that EI contributes not only to students' affective development but also to tangible improvements in their speaking performance. Emotionally responsive scaffolding, constructive feedback, and the normalization of errors enabled students to take linguistic risks, speak more fluently, and express ideas with greater confidence. These findings confirm that speaking development in EFL contexts is inseparable from emotional factors and that effective speaking instruction requires teachers to attend to both emotional and linguistic dimensions of learning.

From a practical perspective, this study underscores the importance of recognizing Emotional Intelligence as a core pedagogical competence rather than a supplementary teaching skill. Teacher education and professional development programs should therefore incorporate EI-oriented training to help teachers manage classroom emotions, build supportive relationships, and create emotionally inclusive speaking environments. For future research, further studies involving larger participant groups, diverse educational settings, or mixed-method designs are recommended to extend understanding of EI implementation and its long-term impact on learners' communicative competence.

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