



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AFFIRMATION PRACTICES AND TEACHER FEEDBACK IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSES AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This research investigates the impact of self-affirmation practices and teacher feedback on students' speaking skills in EFL classes, focusing on students in grades XI at two vocational high schools in Karawang, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study design, this research identifies the self-affirmation practices that students employed before participating in classroom speaking activities. It also examines how teacher feedback, both corrective and encouraging, shapes students' perceptions and performance. The findings highlighted the importance of integrating self-affirmation and effective feedback in EFL classrooms, as well as the need for teacher training to create a supportive learning environment. This study has implications for EFL educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, showing that psychological reinforcement in language teaching can address students' emotional needs, leading to improved speaking proficiency and confidence.

Keywords: Affirmation; Feedback; Psychological Reinforcement; Speaking.

PRAKTIK AFIRMASI DAN UMPAN BALIK GURU DALAM MENINGKATKAN KEMAMPUAN BERBICARA SISWA SMA

Abstrak: Penelitian ini meneliti dampak praktik afirmasi diri dan umpan balik guru dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara Bahasa Inggris (EFL) pada siswa kelas XI di dua SMK di Karawang, Indonesia. Menggunakan desain kualitatif studi kasus, studi ini mengidentifikasi teknik afirmasi diri yang dilakukan siswa sebelum aktivitas berbicara (speaking activities) di kelas. Umpan balik guru, baik korektif maupun mendorong, juga berperan dalam membentuk persepsi dan kinerja siswa. Temuan menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan afirmasi diri dan umpan balik efektif dalam pembelajaran EFL, serta perlunya pelatihan guru untuk menciptakan lingkungan yang mendukung. Studi ini menyarankan bahwa pendekatan psikologis dalam pengajaran bahasa dapat memenuhi kebutuhan emosional siswa, meningkatkan keterlibatan, kepercayaan diri, dan kemahiran berbicara. Implikasinya relevan bagi pendidik EFL, pengembang kurikulum, dan pembuat kebijakan pendidikan.

Kata kunci: Afirmasi; Umpan Balik; Keahlian Berbicara.

INTRODUCTION

The development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often hindered by students' lack of confidence and anxiety. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory highlights the importance of confidence in learning, while MacIntyre et al. (2012) identify anxiety as a major barrier to effective communication. Psychological factors, such as self-perception and confidence, play a critical role in educational outcomes, and interventions like self-affirmation can reduce educational disparities (Hadden, 2024). Teacher feedback is also pivotal in fostering a supportive learning environment, as it enhances students' self-confidence and engagement (Dweck, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Speaking is a productive skill that requires mastery of pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse management. Effective speaking involves both linguistic competence and an understanding of interactive and cultural dimensions (Bygate, 1987; Kayi, 2006). However, EFL learners often face challenges such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and speaking anxiety, which are further exacerbated by environmental factors like limited exposure to English (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

To address these challenges, one promising approach is the use of affirmations. Rooted in self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), affirmations help students build confidence, resilience, and a positive self-concept. In the context of language learning, they serve to reduce anxiety and promote a growth mindset, thereby encouraging students to participate more actively in speaking activities (Dweck, 2006). These affirmations can take various forms—verbal, written, behavioral, or social—and their effectiveness depends on authenticity, specificity, relevance, and consistency (Dörnyei, 2001; Harmer, 2007).

In addition to affirmations, teacher feedback plays a crucial role in EFL classrooms. While affirmations focus on internal motivation and self-perception, teacher feedback provides external support through encouragement and constructive guidance. When delivered effectively—being specific, timely, and aligned with learning goals—feedback helps students recognize their strengths and identify areas for improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Furthermore, feedback contributes to reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing self-confidence, thereby fostering a supportive environment where students feel safe to take linguistic risks (Brookhart, 2017).

Previous research explores various studies on feedback and affirmation practices in language learning, particularly in EFL contexts. For example, Rozaka, Maisa, and Hartati (2023) highlight the effectiveness of implicit feedback, such as recasts, in reducing student anxiety and promoting active participation. Their findings show that students prefer immediate feedback, aligning with behaviorist principles for better retention. Similarly, Weekly, Pollard, and Macpherson (2022) reveal diverse student and teacher perspectives on corrective feedback in English for academic purposes, emphasizing the need for a balance between accuracy and fluency. Ramadhani's study (2020) indicates a preference for explicit correction and immediate feedback, emphasizing the importance of tailoring corrective feedback to student needs. Meanwhile, Febrianti (2017) identifies recasts as a favored strategy for improving grammatical accuracy in conversation classes. Studies by Hadden, Harris, and Easterbrook (2024), along with Tekin and Razi (2014), explore the nuanced effects of affirmation practices, noting their context-dependent nature.

These existing studies show both alignment and contrast with my research on Affirmation Practices and Teacher Feedback in Enhancing Students' Speaking Skills in EFL Classes Among High School Students. For instance, the findings from Rozaka et al. (2023) on the effectiveness of recasts in fostering a supportive, low-anxiety learning environment align with my study's emphasis on how feedback and affirmations build students' confidence in speaking. Likewise, Ramadhani (2020) highlights students' desire for explicit and timely feedback, which supports the idea that clarity and immediacy are crucial. However, while much of the existing literature focuses primarily on corrective feedback, my research uniquely explores the type of affirmation used by the students and the type of feedback used by the teacher, and how these practices can enhance both confidence and speaking performance based on students' and teachers' perceptions.

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The integration of affirmation practices and teacher feedback into EFL speaking activities requires careful planning and cultural sensitivity. Affirmations and feedback should be embedded naturally into speaking tasks, such as role-plays and discussions, to maximize their impact on learner confidence and skill development. Teachers must balance correction and encouragement, tailoring their approach to students' cultural backgrounds and individual needs.

This research is valuable for teachers, curriculum developers, students, and researchers, as it provides insights into how psychological reinforcement techniques can enhance EFL speaking skills and create a supportive learning environment. The research objectives are formulated in the following questions:

1. What types of self-affirmation practices do the students apply when performing a speaking activity in front of the class?
2. Based on self-affirmation practiced by the students, how do they perceive the impacts on speaking performance?
3. How is the teacher's feedback delivered to the students when performing a speaking activity?
4. How does this teacher's feedback improve students' speaking development?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of self-affirmation practices and teacher feedback in enhancing students' speaking skills in EFL classes. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences, making it particularly suitable for capturing the complexities of educational interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study uses a case study methodology, enabling detailed examination of affirmation and feedback practices within their real-life educational contexts.

The participants of this study include two English teachers and 51 students from two vocational high schools in Karawang, Indonesia. The teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in teaching EFL for at least ten years and their active implementation of feedback strategies. The students, from grades XI, participated in speaking activities, providing valuable insights into the effects of affirmation practices and feedback. To find data on the affirmation type used by the students and their perception of affirmation used in the classroom, there were 15 students from 51 students in the classroom who were willing to be interviewed.

To ensure comprehensive data collection, this study employed multiple qualitative methods. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Conducted with students to gather insights into their experiences with self-affirmation practices. Classroom Observations: Video recordings were analyzed to assess the delivery and impact of teacher feedback on students' speaking skills. Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of their feedback strategies and their perceived impact on students.

The research was conducted from September 2024 to February 2025. All interviews and discussions were transcribed for analysis. The research adhered to triangulation techniques to ensure reliability and validity. Data analysis followed thematic analysis and interactive models proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The process included data compilation: organizing transcribed interviews, FGDs, and observations into a structured database, coding and categorization: identifying key themes related to affirmation practices and feedback strategies, interpretation and conclusion drawing: analyzing patterns and drawing insights on the impact of affirmation practices and feedback on students' speaking skills.

This study ensured ethical compliance by obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality, and following research ethics guidelines. Participants were assured of their anonymity, and data were securely stored to protect their privacy. The study also received institutional approval before data collection commenced.



The study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness, including CREDIBILITY: data triangulation was used through FGDs, observations, and interviews, TRANSFERABILITY: detailed descriptions of the research setting and participants were provided to ensure applicability to similar educational contexts, DEPENDABILITY: research procedures were documented systematically for consistency, and CONFIRMABILITY: member checking was conducted to validate findings with participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Affirmation Used by Students in Speaking Activities

The results from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed various affirmation practices employed by students to enhance their speaking confidence. The most common type of affirmation was Behavioral Affirmation, with students frequently using breathing exercises to reduce anxiety before speaking. Additionally, Verbal Affirmation was widely practiced, including self-talk and reciting prayers or dzikir, which provided a sense of calm and reassurance. Some students also engaged in Non-Verbal Affirmation, such as covering their ears to block distractions, while only a few students sought Social Affirmation by performing in front of family members for feedback.

Table 1

Type of Affirmation Used by the Students

| No | Type of Affirmation | Findings |
|----|-------------------------|----------|
| 1 | Behavioural Affirmation | 38 % |
| 2 | Non Verbal Affirmation | 33 % |
| 3 | Verbal Affirmation | 6 % |
| 4 | Social Affirmation | 4 % |
| 5 | Written Affirmation | 0 % |

2.

2. Students' Perception of Affirmation Practices

Students perceived affirmation as a crucial factor in improving their speaking performance. Many reported that engaging in affirmation rituals, such as deep breathing and self-talk, increased their confidence and reduced nervousness. However, some students noted that while affirmation helped, it did not eliminate their anxiety, especially in high-pressure situations. Despite these mixed responses, the majority of students agreed that affirmation practices positively influenced their performance.

Students also acknowledged that affirmation practices helped them build resilience when facing difficult speaking tasks. Several students shared that using affirmations before speaking allowed them to focus more on delivering their content rather than worrying about potential mistakes. Additionally, some students emphasized the role of religious affirmations, such as reciting prayers, in strengthening their mental state and providing a sense of comfort before public speaking.

Another key insight was that students who consistently practiced affirmations over time reported feeling a gradual improvement in their confidence. They felt more prepared to handle speaking challenges and were more willing to participate in class discussions. However, a few students mentioned that they initially struggled to believe in their affirmations, suggesting that self-affirmation may require repeated practice to become fully effective. This finding highlights the need

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for educators to encourage students to develop affirmation routines and integrate them into their learning process.

a. Types of Feedback Used by Teachers

Analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews identified two main types of feedback used: Verbal and Non-Verbal Feedback.

a. Verbal Feedback.

Teachers provided constructive feedback, which served to encourage and motivate students. This included praise such as "That was great!" and "You did well!" that reinforced students' confidence and willingness to participate. In addition, teachers used corrective feedback to guide students toward improvement by addressing specific errors in pronunciation, grammar, and sentence structure. This feedback often took the form of direct corrections, rephrasing student responses, and offering alternative word choices to help students refine their spoken English. Corrective feedback was given with a supportive tone to ensure students remained engaged and motivated rather than discouraged by their mistakes.

b. Non-Verbal Feedback

Teachers also reinforced their verbal responses with a range of non-verbal cues that contributed to a positive classroom atmosphere. Smiling was frequently used to reassure students and make them feel at ease, especially after making errors. Nodding served as an affirmation of correct responses, encouraging students to continue speaking. Hand gestures, such as giving a thumbs-up, were employed to signal approval and reinforce positive performance. Clapping hands was another strategy used to celebrate students' efforts and accomplishments, helping to create a classroom culture that valued participation and progress. These non-verbal feedback methods complemented verbal feedback by providing immediate, visual encouragement that reinforced the teacher's support and recognition of student effort.

Table 2

Type of Feedback Used by the Students

| No | Type of Feedback | Findings |
|----|--------------------------|----------|
| 1 | Verbal Feedback | |
| | a. Constructive Feedback | 70.4 % |
| | b. Corrective Feedback | 15.4 % |
| 2 | Non-Verbal Feedback | 4 % |
| | a. Gestures | 11.2 % |
| | b. Facial Expressions | 3.1 % |

c. Teachers' Perception of Feedback and Its Impact on Speaking Development

Teachers viewed feedback as essential in guiding students toward improvement. They believed that corrective feedback was particularly effective in refining pronunciation and speech clarity, while constructive feedback encouraged students to remain motivated. Teachers also noted that students who received feedback often demonstrated improvement in subsequent speaking tasks. However, they acknowledged that immediate improvements were difficult to observe as feedback effects accumulated over time.



Teachers emphasized that students responded differently to feedback depending on their confidence level. Some students were highly receptive to corrective feedback and actively worked on their mistakes, while others initially felt discouraged but gradually learned to view feedback as constructive. Teachers noted that building a culture of positive reinforcement helped students accept feedback more openly, reducing their fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, teachers observed that providing a mix of positive and corrective feedback led to better long-term progress in students' speaking skills. By balancing praise with specific areas for improvement, teachers could maintain student motivation while ensuring that learning objectives were met. They also highlighted that students who regularly received feedback were more willing to participate in class discussions and take on speaking challenges, demonstrating increased confidence over time.

Another key observation was that immediate feedback during speaking tasks helped students internalize corrections more effectively. Teachers reported that students who received feedback right after making a mistake were more likely to remember and apply the corrections in future tasks. This suggests that timely feedback plays a crucial role in reinforcing learning and promoting continuous improvement in students' speaking abilities.

The findings from this study reveal the significant impact of affirmation practices on students' confidence and performance during speaking presentations. Students reported using personal rituals—such as deep breathing, prayer, and seeking encouragement from supportive individuals—to manage anxiety and foster a positive self-image. These behaviors helped them engage more confidently in speaking tasks. This supports Cohen and Sherman's (2014) assertion that affirming core values can protect individuals' self-worth when facing challenges, enabling students to feel more capable and motivated during high-pressure speaking tasks.

Consistent with Razi's (2014) research, this study found that while affirmation practices did not directly correlate with improved performance scores, they substantially lowered students' anxiety levels. Razi's findings on pre-listening relaxation and self-affirmation exercises showed similar results, indicating a notable drop in self-perceived anxiety but no significant change in test scores. These results suggest that affirmation practices should be seen as supportive tools that reduce emotional barriers to performance, contributing to a more conducive environment for engagement and learning, even if the impact on immediate test results is limited.

In terms of teacher feedback, this study found that both verbal and non-verbal feedback played essential roles in supporting students' speaking development. Teachers frequently provided encouraging comments and constructive criticism, which students reported as motivating and helpful for improving future performance. Gestures and facial expressions further reinforced verbal feedback. As Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 noted, students improved noticeably in subsequent speaking tasks after receiving targeted feedback, underscoring the positive influence of diverse feedback strategies on learning outcomes.

Students perceived constructive feedback as critical for their speaking growth, particularly when delivered with support and clarity. Feedback helped identify strengths, while corrective feedback guided students toward improvement. This reflects Wong and Waring's (2009) argument that feedback serves both evaluative and motivational functions, creating an atmosphere where learners feel safe to experiment and grow. Immediate feedback was especially valued, allowing students to quickly adjust and refine their communication strategies.

Finally, teacher perspectives reinforced the importance of affirming students' efforts and building confidence through positive reinforcement. Teachers emphasized recognizing students' progress, no matter how small, and motivating them through both praise and corrective feedback. This is supported by Nassaji (2021), who explains that feedback confirms accurate language use and boosts learner confidence. Ramadhani's (2020) findings also resonate here, emphasizing that feedback enhances student motivation and willingness to participate. Overall, this study highlights the crucial interplay between affirmation and feedback in creating supportive, confidence-boosting learning environments that improve students' speaking proficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the role of affirmation practices and teacher feedback in enhancing students' speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Through qualitative case study design, including classroom observations, focus group discussions, and teacher interviews, the study identified key strategies used by students and teachers to foster confidence and improve speaking performance.

Findings revealed that students commonly employed behavioral affirmations, such as deep breathing, self-talk, and physical gestures, to manage anxiety before speaking. Additionally, verbal affirmations, particularly in the form of prayer and motivational phrases, played a significant role in enhancing students' confidence. Non-verbal affirmations, such as internal self-encouragement, were also prevalent, reinforcing students' belief in their speaking abilities. However, written affirmations were notably absent, suggesting a preference for immediate, personal affirmations over documented self-encouragement.

Students perceived affirmation practices as an essential tool for overcoming nervousness and improving their speaking performance. While some students reported that affirmations significantly reduced anxiety, others noted that their effectiveness varied depending on the situation. This underscores the individualized nature of affirmation strategies and highlights the need for diverse approaches to support students with different learning styles and levels of confidence.

Teacher feedback was also found to be a crucial element in shaping students' speaking development. Teachers employed verbal feedback in the form of praise and corrective feedback, helping students recognize both their strengths and areas for improvement. Non-verbal feedback, such as smiling, nodding, and clapping, reinforced spoken feedback and created a more encouraging classroom atmosphere. Both teachers and students recognized that constructive feedback played a major role in boosting confidence and enhancing performance over time.

The findings also indicated that students often demonstrated noticeable improvements after receiving teacher feedback, particularly when it was provided in a structured and supportive manner. Teachers noted that students who paid attention to feedback tended to perform better in subsequent tasks, suggesting that timely and well-delivered feedback contributes to long-term speaking proficiency.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of integrating affirmation practices and effective feedback strategies into EFL classrooms. Encouraging students to develop personalized affirmation techniques and ensuring that teachers provide balanced, constructive feedback can lead to improved speaking confidence and overall language proficiency. These findings have important implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, suggesting that fostering a psychologically supportive environment can significantly enhance students' learning experiences. Future research could further explore how different types of affirmations and feedback impact students with varying levels of proficiency and confidence over an extended period.

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