

## **Boosting Confidence Through Praise Expressions in English Language Learning**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the role of praise expressions in fostering learners' confidence in spoken English within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom context. Praise expressions are considered an important aspect of classroom interaction because they function not only as evaluative feedback but also as emotional and motivational support for learners. In many EFL classrooms, students often experience speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence, which may limit their participation in oral communication activities. Therefore, understanding how praise expressions contribute to learners' confidence becomes essential in supporting communicative language learning. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the forms, functions, and influence of praise expressions used during classroom interaction. Data were collected through classroom observation and documentation, focusing on teacher-student interaction during speaking-related activities. The findings reveal that teachers frequently used praise expressions such as "good," "excellent," "great job," and supportive comments encouraging students' participation and effort. These praise expressions contributed positively to learners' confidence by reducing speaking anxiety, increasing classroom participation, and encouraging students to express themselves more actively in English. The study also found that the effectiveness of praise depended on contextual factors, including the sincerity, specificity, and manner of delivery of the praise itself. Personalized and meaningful praise appeared to motivate learners more effectively than repetitive or overly general praise. Furthermore, praise expressions helped create a positive classroom atmosphere characterized by emotional support, reduced fear of negative evaluation, and stronger teacher-student relationships. The discussion highlights that praise should not be viewed merely as a simple compliment but as a meaningful pedagogical and sociolinguistic strategy that influences learner engagement and communicative development. This study concludes that deliberate and context-sensitive praise expressions can serve as an effective classroom practice for fostering speaking confidence and promoting greater communicative participation among EFL learners.

*Keywords: Praise Expressions; Learner Confidence; EFL Classroom*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Praise, in its broadest sense, refers to verbal expressions of approval, encouragement, and recognition given to learners in response to their performance or effort. Within the classroom, praise functions not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a social act that can shape how learners perceive themselves as language users (Lv et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2021). From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is more than a system of grammatical rules because it also serves as a medium through which identity, emotion, and interpersonal relationships are negotiated. When teachers provide praise, they are not simply evaluating a student's answer, but they are also communicating messages about the learner's value, capability, and position within the learning community (Çelik & Baturay, 2024; Hu & Hemchua, 2023; Pravita & Kuswandono, 2021; Sharma & Gupta, 2021; Shree & Shukla, 2016). Positive verbal feedback can strengthen learners' confidence and encourage them to participate more actively in classroom interaction. In language learning environments, especially in EFL classrooms, praise can reduce fear of making mistakes and help students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in English.

Motivational theories also emphasize the importance of positive reinforcement in learning. Praise can lower emotional barriers and create supportive conditions in which learners feel safe to take linguistic risks. Students who receive encouraging responses from teachers are often more willing to speak, ask questions, and engage in communicative activities. In speaking activities, confidence plays a crucial role because many EFL learners experience anxiety, nervousness, or fear of negative judgment when using English orally (Anggreini et al., 2023; Nurul Isma & Bahasa Asing UMI, 2019). Through consistent and supportive praise, teachers can help learners develop a more positive self-image and greater willingness to communicate. As a result, praise becomes an important classroom practice that supports both emotional well-being and language development.

Despite its importance, previous studies have given limited attention to praise expressions as distinct linguistic forms within EFL classroom interaction. Much of the existing research on verbal feedback focuses mainly on corrective feedback, error correction, and evaluative discourse, while the specific ways praise contributes to learner confidence remain underexplored. In many studies, praise is treated as a simple and uniform act without considering variations in its form, frequency, and effectiveness across different classroom and cultural contexts (Ahna & Basikin, 2020; Cheta Raj Regmi et al., 2023; Khan & Arslan, 2025; Rauteda, 2024). In reality, praise is not automatically effective because its impact depends on how it is delivered, who delivers it, and how learners interpret it. Some forms of praise may motivate students, while others may feel insincere or fail to encourage meaningful participation. Therefore, understanding the linguistic and contextual dimensions of praise is essential for improving classroom communication and student engagement.

This paper responds to this gap by examining praise expressions as an influential element in English language learning, particularly in relation to learners' confidence in spoken communication. The discussion focuses on the linguistic characteristics of praise expressions, the theoretical perspectives explaining their motivational function, and the classroom conditions in which praise can most effectively support spoken English development. By connecting sociolinguistic perspectives with affective learning theories, this paper seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how deliberate and context-sensitive praise can function as a practical strategy for reducing speaking anxiety and encouraging greater communicative participation among EFL learners. Ultimately, this discussion highlights the importance of teacher language in creating supportive classroom environments that foster confidence, motivation, and active use of English.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The study of praise in educational settings has long been associated with theories of motivation, classroom interaction, and learner psychology. In language learning contexts, praise is widely recognized as a form of positive reinforcement that can influence students' emotional and academic development. Educational psychologists argue that learners who receive supportive verbal feedback tend to develop stronger self-confidence, higher motivation, and greater persistence in learning tasks (Elenurm & Fabritius, 2023; Verawati et al., 2020). In EFL classrooms, where students often experience anxiety and fear of making mistakes, praise becomes particularly significant because it can reduce tension and encourage participation in communicative activities. Classroom discourse studies also highlight that teacher talk strongly shapes the atmosphere of learning, as teachers hold a central role in managing interaction and guiding student behavior. Through expressions such as "good job," "excellent," or "well done," teachers provide not only

evaluation but also emotional support that may strengthen learners' willingness to speak English. In sociolinguistic perspectives, praise is viewed as a communicative act that reflects interpersonal relationships and social values within classroom interaction. Therefore, praise is not simply a linguistic expression but also a social practice that influences how learners perceive themselves and their role within the classroom community.

Previous studies on verbal feedback in EFL learning have mostly focused on corrective feedback and error correction strategies rather than praise itself. Researchers have extensively examined how teachers correct pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary mistakes and how learners respond to such corrections during classroom interaction (Soori et al., 2025; Wiboolyasarin et al., 2024; Xu & Wang, 2025). While these studies contribute significantly to understanding language acquisition, they often overlook the positive and affective dimensions of teacher feedback. Some studies that discuss praise generally categorize it as a type of positive feedback without exploring its linguistic variation or communicative function in depth. In reality, praise can appear in different forms, including direct praise, indirect praise, effort-based praise, and achievement-oriented praise, each carrying different psychological effects on learners. Furthermore, cultural background may influence how praise is interpreted by students. In some educational settings, frequent praise may increase confidence and motivation, while in others it may be viewed as excessive or less meaningful if not delivered sincerely. These differences indicate that praise should not be treated as a universal or fixed strategy because its effectiveness depends on classroom context, teacher intention, and learner perception. Consequently, there is a need for more detailed discussions regarding how praise expressions operate linguistically and socially in EFL classrooms.

Research related to speaking confidence also demonstrates the close relationship between emotional support and communicative performance in language learning. Speaking is often considered one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners because it requires immediate language production and exposes learners to the possibility of making public mistakes (Merica et al., 2022; Zarkasyi et al., 2018). Many learners experience speaking anxiety, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence, which can limit their participation during classroom interaction. Studies on affective factors in language learning explain that supportive teacher behavior can help reduce these emotional barriers and create a safer learning environment. Praise, as part of supportive teacher discourse, may encourage learners to take risks in speaking and become more actively engaged in oral communication activities. In addition, learner-centered teaching approaches emphasize the importance of creating positive classroom environments where students feel respected, valued, and motivated to express their ideas. However, despite growing awareness of affective factors in language learning, there remains limited discussion specifically examining how praise expressions contribute to learners' speaking confidence in EFL settings. Therefore, further exploration of praise as a linguistic and pedagogical strategy is necessary to better understand its role in fostering communicative engagement and supporting spoken English development among learners.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the role of praise expressions in fostering learners' confidence in spoken English within EFL classroom contexts. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to investigate the meanings, functions, and contextual use of praise expressions in

natural classroom interaction rather than to measure them statistically. Descriptive qualitative research allows researchers to examine language phenomena in depth and to understand how communication practices influence learners' experiences and perceptions (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Lambert & Lambert, 2013; Seixas et al., 2018). Through this approach, the study focused on identifying the forms of praise expressions used by teachers, examining how these expressions appeared during classroom interaction, and analyzing their contribution to students' confidence in speaking English. The study also emphasized the social and affective dimensions of classroom discourse, particularly how teacher language can shape learners' participation and emotional engagement during speaking activities.

The data of this study were collected through classroom observation and documentation. Classroom observation was conducted in an EFL learning environment to capture authentic interaction between teachers and students during speaking-related activities (Mirhosseini, 2020; Zevalkink, 2021). During the observation process, the researcher carefully noted verbal expressions of praise delivered by the teacher, including direct praise, encouragement, and positive evaluative statements addressed to students. The observation focused particularly on situations where students participated in oral communication, answered questions, presented ideas, or practiced speaking tasks. In addition to observation, documentation techniques were used to support the analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher collected field notes and classroom interaction transcripts to identify recurring praise expressions and their contextual use. These data sources enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how praise was utilized in classroom communication and how students responded to it during the learning process.

The participants of this study consisted of EFL students and an English teacher involved in classroom interaction activities. The participants were selected purposively because they represented learners actively engaged in English speaking practices within the classroom setting (Campbell et al., 2020; Etikan, 2016). The teacher's verbal feedback became the primary focus of analysis, while students' responses and participation were observed to understand the influence of praise expressions on speaking confidence. To maintain ethical considerations, participants' identities were kept anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. The study also ensured that classroom observation was conducted naturally without disrupting the teaching and learning process. By observing authentic classroom communication, the researcher aimed to capture realistic patterns of praise usage and students' behavioural responses within everyday instructional activities.

The collected data were analysed using qualitative data analysis procedures consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). First, the researcher selected and categorized praise expressions found in classroom interaction transcripts based on their linguistic forms and communicative functions. The data were then interpreted by connecting the findings with theories of sociolinguistics, classroom discourse, and affective language learning. Particular attention was given to how praise expressions influenced students' willingness to speak, participation during classroom interaction, and overall speaking confidence. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and relationships between teacher praise and learner engagement in spoken English activities. Through this analytical process, the study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how praise expressions function as both linguistic and pedagogical tools in supporting EFL learners' confidence and communicative development.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of this study revealed that praise expressions were frequently used by the teacher during classroom interaction, particularly in speaking activities involving question-and-answer sessions, oral presentations, and group discussions. The teacher commonly used direct praise expressions such as “good,” “excellent,” “very good,” and “great job” immediately after students responded orally in English. These expressions functioned as positive reinforcement that acknowledged students’ efforts and encouraged further participation. In several classroom situations, praise was also combined with supportive comments such as “don’t worry,” “you can do it,” and “that’s a good attempt,” which appeared to reduce students’ hesitation when speaking English. The findings indicated that praise was not limited to evaluating correct answers but was also used to appreciate students’ willingness to participate, even when grammatical or pronunciation errors were present. This practice created a more supportive classroom atmosphere where learners felt safer to express themselves in English without excessive fear of making mistakes.

The study also found that praise expressions contributed significantly to increasing students’ confidence during spoken communication activities. Students who received positive verbal responses from the teacher showed greater willingness to answer questions, share opinions, and participate in classroom discussions. Several learners who initially appeared passive or reluctant gradually became more active after receiving repeated encouragement and recognition from the teacher. Observation data demonstrated that praise often generated positive emotional reactions such as smiling, laughter, and increased eye contact, indicating a higher level of comfort and engagement in classroom interaction. In addition, students tended to speak with greater fluency and less hesitation after receiving praise, suggesting that positive feedback helped reduce speaking anxiety. These findings support the idea that praise functions not only as instructional feedback but also as emotional support that strengthens learners’ self-confidence in using English orally.

Another important finding was that the effectiveness of praise depended on the way it was delivered and contextualized within classroom interaction. Praise expressions that were specific and personalized appeared to have a stronger impact on learner confidence compared to general or repetitive praise. For example, statements such as “your pronunciation is much clearer today” or “that was a very creative answer” motivated students more effectively because they highlighted particular aspects of students’ performance. In contrast, overly frequent or automatic praise sometimes appeared less meaningful and did not always produce visible increases in student engagement. The findings also showed that the teacher’s tone of voice, facial expression, and supportive body language influenced how students interpreted praise expressions. When praise was delivered sincerely and naturally, students responded more positively and became more willing to continue participating in speaking activities. This indicates that praise operates not only through linguistic meaning but also through interpersonal and emotional dimensions of communication.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that praise expressions played an important role in creating a positive classroom environment that supported communicative learning. The consistent use of encouraging language fostered a classroom atmosphere characterized by mutual respect, reduced anxiety, and active interaction between teacher and students. Learners appeared more comfortable making mistakes and experimenting with English expressions because they perceived the classroom as a supportive space rather than a judgmental environment. This condition encouraged greater communicative engagement,

especially among students who previously lacked confidence in speaking English. The findings also suggest that praise expressions can strengthen teacher-student relationships by promoting feelings of appreciation and inclusion within classroom interaction. Overall, the study highlights that praise expressions are not merely simple compliments but meaningful pedagogical tools that can influence learners' emotional states, participation patterns, and confidence development in EFL speaking classrooms.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study demonstrate that praise expressions play an important role in shaping learners' confidence and participation in EFL speaking classrooms. The frequent use of positive verbal feedback by the teacher supports the idea that classroom language functions not only as a tool for instruction but also as a medium for emotional and social support. Praise expressions such as "good job," "excellent," and "that's a good attempt" encouraged students to participate more actively in oral communication activities and reduced their fear of making mistakes while speaking English. These findings are consistent with sociolinguistic perspectives that emphasize the role of language in constructing interpersonal relationships and learner identity within classroom interaction. Through praise, teachers communicate recognition, acceptance, and encouragement, which may strengthen students' sense of belonging and confidence as English language learners. The findings also support affective learning theories suggesting that positive classroom interaction can lower emotional barriers and create safer conditions for language practice (Markee, 2015). When students feel appreciated and supported, they become more willing to take communicative risks and engage in spoken interaction.

Another important discussion emerging from this study concerns the contextual and interpersonal nature of praise expressions. The findings indicate that praise is not automatically effective simply because it contains positive words. Instead, its impact depends greatly on how it is delivered, interpreted, and connected to learners' performance. Specific praise directed toward particular achievements or improvements appeared to motivate students more effectively than general or repetitive praise. This suggests that meaningful praise requires sincerity, contextual relevance, and attention to learners' individual progress. In addition, nonverbal aspects such as tone of voice, facial expression, and supportive gestures influenced how praise was perceived by students. These findings reinforce the view that classroom communication is a multidimensional process involving both linguistic and emotional interaction (Lv et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2021). Praise therefore should not be understood merely as evaluative language but as part of a broader communicative strategy that shapes classroom atmosphere and learner engagement. Teachers who use praise thoughtfully and authentically may create more supportive learning environments that encourage students to participate confidently in spoken English activities.

The findings also highlight the pedagogical significance of praise expressions in fostering communicative competence among EFL learners. Speaking is often regarded as one of the most anxiety-inducing aspects of language learning because learners fear negative evaluation and public mistakes. The study demonstrates that praise can function as a practical strategy for reducing speaking anxiety and encouraging learners to express themselves more freely in English. By creating a positive and less judgmental classroom environment, praise supports learners' willingness to communicate and promotes more active interaction during speaking tasks. These findings suggest that teachers should pay greater attention to the quality and purpose of their verbal feedback during classroom

interaction. Rather than focusing solely on correcting errors, teachers may balance corrective feedback with supportive praise that recognizes effort, improvement, and participation. Such an approach may help learners develop not only linguistic competence but also emotional resilience and communicative confidence (Merica et al., 2022; Zarkasyi et al., 2018). Therefore, praise expressions should be considered an important component of effective EFL teaching practices, particularly in classrooms where learners struggle with low confidence and speaking anxiety.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that praise expressions play a significant role in supporting learners' confidence in spoken English within EFL classroom interaction. The findings demonstrate that positive verbal feedback from teachers contributes not only to students' motivation but also to their emotional comfort and willingness to participate in speaking activities. Through praise expressions such as encouragement, recognition, and appreciation of effort, learners become more confident in expressing themselves in English and less afraid of making mistakes during classroom communication. The study also reveals that praise functions as both a pedagogical and sociolinguistic tool because it shapes classroom relationships, emotional atmosphere, and learner identity within the learning process. In addition, praise expressions help create a supportive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and encouraged to engage actively in communicative activities.

The study further emphasizes that the effectiveness of praise depends greatly on how it is delivered within classroom interaction. Specific, sincere, and contextually appropriate praise was found to have a stronger positive impact on learner confidence compared to repetitive or overly general praise. These findings suggest that teachers should use praise strategically and meaningfully to balance corrective feedback with emotional support during language learning activities. By doing so, teachers may help learners reduce speaking anxiety and develop greater communicative confidence in English. Overall, this study highlights the importance of teacher language in shaping learners' emotional and communicative development and suggests that praise expressions should be recognized as an essential component of effective EFL teaching practices.

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