Factors Influencing Learners' English Speaking Confidence: Insights from Vietnamese Higher Education

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the factors influencing English-speaking confidence among university students in Vietnam. In this context, English proficiency is a national strategic priority, yet speaking ability remains a significant challenge. Grounded in a socio-cognitive framework based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, this research investigates a multi-factorial model encompassing six key predictors: Language Anxiety, Learner Motivation, Perceived Linguistic Competence, Teacher's Role, Peer Influence, and Exposure to English. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 361 undergraduate students from various universities across Vietnam. The data were analyzed using a three-stage process: Cronbach's Alpha for scale reliability, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to establish construct validity, and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression to test the predictive model. The results revealed that the proposed model significantly predicted learners' speaking confidence, explaining a substantial portion of the variance. Language Anxiety emerged as the most potent negative predictor, while a positive perception of the Teacher's Role and higher Perceived Linguistic Competence were the most potent positive predictors. These findings underscore that speaking confidence is not merely an innate personal trait but an emergent property shaped by a complex interplay of individual psychological states and the immediate pedagogical and social environment. The study concludes with concrete pedagogical implications for EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers in Vietnam, advocating for a holistic approach that prioritizes the creation of low-anxiety, supportive learning ecologies to foster the confidence necessary for effective oral communication.

Keywords: English speaking confidence, EFL, Vietnamese higher education, quantitative analysis

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, proficiency in English has transitioned from a desirable asset to an essential skill for national development and individual success (Nguyen, 2022). As a global lingua franca, English facilitates international communication, trade, and academic exchange. For Vietnam, a nation undergoing rapid economic growth and international integration, the imperative to cultivate a workforce proficient in English is particularly acute. The language has become a compulsory subject across all levels of the national education system, introduced as early as the third grade in primary schools since 2006 (Nguyen, 2022). This policy reflects a national ambition to develop highly qualified human capital capable of meeting the demands of foreign companies, participating in international trade, and pursuing opportunities for overseas study (Nguyen, 2022). Consequently, English proficiency is directly linked to the future academic and career prospects of Vietnamese students, serving as a critical gateway to professional advancement and global mobility (Nhan, 2024).

Despite years of compulsory English education, a significant "speaking proficiency paradox" persists within Vietnamese higher education. Many university graduates, while possessing a foundational knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, struggle to communicate effectively in spoken English (Nguyen, 2019). This gap between passive knowledge and active use is often rooted not in a lack of linguistic competence per se, but in a profound lack of speaking confidence (Nguyen, 2022).

Speaking is consistently reported as the most challenging and anxiety-provoking of the four language skills for Vietnamese learners (Vu & Nguyen, 2024). This lack of confidence acts as a formidable psychological barrier, preventing learners from participating in oral activities and seizing opportunities for practice. This avoidance creates a debilitating cycle: low confidence leads to less practice, which in turn prevents skill development and reinforces the initial lack of confidence, leading to skill stagnation (Nhan, 2024). Ultimately, this deficiency in speaking confidence can severely limit a graduate's ability to integrate into professional environments and realize their full career potential (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The challenges facing Vietnamese EFL learners have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Previous studies have identified a range of influential factors, including psychological variables like language anxiety (Dung & Hung, 2020) and motivation (Truong, 2025), as well as external factors such as teaching methodologies (Nhan, 2024), classroom environment (Nhan, 2024), and peer dynamics (Dung & Hung, 2020). However, the existing body of research in the Vietnamese context is characterized by several limitations. Many studies are qualitative, providing rich, in-depth insights, but they often rely on small sample sizes, which limit generalizability (Nhan, 2024). Other quantitative studies tend to focus on a narrow set of variables, examining factors in isolation rather than as part of an integrated system.

A significant gap remains for a large-scale, quantitative investigation that develops and empirically tests a comprehensive, multifaceted model of English-speaking confidence. Such a study is needed to move beyond identifying individual correlates and toward understanding the relative importance and interplay of a broader range of psychological, pedagogical, and environmental determinants. This research addresses this gap by simultaneously examining the predictive power of six critical factors—Language Anxiety, Learner Motivation, Perceived Linguistic Competence, Teacher's Role, Peer Influence, and Exposure to English—on the speaking confidence of Vietnamese university students. By quantifying these relationships, this study aims to provide robust empirical evidence to guide the development of targeted, effective interventions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in a socio-cognitive framework that conceptualizes speaking confidence as a form of domain-specific self-efficacy, which is influenced by both internal psychological states and external environmental factors. The central construct of this study, English Speaking Confidence, is defined not as a general personality trait, such as self-esteem (Nguyen, 2022), nor as an objective measure of language proficiency (Wang et al., 2022), but rather as a specific form of self-efficacy. Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), speaking confidence is conceptualized as a learner's belief in their ability to successfully organize and execute the actions required to perform a specific English-speaking task (Ghafar, 2023). This task-specific belief is dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by an individual's cognitive processing of four principal sources of information:

Mastery Experiences: The most influential source, derived from one's past successes and failures in speaking tasks.

Vicarious Experiences: Gained from observing others, particularly peers, succeed or fail at similar tasks.

Social Persuasion: Verbal and non-verbal feedback and encouragement from credible sources, such as teachers and peers.

Physiological and Emotional States: The interpretation of one's emotional arousal, such as anxiety or excitement, when faced with a speaking task (Asnaini et al., 2022).

This framework is highly relevant as it positions confidence as a critical antecedent to Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which is the immediate precursor to actual speaking behavior in a second language (Wang et al., 2022). Learners with low confidence are less willing to communicate, leading to fewer mastery experiences and perpetuating a cycle of low confidence and limited proficiency.

The six independent variables in this study were selected because they map directly onto the sources of self-efficacy information within Bandura's model and have been consistently identified in the literature as crucial to the EFL learning process. Theoretically, language anxiety is deeply intertwined with a learner's self-perception and ability to process new information. This anxiety directly corresponds to the "physiological and emotional states" identified in Bandura's model of self-efficacy. The physical and emotional turmoil associated with anxiety—such as tension, worry, and apprehension—is interpreted by learners as a reflection of their incompetence. This internal state actively undermines their self-efficacy, which is their belief in their capacity to succeed. This concept is further reinforced by Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, and according to this hypothesis, heightened negative emotions like anxiety act as a mental block, or "filter," which prevents comprehensible input from being effectively processed. As a result, this emotional barrier not only hinders the acquisition of the language but also erodes the learner's confidence in using it, creating a detrimental cycle of doubt and avoidance (Nhan, 2024).

Language anxiety is not a monolithic feeling but a complex, situation-specific construct. Following the foundational work of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), it is understood to comprise three distinct yet interrelated components. The first is Communication Apprehension, which is the fundamental fear of expressing oneself or communicating with others. The second, Fear of Negative Evaluation, involves the specific dread of being judged, criticized, or viewed unfavorably by others, such as teachers or peers. The third component is Test Anxiety, which is the particular fear of failure within the formal, evaluative context of academic testing. Recognizing these three facets enables a more nuanced understanding of the various pressures learners face (Ho & Truong, 2022).

Empirical studies consistently confirm that language anxiety is one of the most significant negative predictors of a student's speaking performance and overall confidence (Dung & Hung, 2020). This issue is particularly pronounced and culturally shaped within the Vietnamese context. Here, anxiety manifests as an intense fear of making errors, which is linked to potent cultural concepts of social image. Learners are not only concerned about negative evaluation from teachers. However, they are often more profoundly afraid of being laughed at or judged by their peers, as this relates directly to the cultural notion of "losing face" (Ho & Truong, 2022). This fear of public embarrassment and damage to one's social standing is so powerful that it frequently leads to passivity in the classroom and a deliberate avoidance of speaking opportunities, significantly hindering language development (Ho & Truong, 2022). We formulate the following hypothesis regarding the relationship between language anxiety and English speaking confidence:

H1: Language Anxiety is negatively related to learners' English Speaking Confidence.

Motivation serves as the fundamental driving force that compels learners to seek out and persevere through "mastery experiences actively." According to Social Cognitive Theory, individuals who are motivated are more inclined to set challenging goals for themselves, apply significant effort to meet those goals, and persist even when faced with difficulties (Ghafar, 2023). This sustained persistence naturally leads to more frequent and successful speaking engagements. Each successful experience then functions as a building block, constructing a more robust and resilient sense of self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to succeed (Nguyen, 2022). This creates a powerful, positive feedback loop where motivation fuels the actions that, in turn, validate and strengthen a learner's confidence.

To fully grasp the concept of motivation, this study utilizes two complementary theoretical frameworks. The first is Self-Determination Theory, which provides a crucial distinction between intrinsic motivation—the drive to engage in an activity purely for the inherent satisfaction and enjoyment it brings—and extrinsic motivation, which involves engaging in an activity to achieve a separate, external outcome, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment (Ha, 2024). The second framework is Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which differentiates between integrative motivation, a learner's desire to connect with and be part of the target language's culture and community, and instrumental motivation, which is the drive to learn a language for practical, utilitarian purposes. While intrinsic motivation is frequently associated with deeper and more sustained engagement in learning (Truong, 2025), instrumental factors, like the pursuit of

enhanced career opportunities, are an especially potent driver within the Vietnamese context (Nguyen, 2019).

A vast body of empirical evidence confirms that motivation is a cornerstone of successful language acquisition, showing a strong positive correlation with learners' participation levels, the effort they expend, and their ultimate achievement (Nguyen, 2022). Critically, the benefits of motivation extend beyond mere performance metrics. Studies have shown that motivation directly bolsters a learner's confidence while simultaneously diminishing feelings of anxiety. This occurs because motivated learners are more likely to reframe challenges, viewing them not as threats to their ego or competence but as valuable opportunities for personal growth and skill development (Ha, 2024). This resilient mindset is crucial for navigating the inherent difficulties of learning a new language. In summary, learner motivation can positively correlate with English speaking confidence, as delineated below.

H2: Learner Motivation is positively related to learners' English Speaking Confidence.

A learner's subjective assessment of their linguistic tools serves as a fundamental input for their self-efficacy judgments. Before engaging in a speaking task, individuals often conduct a rapid, implicit self-query: "Do I have the necessary words, grammar, and pronunciation to succeed?" This internal self-assessment of capability, defined as Perceived Linguistic Competence, directly informs and shapes their level of confidence for that specific activity (Nhan, 2024). Consequently, the belief in one's available linguistic resources is not merely a secondary factor but a foundational element that predetermines the confidence with which a learner approaches communication.

It is crucial to distinguish this factor from objective proficiency scores, such as those from standardized tests. Perceived Linguistic Competence is not a measure of a learner's actual, verifiable skill level but rather their subjective perception and internal inventory of their linguistic resources. This includes their assessment of the breadth of their vocabulary, their command of grammatical structures, and their evaluation of their ability to produce comprehensible pronunciation. It is an internal, psychological metric of feeling linguistically "equipped" or "unequipped" for a communicative challenge, regardless of external validation.

Empirical studies conducted with Vietnamese students consistently validate the decisive role of this subjective perception. These studies reveal that a perceived lack of vocabulary, persistent difficulties with complex grammar, and acute concerns about pronunciation are among the most frequently cited reasons for a lack of speaking confidence and heightened anxiety (Vu & Nguyen, 2024). When learners feel their linguistic toolkit is inadequate for the task at hand, their belief in their ability to communicate effectively plummets. This evidence underscores that a learner's confidence is not just tied to what they know, but more critically, to what they believe they know and can mobilize in a real-world communicative situation. Therefore, we posit that perceived linguistic competence can be positively linked to learners' English speaking confidence, as detailed in the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived Linguistic Competence is positively related to learners' English Speaking Confidence.

In the formal learning environment, the classroom teacher is arguably the most potent source of "social persuasion," a key

component of self-efficacy. The specific nature of a teacher's feedback, their methods of error correction, and their expressions of encouragement—or lack thereof—all serve as direct messages to students that actively shape their beliefs about their capabilities (Asnaini et al., 2022). Beyond this direct influence, the teacher also functions as the architect of the learning environment itself. They are responsible for designing activities that can either provide valuable opportunities for successful "mastery experiences"—which build confidence—or, conversely, create high-anxiety situations that are likely to fail, thereby diminishing a student's sense of competence.

This concept of teacher influence is multifaceted, encompassing several distinct but interconnected domains. It includes the teacher's interpersonal qualities, such as being supportive, empathetic, and approachable, which foster a sense of psychological safety. It also involves their pedagogical practices. This is evident in the choice to employ interactive, communicative activities that promote active use of the language, as opposed to passive methods, such as the grammar-translation approach. A crucial element here is the ability to provide constructive, non-threatening error correction that students perceive as helpful rather than critical. Finally, it encompasses the teacher's overall ability to cultivate a safe, low-anxiety classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking the necessary risks to progress in their language learning (Tam & Duc, 2025).

Empirical evidence from the Vietnamese context clearly illustrates the critical impact of teaching methods on student confidence. Ineffective pedagogical approaches that overemphasize rote memorization and repetitive grammar drills, while neglecting authentic communicative practice, have been identified as a significant problem, often leading to passive knowledge rather than active skills (Nguyen, 2022). Conversely, research consistently highlights the transformative power of a positive and supportive teacher. When educators successfully create a safe and encouraging classroom environment, offer constructive feedback rather than punitive measures, and actively foster participation without fear of failure, they play a pivotal role in building student confidence and empowering them to become active speakers (Juliani & Dafit, 2024). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Teacher's Role is positively related to learners' English Speaking Confidence.

Within the social learning environment, peers represent another critical influence on a student's self-efficacy, operating through at least two of Bandura's primary pathways. Firstly, they provide powerful "vicarious experiences." When a learner observes a peer perceived as having similar ability completing a task, it can significantly boost their confidence, fostering a mindset of "If they can do it, so can I." Secondly, peers act as a potent source of "social persuasion." The feedback, reactions, and perceived judgments from classmates can either affirm and encourage a student's belief in their abilities or, conversely, create doubt and undermine their confidence (Asnaini et al., 2022).

Peer influence is best understood as a dual-faceted construct with the potential for both positive and negative effects. On one hand, it can manifest as a supportive and constructive force. This positive dimension, often referred to as peer support, encompasses collaborative learning activities, mutual encouragement among students, and the exchange of helpful and constructive feedback, all of which can foster a healthy learning community (Huang,

2023). On the other hand, peer influence can become a detrimental force, manifesting as peer pressure. This negative side involves harmful social comparison, unhealthy competition, and, most damagingly, the fear of ridicule or negative judgment from classmates, which can stifle participation and create anxiety (Dalem, 2017).

The negative aspect of peer influence is often particularly salient in many Asian educational contexts, including Vietnam. Research consistently shows that the fear of being laughed at by peers for making mistakes is a potent source of speaking anxiety and serves as a significant deterrent to classroom participation (Dung & Hung, 2020). This fear can silence students and prevent them from engaging in essential practice. However, there is a straightforward solution. The strategic implementation of well-structured collaborative learning activities, combined with the cultivation of a supportive peer environment, has been shown to mitigate this fear effectively. By creating a safer, more cooperative space for practice, educators can harness the positive potential of peer influence to build, rather than break, student confidence (Nhan, 2024). We formulate the following hypothesis regarding the relationship between peer influence and English speaking confidence:

H5: Peer Influence is positively related to learners' English Speaking Confidence.

Direct exposure to and active use of the target language is the primary mechanism through which learners accumulate confidence-building "mastery experiences." The principle, as articulated by numerous scholars, is that frequent and consistent practice serves as the panacea for both developing fluency and reducing language-related anxiety (Dincer, 2017). Every successful communicative interaction, regardless of its scale, functions as a form of positive reinforcement. Each instance proves to the learner that they are capable, thereby strengthening their self-efficacy beliefs and encouraging them to engage in future communication with greater assurance.

This factor is conceptualized as the perceived quantity and quality of opportunities available to a learner for authentic or semi-authentic English speaking practice. These opportunities can be broadly categorized into two domains. The first is in-class opportunities, which are structured by the educator and include activities such as communicative tasks, role-playing, group discussions, and presentations. The second domain consists of out-of-class exposure, which encompasses more self-directed activities, such as seeking conversations with foreigners, participating in English clubs, consuming English-language media, and utilizing language learning applications. The combination of both formal practice and real-world application is crucial for holistic skill development.

A significant and well-documented obstacle for many learners in Vietnam is the limited exposure to authentic English use outside the formal classroom setting (Vu & Nguyen, 2024). This scarcity of real-world practice opportunities means that theoretical knowledge acquired in class often remains inert. It cannot be easily converted into the practical, spontaneous, and confident speaking ability required for effective communication. Consequently, studies consistently identify this lack of practice opportunities as a significant barrier, not only to skill development itself but also to the growth of the confidence needed to use those skills effectively

(Nhan, 2024). In summary, exposure to English can positively correlate with English speaking confidence, as delineated below.

H6: Exposure to English is positively related to learners' English Speaking Confidence.

Based on the literature review, this study proposes a research framework (Figure 1) to investigate the key factors that enhance the learners' English Speaking Confidence.
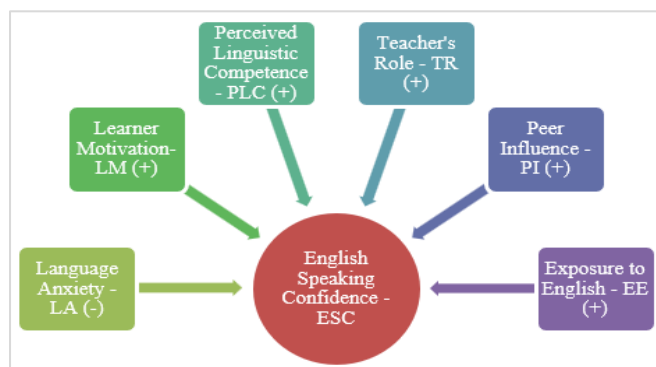

Figure 1: Research Framework

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, an approach chosen for its effectiveness in examining the relationships between multiple independent variables and a single dependent variable across a large population at a specific point in time (Hidayatulloh et al., 2025). This design is particularly suitable for developing and testing a predictive model aimed at identifying the key determinants of English speaking confidence (Hung et al., 2025).

The sample consisted of 361 undergraduate students from various universities across Vietnam, recruited through a non-probability convenience sampling method. An online survey link was distributed via university networks and student-focused social media platforms to gather participants. The resulting sample was diverse, encompassing students from a wide range of academic majors and years of study, thereby providing a broad cross-section of the Vietnamese higher education population. Data were collected over three months. The survey's introduction clearly outlined the research purpose and assured participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was required from all participants before they could access the questionnaire, confirming the voluntary nature of their involvement.

A structured questionnaire comprising 32 items was developed to measure the seven primary constructs of the study. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To ensure high content validity, the instrument was created by adapting items from established, validated scales within applied linguistics and educational psychology. Bilingual experts conducted a rigorous translation and back-translation process to guarantee the linguistic and conceptual equivalence of the items for the Vietnamese context.

The study's dependent variable, Learners' English Speaking Confidence (ESC), was measured using a 3-item scale. This scale was specifically designed to assess students' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to perform everyday English speaking tasks, with items informed by self-efficacy principles and established

instruments, such as the EFL Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale (EFL-SSES) (Wang & Sun, 2024).

The six independent variables were measured as follows: Language Anxiety (LA) was assessed using a 4-item scale adapted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCAS, which focuses on communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Learner Motivation (LM) was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Gardner's (1985) AMTB to reflect both intrinsic and integrative, as well as extrinsic and instrumental, motivations relevant to the Vietnamese context (Cocca et al., 2017). Perceived Linguistic Competence (PLC) utilized a 7-item self-assessment scale for vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency, informed by prior research in Vietnam (Nhan, 2024). The Teacher's Role (TR) was evaluated using a 4-item scale that assessed teacher supportiveness and classroom climate, based on instruments such as the EEFLUT questionnaire (Narváez-Cantos & Carreño-Jácome, 2024). Peer Influence (PI) was assessed using a 5-item scale designed to capture both positive (support) and negative (fear of ridicule) peer dynamics (Namaziandost et al., 2024). Finally, Exposure to English (EE) was measured using a 4-item scale that assessed the frequency of language use both inside and outside the classroom (Nhan, 2024).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Statistics 26 and proceeded through three sequential stages. The initial stage of analysis was a Reliability Analysis. The internal consistency of each of the seven measurement scales was assessed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. A coefficient of $\alpha>0.70$ was considered the threshold for acceptable reliability, consistent with standard practice in social science research.

Next, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on the 29 items of the six independent variables and the three items of the dependent variable to confirm their underlying factor structure. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The analysis used Principal Components with a Varimax rotation. Items were retained if they demonstrated a factor loading of greater than 0.50 on their primary factor, with minimal loadings on other factors (Tran & Bui, 2020).

Finally, Hypothesis Testing was performed using a standard Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression. The composite scores for the six independent variables were entered as predictors of the dependent variable, English Speaking Confidence. To ensure the absence of multicollinearity, collinearity diagnostics, specifically the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), were examined. A VIF value below 5.0 was deemed acceptable (Truong, 2025). Statistical significance for all tests was set at the $p<0.05$ level.

RESULTS

Outlines the demographic characteristics of the 361 undergraduate Vietnamese students who participated in the research. A descriptive analysis of the sample revealed a varied composition in terms of gender, academic year, and significant field of study, with detailed results presented in Table 1. The sample was predominantly female, comprising 65.1% (N = 235) of the participants, while male students accounted for the remaining 34.9% (N = 126). Regarding the distribution across academic years, third-year students formed the largest group (30.5%, N = 110), followed closely by second-year students (29.1%, N = 105). First-year students comprised 23.5% (N = 85) of the sample. In comparison, fourth-year students (or above) constituted the

smallest group at 16.9% (N = 61), ensuring that perspectives were captured from various stages of the higher education journey. The sample also demonstrated significant disciplinary diversity, with students from Economics & Business representing the largest contingent (36.0%, N = 130). This was followed by students from the Social Sciences & Humanities (26.3%, N = 95) and STEM fields (23.8%, N = 86). The 'Other' category, representing a broad range of different majors, comprised the final 13.9% (N = 50) of participants.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 361)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	235	65.1
	Male	126	34.9
	Total	361	100.0
Academic Year	First Year	85	23.5
	Second Year	105	29.1
	Third Year	110	30.5
	Fourth Year & Above	61	16.9
	Total	361	100.0
Academic Major	Economics & Business	130	36.0
	Social Sciences & Humanities	95	26.3
	STEM	86	23.8
	Other	50	13.9
	Total	361	100.0

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

Table 2: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Language Anxiety (LA)	4	0.893
Learner Motivation (LM)	5	0.910
Perceived Linguistic Competence (PLC)	7	0.928
Teacher's Role (TR)	4	0.892
Peer Influence (PI)	5	0.908
Exposure to English (EE)	4	0.893
English Speaking Confidence (ESC)	3	0.869

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

As shown in Table 2, all seven scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.869 to 0.928, comfortably exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the items within each scale reliably measure a single, underlying construct.

Table 3. Rotated Matrix from Exploratory Factor Analysis for Independent Variables

Item	Factor 1 (PLC)	Factor 2 (LM)	Factor 3 (PI)	Factor 4 (LA)	Factor 5 (EE)	Factor 6 (TR)
PLC6	0.853					
PLC3	0.847					
PLC1	0.839					
PLC7	0.836					
PLC4	0.830					
PLC5	0.828					
PLC2	0.814					
LM1		0.876				
LM4		0.866				
LM2		0.858				
LM5		0.850				
LM3		0.832				
PI3			0.867			
PI5			0.855			
PI4			0.852			
PI1			0.851			
PI2			0.849			
LA1				0.886		
LA3				0.876		
LA2				0.865		
LA4				0.845		
EE1					0.873	
EE4					0.873	
EE2					0.871	
EE3					0.858	
TR4						0.886
TR2						0.868
TR1						0.863
TR3						0.856

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

An EFA was conducted on the 29 items of the six independent variables to validate their underlying structure. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.859, well above the recommended value of 0.60, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant ($\chi2(406) = 6650.370$, $p<.001$). These results indicated that the data were highly suitable for factor analysis. The analysis, using Principal Components with a Varimax rotation, yielded a transparent and interpretable six-factor solution that

corresponded precisely to the hypothesized constructs. This solution explained a total of 73.967% of the variance. All items loaded strongly onto their intended factors (loadings > 0.50) and exhibited minimal cross-loadings, providing strong evidence for the construct validity of the independent variables. The whole matrix is presented in Table 3.

Table 4: OLS Regression Model Predicting English Speaking Confidence

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	0.700		0.050	
Language Anxiety (LA)	-1.093	-0.632	<0.001	1.011
Learner Motivation (LM)	0.063	0.036	0.185	1.004
Perceived Linguistic Competence (PLC)	0.653	0.352	<0.001	1.011
Teacher's Role (TR)	0.761	0.435	<0.001	1.003
Peer Influence (PI)	0.410	0.233	<0.001	1.006
Exposure to English (EE)	-0.041	-0.024	0.381	1.011
Model Summary				
R-squared	0.738			
Adjusted R-squared	0.734			
F-statistic	166.365		<0.001	
N	361			
Durbin-Watson	1.796			

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

A standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the six hypotheses, with the six independent variables entered as predictors of English Speaking Confidence. An initial check of assumptions confirmed the suitability of the data for this analysis, as the requirements of linearity, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, and normality of residuals were all met. Furthermore, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors were below 2.0, which is well under the standard ceiling of 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern within the model.

The overall regression model was found to be statistically significant and demonstrated strong predictive power, $F_{(6, 354)} = 166.365$, $p < 0.001$. The model successfully explained a large proportion of the variance in the dependent variable, with an R-squared value of 0.738 and an adjusted R-squared value of 0.734.

This result indicates that collectively, the six factors included in the model can account for 73.8% of the total variability in students' English Speaking Confidence.

An examination of the individual predictors, detailed in Table 4, revealed that four of the six factors emerged as significant contributors to the model. Language Anxiety (LA) was the most significant predictor, exhibiting a substantial and adverse relationship with speaking confidence ($\beta = -0.632$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H1. The Teacher's Role (TR) was the strongest positive predictor, demonstrating a significant positive association with the outcome variable ($\beta = 0.435$, $p < 0.001$), which supports H4. Following this, Perceived Linguistic Competence (PLC) also proved to be a strong and significant positive predictor of confidence ($\beta = 0.352$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Peer Influence (PI) was also found to have a significant positive relationship, although its effect size was smaller than that of the preceding factors ($\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H5. Contrary to expectations, however, neither Learner Motivation (LM) ($\beta = 0.036$, $p > 0.05$) nor Exposure to English (EE) ($\beta = -0.024$, $p > 0.05$) was found to be a significant predictor in the model. Therefore, H2 and H6 were not supported by the data.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide significant quantitative evidence regarding the complex web of factors that shape the English speaking confidence of university students in Vietnam. The regression model successfully accounted for approximately 73.8% of the variance in speaking confidence, indicating that the selected socio-cognitive framework is robust and highly relevant to the data. The analysis identified four significant predictors, with Language Anxiety, Teacher's Role, and Perceived Linguistic Competence emerging as the most influential.

As hypothesized (H1), Language Anxiety was the most potent predictor in the model, exerting a strong negative influence on speaking confidence ($\beta = -0.632$). This finding aligns with a vast body of international research that frames anxiety as a primary psychological barrier to language learning and performance (Dung & Hung, 2020). In the Vietnamese context, this effect is likely amplified. The fear of making mistakes is not merely a cognitive concern but is deeply intertwined with social evaluation and the cultural concept of "losing face" (Ho & Truong, 2022). When students anticipate negative judgment from their teacher or, more acutely, ridicule from their peers, their affective filter rises, their cognitive resources are diverted from the speaking task to managing their emotional state, and their self-efficacy plummets (Nhan, 2024). This result confirms that any serious attempt to build speaking confidence must first address and mitigate the pervasive issue of classroom anxiety.

The strongest positive predictor was the Teacher's Role ($\beta = 0.435$), confirming H4. This highlights the pivotal role of the instructor as a source of "social persuasion" and an architect of the classroom climate (Asnaini et al., 2022). A teacher who is perceived as supportive, provides encouraging and constructive feedback, and fosters a safe, non-threatening environment can directly counteract the adverse effects of anxiety and build students' belief in their capabilities. This finding challenges a purely student-centric view of confidence and underscores the immense responsibility and influence that teachers wield. In a context where traditional pedagogy can be teacher-centered and focused on error correction, this result is a powerful call for a shift

towards more humanistic, learner-centered approaches that prioritize psychological safety (Juliani & Dafit, 2024).

Perceived Linguistic Competence also proved to be a strong positive predictor of confidence ($\beta = 0.352$), in support of H3. This is a logical and crucial finding: students' belief in their ability to speak is fundamentally tied to their assessment of the linguistic tools available to them (Nhan, 2024). When students feel they lack the necessary vocabulary, grammatical control, or pronunciation skills to express themselves, their confidence naturally wanes (Vu & Nguyen, 2024). This highlights the importance of not only teaching linguistic content but also teaching it in a way that builds a student's perception of their competence. This involves providing ample opportunities for successful application, helping students recognize their progress, and focusing on communicative effectiveness over perfect accuracy.

Finally, Peer Influence was found to be a significant, albeit weaker, positive predictor ($\beta = 0.233$), supporting H5. This suggests that while the fear of negative peer judgment is a component of anxiety, the positive aspects of peer interaction—collaboration, support, and encouragement—also play a distinct role in building confidence. A supportive peer environment can provide positive "vicarious experiences" and "social persuasion," creating a micro-community within the classroom where students feel safer to practice and take risks (Nhan, 2024).

Perhaps the most surprising findings were the non-significance of Learner Motivation (H2 not supported) and Exposure to English (H6 not supported) in the final regression model. This does not imply that these factors are unimportant. Instead, in a multivariate context, their direct influence on confidence appears to be overshadowed by or channeled through other, more proximal factors. The non-significant effect of Learner Motivation suggests that its impact on speaking confidence may be indirect. It is highly plausible that the influence of motivation is mediated by other variables in the model. For instance, highly motivated students are more likely to seek out practice (increasing Exposure) and study diligently (improving their Perceived Linguistic Competence). Once these more direct influences are accounted for in the regression model, the unique predictive power of motivation itself diminishes. A student can be highly motivated to learn English for career purposes. However, if they are simultaneously crippled by anxiety and perceive their skills as poor, that motivation alone may not be enough to generate confidence in a specific speaking situation.

Similarly, the non-significance of Exposure to English suggests that the sheer quantity of practice may be less important than the quality of that practice and the psychological state in which it is undertaken. If a student's exposure to English primarily consists of high-stakes, anxiety-provoking classroom situations or interactions where they feel linguistically inadequate, more exposure could paradoxically decrease confidence by accumulating more "failure" experiences. The positive effects of exposure are likely contingent on it occurring within a supportive context, as shaped by the teacher and peers.

These results, when viewed holistically, paint a compelling picture of speaking confidence as an emergent property of a complex socio-cognitive system. The findings challenge any simplistic notion that confidence is a purely internal trait that a student either has or does not have. Instead, it is dynamically co-regulated by the interaction between the learner's internal psychological landscape and their immediate social and pedagogical environment. The powerful influence of external, social factors, such as the Teacher's Role and Peer Influence, demonstrates that confidence is not built in a vacuum. A supportive teacher can actively lower the affective filter, provide the positive "social persuasion" that builds efficacy, and design tasks that lead to "mastery experiences." In doing so, the teacher directly mitigates the most potent negative predictor: Language Anxiety. Conversely, a critical teacher or a hostile peer environment can amplify anxiety, effectively neutralizing the positive effects of a student's intrinsic motivation or their objective linguistic knowledge.

This interplay suggests a hierarchy of influence. The foundational layer appears to be the affective climate of the classroom. If this climate is fraught with anxiety, other positive factors struggle to take root. However, suppose the teacher and peers can cultivate a supportive and psychologically safe environment. In that case, it creates fertile ground for students to build their Perceived Linguistic Competence through practice, allowing their motivation to translate into confident participation. This perspective shifts the focus from merely telling students to "be more confident" to a more systemic approach of engineering learning ecologies, where confidence can naturally grow.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to identify and quantify the primary factors that predict English-speaking confidence among Vietnamese university students. The research successfully developed and validated a robust socio-cognitive model that accounted for a substantial 73.8% of the variance in speaking confidence. The findings reveal a clear hierarchy of influence. First and foremost, Language Anxiety emerged as the single most significant obstacle, demonstrating a powerful negative relationship with speaking confidence. Conversely, the analysis identified the Teacher's Role in fostering a supportive environment and the student's Perceived Linguistic Competence as the two most influential positive drivers of confidence. Furthermore, a positive Peer Influence was also found to contribute significantly to building confidence. Interestingly, the direct effects of Learner Motivation and Exposure to English were not statistically significant, suggesting their impact may be mediated by these more proximal affective and cognitive factors.

Pedagogical Implications

These findings provide clear, evidence-based guidance for stakeholders seeking to enhance the communicative abilities of Vietnamese students. The implications are practical and call for a shift in pedagogical focus.

For EFL Teachers:

The primary pedagogical takeaway from this research is the critical importance of creating low-anxiety, supportive classroom environments to foster speaking confidence. Translating this principle into practice requires a conscious shift in teaching philosophy and methodology. A foundational step is to normalize errors by explicitly teaching students that making mistakes is a natural and necessary part of the learning process, thereby reframing errors as learning opportunities rather than failures. This cultural shift should be supported by the adoption of process-oriented feedback, moving away from purely summative, grade-focused evaluation toward formative feedback that is encouraging and prioritizes communicative success over mere linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, educators should consistently utilize low-

stakes communicative activities, such as prioritizing pair work and small-group discussions over high-pressure individual presentations to the whole class. This strategy effectively reduces the "spotlight effect" and lowers the fear of negative evaluation, as students feel safer practicing with a small group of peers. Finally, the teacher must consciously act as an agent of encouragement and a source of positive social persuasion by consistently acknowledging effort, praising improvement, and expressing a genuine belief in their students' potential to succeed.

For Curriculum Developers and Policymakers:

Beyond individual classroom practice, these findings also have significant implications for curriculum design and institutional policy. Firstly, curricula should be revised to integrate explicit affective objectives, such as managing anxiety and building confidence, alongside traditional linguistic objectives. To achieve this, institutions should actively promote Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), providing robust training in pedagogical approaches that prioritize communicative fluency and confidence over grammatical perfection. The curriculum itself must be designed to develop linguistic competence for effective communication. Additionally, universities should proactively foster out-of-class exposure by supporting the creation of English clubs, conversation partner programs, and other informal environments where students can use the language in low-pressure, authentic contexts, ensuring that this exposure translates into positive mastery experiences. Finally, underpinning all of these efforts is the need to invest in teacher professional development. University administrators should fund and prioritize training programs for EFL teachers that focus specifically on the psychological and affective dimensions of language teaching, thereby equipping them with the essential skills to manage classroom anxiety and effectively foster student confidence (Nhan, 2024).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, its limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design allows for the identification of predictors but cannot establish causality. Second, the reliance on self-report data means the measures are subjective and potentially influenced by social desirability bias. Third, the use of convenience sampling means the findings may not be fully generalizable to all university students across Vietnam.

The limitations of this study point toward several important avenues for future research. To better understand the causal relationships between these variables, longitudinal studies that track a cohort of students over several years would be invaluable for observing how confidence develops over time. Furthermore, mixed-methods research that integrates qualitative approaches, such as classroom observations and in-depth student interviews, could provide a richer, more contextualized understanding of the "why" behind the quantitative results by exploring the lived experiences of anxiety and confidence-building. A valuable next step would be to conduct interventionist studies that design and test the effectiveness of specific pedagogical interventions based on the findings of this study, such as programs focused on anxiety-reduction strategies or teacher training on providing supportive feedback. Finally, on a methodological front, employing advanced statistical modeling, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), would allow for the testing of the more complex mediational and interactional relationships hypothesized in the discussion,

including whether Perceived Linguistic Competence mediates the relationship between Motivation and Confidence.

In conclusion, fostering English-speaking confidence in Vietnamese higher education necessitates a paradigm shift from a purely linguistic focus to a more holistic, socio-cognitive approach. By acknowledging that confidence is cultivated within a complex ecology of psychological, pedagogical, and social factors, educators can begin to create the supportive environments necessary for students to find their voice in the English language.

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