Lidiia NARIZHNA,
orcid.org/0000-0001-6932-2399
Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences,
Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages
Donbas State Pedagogical University
(Dnipro, Ukraine) lidiianik@gmail.com

Oksana BURKOVSKA,
orcid.org/0000-0003-4311-852x
PhD in Philology, Associate Professor,
LLC "Technical university "Metinvest polytechnic"
(Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine) kasanka.i82@gmail.com

IMPROVING SPEAKING CONFIDENCE IN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH LEARNERS

This article investigates factors influencing speaking confidence among university English learners and examines strategies to enhance communicative competence in EFL classrooms. Fluent oral communication is a critical skill for academic and professional success, yet many students exhibit reluctance to participate in spoken activities due to psychological and linguistic barriers. Psychological factors, such as anxiety, fear of mistakes, shyness, and low self-confidence, significantly reduce students' willingness to communicate. Linguistic factors, including limited vocabulary, insufficient knowledge of grammatical structures, and incorrect pronunciation, further hinder effective communication. The article explores the dynamic interplay between attitudes, motivation, and beliefs, emphasizing their influence on students' readiness to engage in communicative activities. Positive attitudes toward the target language and its speakers, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and growth-oriented beliefs foster higher levels of participation, reduce anxiety, and enhance overall language proficiency. The study highlights the importance of creating supportive and interactive classroom environments, providing focused vocabulary and grammar instruction, encouraging gradual exposure to speaking tasks, and delivering constructive feedback to reinforce learners' self-efficacy. By addressing both psychological and linguistic factors, teachers can promote students' speaking confidence, leading to improved oral performance and active engagement in EFL classrooms. Understanding these interrelated variables provides practical guidance for educators seeking to implement strategies that cultivate positive attitudes, sustained motivation, and effective communication skills among university learners of English.

Key words: *speaking confidence, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), communicative competence, motivation, vocabulary development, grammar knowledge, pronunciation.*

Лідія НАРІЖНА,
orcid.org/0000-0001-6932-2399
кандидат педагогічних наук,
доцент кафедри іноземних мов
Державного вищого навчального закладу «Донбаський державний педагогічний університет»
(Дніпро, Україна) lidiianik@gmail.com

Оксана БУРКОВСЬКА,
orcid.org/0000-0003-4311-852x
кандидат філологічних наук,
доцент кафедри мовних та гуманітарних дисциплін
ТОВ «Технічний університет «МЕТІНВЕСТ ПОЛІТЕХНІКА»
(Запоріжжя, Україна) kasanka.i82@gmail.com

РОЗВИТОК УПЕВНЕНОСТІ У ГОВОРІННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЮ СЕРЕД СТУДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ

У статті досліджуються чинники, що впливають на впевненість студентів університету у володінні англійською мовою, а також розглядаються стратегії підвищення комунікативної компетентності під час вивчення англійської як іноземної мови. Вільне усне спілкування є ключовим навиком для академічного та професійного успіху, проте багато студентів уникають участі в усних активностях через психологічні та мовні бар'єри. Психологічні чинники,

такі як тривога, страх помилок, сором'язливість та низька впевненість у власних здібностях, значно знижують готовність студентів до спілкування. Мовні чинники, серед яких обмежений словниковий запас, недостатнє знання граматичних конструкцій та неправильна вимова, додатково ускладнюють ефективну комунікацію. У статті досліджується взаємозв'язок між ставленням, мотивацією та переконаннями студентів, підкреслюючи їхній вплив на готовність брати участь у комунікативних активностях. Позитивне ставлення до мови та її носіїв, внутрішня та зовнішня мотивація, а також переконання, орієнтовані на розвиток, сприяють активній участі, знижують тривожність і підвищують загальний рівень мовної компетентності. Автор наголошує на важливості створення підтримуючого та інтерактивного середовища, наданні цілеспрямованого вивчення словникового запасу та граматики, поступового залучення студентів до усних завдань та наданні конструктивного зворотного зв'язку для зміцнення впевненості. Усвідомлення цих взаємопов'язаних факторів дає педагогам практичні рекомендації щодо формування позитивних установок, стійкої мотивації та ефективних навичок комунікації серед студентів університету, які вивчають англійську мову.

Ключові слова: впевненість у мовленні, англійська як іноземна мова, комунікативна компетентність, мотивація, розвиток словникового запасу, граматичні знання, вимова.

Problem Statement. Fluent speaking is a crucial skill for university students. Communication activity can be carried out if the speaker has sufficient desire to speak so that communication can take place effectively and efficiently. Students who actively engage in conversational practice improve their speaking speed, vocabulary and general communication skills, this involvement is critically important. When teaching English as a foreign language to higher education students, problems arise due to the fact that many students are unwilling to engage in spoken communication during lessons and demonstrate low readiness for conversational communication, which is often a result of feelings of anxiety, fear of errors, and a lack of confidence in their language competence.

Analysis of research. This issue is further intensified by the predominance of a teacher-centered pedagogical approach, which restricts learners' interaction and reduces opportunities for authentic and meaningful language use (Suryanto, 2015). As a result, there is a serious obstacle to language acquisition, as students' ability to communicate in English is hampered by their weak propensity to speak. A study conducted by Hesti (2021) showed that the main factors influencing students' reluctance to communicate are linguistic, psychological and interlocutor factors, and of all the main factors present, linguistic factors are considered the most important factor influencing students' reluctance to communicate in English in class.

Regarding linguistic problems, factors include lack of vocabulary, lack of knowledge of grammatical patterns and incorrect pronunciation. Regarding non-linguistic factors, Richards (2008) notes that they can be related to lack of motivation, shyness, anxiety, self-doubt and fear of making mistakes, which influence students' reluctance to speak in English as a foreign language classes.

Purpose of the article is to examine the factors influencing speaking confidence among university English learners and to explore strategies for enhancing their communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

Presentation of main material. Among the psychological factors, lack of confidence is the most common. Students often experience anxiety about making mistakes or being judged by their peers, which significantly reduces their willingness to engage in public speaking. This insecurity can stem from previous negative experiences or a general fear of public speaking, making it a critical barrier to effective classroom communication.

Linguistic factors also play a crucial role in students' reluctance to speak. One of the main linguistic problems is a lack of vocabulary. When students do not have a sufficient set of words at their disposal, they find it difficult to clearly express their thoughts and ideas. This limitation often leads to hesitation and silence, as students fear that they will not be able to accurately convey their messages. Another important linguistic factor is a lack of knowledge of grammatical patterns. Grammar provides the structural basis for language, and without a solid understanding of grammatical rules, students' speech can become fragmented and difficult to understand. When students are unsure of grammatical structures, they may avoid speaking to avoid making mistakes, which further contributes to their reluctance to participate in class discussions. Incorrect pronunciation is a third linguistic factor that affects students' willingness to speak. Pronunciation errors can lead to misunderstandings and make it difficult for listeners to understand the intended message. Persistent pronunciation problems can make students feel insecure and anxious about speaking, fearing that they will be misunderstood or judged. This anxiety can significantly reduce their participation in speaking activities, thereby hindering their overall language development.

Effective communication in a second language is a fundamental goal of language education, especially in the context of English as a foreign language. A key element influencing this goal is students' communicative readiness, defined as the willingness to engage in communication when given the opportunity. In

classroom settings, this manifests itself as students' readiness and willingness to engage in communicative activities, such as participating in discussions or interacting with peers. This propensity is shaped by the dynamic interplay of individual, social, and situational factors (Antoku, 2025; Shaffer, 2021). Such readiness can vary depending on the environment, the type of activity, and the support provided by the teacher, ultimately serving as a prerequisite for students' active behavior in the context of language learning (Antoku, 2025; Shaffer, 2021). Speaking readiness is not simply a product of linguistic competence, but is also related to various psychological and contextual factors, including students' attitudes, motivations, and beliefs. Understanding these relationships is essential for creating an effective communicative environment in EFL classes (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

Personal attitudes include students' feelings, beliefs, and dispositions toward the target language, its native speakers, and the process of language acquisition. Positive attitudes tend to promote engagement and success, whereas negative attitudes may impede active participation and hinder language development. Factors that shape attitudes include cultural perceptions, past experiences, and perceptions of the relevance of the language. Closely related to attitudes is motivation, which refers to the internal drive that sustains effort and persistence in language learning. Strong motivation increases self-confidence and reduces anxiety, leading to higher levels of language learning. At the heart of both attitude and motivation are students' beliefs about language learning. Beliefs encompass students' perceptions of their abilities, the nature of language learning, and the value of language. Constructive beliefs encourage active participation, while misconceptions or negative beliefs can lead to hesitation and avoidance. For example, belief in one's own competence and the usefulness of English is closely related to confidence in communicating in English.

These three elements (attitude, motivation, and beliefs) are interrelated. A positive attitude can increase motivation, which in turn reinforces positive beliefs about language learning. Creating a conducive classroom environment can improve attitudes, thereby increasing motivation and fostering constructive beliefs, which ultimately leads to high levels of students' communicative competence.

Students' communicative competence is a multifaceted construct that reflects a person's propensity to initiate communication when given the opportunity (Adnan & Nadeem, 2023). Students' attitudes, motivation and beliefs are critical determinants that significantly influence their communicative competence

in EFL classes, shaping the trajectory of language learning and the gradual development of their communicative competence. It is crucial to recognize that communicative competence is not only determined by linguistic literacy, but also depends significantly on students' attitudes towards the target language and culture, their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning the language, and their deeply held beliefs about their language learning capabilities. When teachers understand how affective variables shape communicative competence, they can create learning environments that encourage students learning English as a foreign language to actively participate and communicate confidently.

Attitudes play a significant role in shaping language learners' behavior and their engagement in communication. Attitudes towards language learning encompass students' feelings about the language itself, its speakers, and the learning process. Attitudes often stem from cultural values or perceptions of the usefulness of the language for academic or career growth (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Cultural perceptions, past learning experiences, and beliefs in self-efficacy shape attitudes. Positive attitudes toward English and its speakers are associated with greater engagement in communicative tasks and increased levels of English language comprehension. Research shows that students with positive attitudes are more likely to seek opportunities to communicate in the target language, even in anxiety-provoking situations. Negative attitudes can hinder engagement. Negative experiences, such as fear of judgment or past failures, can lead to a reluctance to communicate. The classroom atmosphere plays a crucial role in changing such attitudes.

Motivation as a driving force during language learning influences language learning success and is related to learning, including teacher support and peer interaction, also plays a role in facilitating learning. Motivation includes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both of which affect student persistence and engagement. Students driven by intrinsic factors, such as enjoyment or curiosity, tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement and proficiency in speaking-related learning. Extrinsic rewards, such as grades or job prospects, also increase motivation but may not sustain long-term engagement unless they are coupled with intrinsic interest. Recent research highlights the role of affectivity – the emotional connection to learning materials – in promoting motivation and academic achievement. Students' beliefs influence their confidence and engagement in communication. Some students perceive language learning as a linear process that requires perfect grammar and vocabulary before communicating, which can lead to communi-

cation anxiety and reluctance to speak. On the other hand, students with growth-oriented beliefs, who view mistakes as a natural part of learning, demonstrate higher levels of communicative competence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Research also highlights the role of self-perceived competence, as students who believe in their language abilities are more likely to engage in communication (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021). Beliefs about language learning are deeply rooted in students' past experiences, cultural norms, and educational context. These beliefs influence how they perceive their abilities and the value of communication in language learning. Students with high self-efficacy, or confidence in their ability to perform certain tasks, are more likely to take on communicative tasks because they believe in their abilities. Students with a growth mindset are more likely to take risks in communication, viewing mistakes as opportunities for improvement. Conversely, those with a fixed mindset may avoid communication due to fear of failure. Unrealistic expectations about language fluency, such as the belief that one must speak perfectly before attempting to communicate, can hinder learning by creating anxiety and self-doubt (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Positive beliefs about language learning promote motivation, reduce anxiety, and encourage the risk-taking behaviors necessary for effective communication. Students who view communication as an integral part of language acquisition are more likely to seek out opportunities to interact. Positive beliefs about the joy of learning English or its usefulness for achieving personal goals enhance intrinsic motivation. Research has shown that informal digital learning environments, such as social media platforms used during online learning, can positively shape students' beliefs about their ability to communicate effectively. Negative beliefs often arise from past failures or cultural norms that prevent them from taking risks in communication. Students who believe they lack the necessary skills often experience increased anxiety, which negatively affects their willingness to speak both online and offline . Instructors play a key role in influencing students' beliefs through their instructional strategies and interpersonal behaviors. Those who demonstrate Indirect behaviors, such as showing empathy or using humor, help reduce anxiety and promote positive beliefs about communication. Constructive feedback that focuses on effort rather than outcomes can transform negative beliefs into positive ones, reinforcing a growth mindset. Teachers can encourage persistence by integrating long-term goals into classroom activities and helping students view challenges as opportunities for growth (Duckworth et al., 2007). Students' emotional states often mediate

the relationship between their beliefs about language learning. Factors such as enjoyment of learning a foreign language increase students' belief in their ability to succeed in communicative tasks while reducing anxiety. Anxiety and boredom caused by an uninteresting classroom environment can reinforce negative beliefs about communication abilities.

The relationship between attitude, motivation, and beliefs is complex, as these factors influence and reinforce each other. Positive attitudes can enhance motivation, while strong motivation can promote positive beliefs about language learning. For example, highly motivated students are more likely to develop favorable beliefs about their language abilities, which in turn increases their level of language engagement. A classroom environment that supports autonomy and confidence-building activities fosters these positive relationships, leading to greater engagement in communicative tasks. Students feel safe expressing themselves without fear of judgment. An achievement goal orientation mediates the relationship between classroom climate and student engagement, encouraging mastery-oriented approaches that are consistent with growth mindsets. Each of the above factors will serve as a significant prerequisite for successful learning of EFL.

Conclusions. Therefore, there are two factors that influence students' reluctance to speak in EFL classes: psychological and linguistic factors. Lack of self-confidence is a psychological factor that most students experience. In addition, from a linguistic point of view, students face a lack of vocabulary, insufficient knowledge of grammatical patterns and incorrect pronunciation. Students' reluctance to speak in EFL classes depends on both psychological and linguistic factors. Psychologically, lack of confidence significantly reduces students' willingness to participate in oral activities. Linguistically, problems such as limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge and pronunciation errors further hinder students' ability to express themselves clearly and accurately. These linguistic limitations lead to hesitation and silence, as students fear miscommunication and judgment. Therefore, both psychological and linguistic barriers pose significant obstacles to effective communication and active participation in EFL classes. To address these issues, teachers can create a supportive environment, provide focused vocabulary learning, emphasize grammar rules, and offer pronunciation practice. Encouraging gradual language exposure and positive reinforcement can help students develop confidence and overcome these barriers to effective communication.

Positive attitudes, strong motivation, and constructive beliefs contribute to greater communicative competence in EFL classes, which directly affects

language development and classroom engagement. It is important to develop a positive attitude towards language learning to improve students' communicative competence. Although motivation and beliefs contribute to this to some extent, they may not be sufficient on their own to significantly affect the level of communicative competence. For teachers, understanding these factors offers practical ways to improve outcomes: by creating a supportive and interactive environment, using engaging teaching strategies, and addressing students' emotional and psychological needs, teachers can significantly increase students' confidence and engagement. Implementing interventions that foster positive attitudes, increase motivation, and challenge negative beliefs can lead to more dynamic and communicative classes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adnan, M., & Nadeem, M. U. Impact of positive emotions on the willingness to communicate in a second language. Linguistics and Literature Review, 2023, 9(1), pp. 1–22. Available at: https://doi.org/10.32350/llr.91/01

2. Antoku, M. Investigating the effect of teacher intervention on learners' willingness to communicate in the Japanese high school EFL classroom. JACET-KANTO Journal, 2025, 12, pp. 24–44. Available at: https://doi.org/10.57365/jacetkanto.12.0_24

3. Dewaele, J.-M., & Pavelescu, L. M. The relationship between incommensurable emotions and willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language: A multiple case study. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 2021, 15(1), pp. 66–80. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1675667

4. Hesti, R. Factors affecting students' reluctance to speak English in the classroom. Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics, 2021, 6(2), pp. 145–156. Available at: https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v6i2.510

5. Peng, J.-E., & Woodrow, L. Willingness to communicate in English: A model in the Chinese EFL classroom context. Language Learning, 2010, 60(4), pp. 834–876. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00576.x

6. Richards, J. C. Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

7. Shaffer, A. L2 classroom willingness to communicate as a predictor of participatory behavior. Dimension, 2021, pp. 9–24. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayt022

8. Suryanto, H. English speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL students: A case study. Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies, 2015, 2(1), pp. 1–16. Available at: https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v2i1.25

REFERENCES

1. Adnan, M., & Nadeem, M. U. (2023). Impact of positive emotions on the willingness to communicate in a second language. Linguistics and Literature Review, 9(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.32350/llr.91/01

2. Antoku, M. (2025). Investigating the effect of teacher intervention on learners' willingness to communicate in the Japanese high school EFL classroom. JACET-KANTO Journal, 12, 24–44. https://doi.org/10.57365/jacetkanto.12.0_24

3. Dewaele, J.-M., & Pavelescu, L. M. (2021). The relationship between incommensurable emotions and willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language: A multiple case study. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 15(1), 66–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1675667

4. Hesti, R. (2021). Factors affecting students' reluctance to speak English in the classroom. Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics, 6(2), 145–156. https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v6i2.510

5. Peng, J.-E., & Woodrow, L. (2010). Willingness to communicate in English: A model in the Chinese EFL classroom context. Language Learning, 60(4), 834–876. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00576.x

6. Richards, J. C. (2008). Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice. Cambridge University Press.

7. Shaffer, A. (2021). L2 classroom willingness to communicate as a predictor of participatory behavior. Dimension, 2021, 9–24. https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayt022

8. Suryanto, H. (2015). English speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL students: A case study. Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies, 2(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v2i1.25