

Speaking Self-Efficacy and Willingness to Communicate in EFL Teacher Education: A Positive Psychology Perspective

Autoeficacia para la expresión oral y disposición para comunicarse en la formación docente de inglés como lengua extranjera: una perspectiva desde la psicología positiva

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Abstract

Keywords
Teacher education;
positive psychology;
speaking self-efficacy;
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communicate

Introduction: Over the past decade, we have seen a significant rise in the number of studies investigating psychological mechanisms, especially self-efficacy, that affect EFL learners' desire to communicate in L2. However, fewer studies focus on teacher training, and the Latin American region, especially learners in Ecuador, have been excluded from these studies. To bridge this gap, this study examined the levels of Speaking Self-Efficacy (SSE) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Ecuadorian pre-service English teachers based on their underlying construct dimensions. **Methodology:** A quantitative survey design was utilized to collect data from 278 pre-service English teachers enrolled at a public teacher education university in Ecuador using adapted and validated SSE and WTC scales. **Results and Discussion:** The findings revealed moderate levels of both speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate among the sample under study. Among the dimensions of speaking self-efficacy, linguistic self-efficacy was the weakest. Regarding WTC, participants reported the highest willingness to communicate during pair and group work and the lowest willingness when speaking individually or interacting directly with the teacher. **Conclusions:** Drawing on positive psychology and social cognitive theory, practical implications for improving SSE and WTC in teacher education are provided within the paper.

Resumen

Palabras Clave
Formación docente;
educación; autoeficacia
para hablar; disposición
para comunicarse

Introducción: Durante la última década, se ha observado un aumento significativo en el número de estudios que investigan los mecanismos psicológicos, especialmente la autoeficacia, que influyen en el deseo de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) de comunicarse en una segunda lengua (L2). Sin embargo, son menos los estudios que se centran en la formación docente, y la región latinoamericana, especialmente los estudiantes de Ecuador, ha quedado excluida de estas investigaciones. Para abordar esta brecha, este estudio examinó los niveles de Autoeficacia para la Expresión Oral (SSE) y Disposición para Comunicarse (WTC) entre futuros docentes de inglés ecuatorianos, considerando las dimensiones subyacentes de ambos constructos. **Metodología:** Se empleó un diseño de encuesta cuantitativa para recopilar datos de 278 futuros docentes de inglés matriculados en una universidad pública de formación docente en Ecuador, mediante escalas de SSE y WTC adaptadas y validadas. **Resultados y discusión:** Los hallazgos revelaron niveles moderados tanto de autoeficacia para la expresión oral como de disposición para comunicarse entre los participantes del estudio. Entre las dimensiones de la autoeficacia para la expresión oral, la autoeficacia lingüística presentó el nivel más bajo. En cuanto a la WTC, los participantes reportaron la mayor disposición para comunicarse durante el trabajo en parejas y grupos, y la menor disposición al hablar individualmente o interactuar directamente con el docente. **Conclusiones:**



Basándose en la psicología positiva y la teoría social cognitiva, el artículo presenta implicaciones prácticas para mejorar la SSE y la WTC en la formación docente.

1. Introduction

Over the last ten years, Positive Psychology (PP) has served as an important framework for studying second and foreign language education, as it regards both positive and negative emotions as important building blocks for successful learning experiences (Derakhshan, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). PP in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has encouraged researchers to examine how positive psychology foundations can mold learners' participation, motivation, and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in the target language (e.g., Bensalem et al., 2025; Fathi et al., 2023; Lan et al., 2021; Lee & Taylor, 2024; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024). Among the constructs investigated within the PP framework, Speaking Self-Efficacy (SSE) and willingness to communicate (WTC) have received growing scholarly attention (e.g., Karimi & Abaszadeh, 2017; Leeming et al., 2024; Yang & Lian, 2023).

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief about their performance in a specific task (Bandura, 1994; Graham, 2022). Therefore, in the context of language learning, speaking self-efficacy refers to a learner's belief about their own speaking abilities in L2. Research has shown that learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to participate in the classroom, thrive when facing communicative challenges, and achieve higher levels of oral competence (Leeming et al., 2024; Wang & Sun, 2024). On the other hand, WTC is defined as an individual's readiness to initiate communication when given the opportunity (MacIntyre et al., 2001). Naturally, this readiness and desire to communicate improve learners' chances of interaction and language development (Karimi & Abaszadeh, 2017; Leeming et al., 2024).

MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed that WTC is influenced by multiple layers of psychological and contextual variables, including perceived competence, anxiety, motivation, classroom relationships, and communication opportunities. Self-efficacy beliefs also vary across tasks and contexts, depending on learners' previous experiences, feedback received from teachers and peers, and emotional states during communicative activities (Graham, 2022; Wang & Sun, 2024). Consequently, learners may demonstrate different levels of confidence and willingness to communicate while doing the tasks they encounter. Moreover, recent research suggests that both SSE and WTC should not be viewed as fixed personality traits but rather as dynamic, context-sensitive constructs that fluctuate according to situational, social, and emotional factors (Graham, 2022; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Wang & Sun, 2024).

The relationship between SSE and WTC has attracted increasing attention in EFL research. Studies conducted in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East have reported significant positive associations between learners' confidence in their speaking abilities and their readiness to communicate in English (Karimi & Abaszadeh, 2017; Khajavy et al., 2016; Leeming et al., 2024). These findings suggest that learners who perceive themselves as capable speakers are more likely to initiate communication and actively participate in classroom interactions. However, fewer studies have focused on pre-service EFL teachers' speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate, and evidence from Latin American contexts remains limited. Moreover, most studies, including the research cited above, focus solely on empirical findings, and descriptive research based on each variable's underlying construct is limited. This is a significant gap since latent variables such as SSE



and WTC are highly dynamic, and each one has various underlying construct dimensions. For instance, SSE is comprised of linguistic, discourse, and pragmatic self-efficacy, while WTC encompasses willingness to communicate with peers, in groups, individually, and with the teacher. Therefore, studying the various levels of SSE and WTC within pre-service EFL teacher training can provide research-backed evidence on how to improve future teachers' confidence and willingness to communicate when speaking English.

Studying WTC and SSE is significant since available research in Latin America frequently highlights challenges related to learners' confidence and oral communication abilities, leading them to experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and limited classroom participation (Alvarez et al., 2024; Dos Santos et al., 2020; Kalantar, 2024). Given the importance of communication in the process of language teaching and learning, the present study adopts a positive psychology perspective to examine Ecuadorian pre-service teachers' levels of speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate and to investigate the relationship between these two constructs. By providing evidence from a context that remains underrepresented in the international literature, this study contributes to the growing body of Positive Psychology research in English language teacher education by reporting on levels of speaking self-efficacy, L2 willingness to communicate, and the relationship between these two latent variables. Such investigation is essential since it can offer insights to inform teacher training practices aimed at strengthening learners' confidence and participation in English-speaking activities.

1.1. Positive Psychology in Education and Language Learning

Recent reviews by Derakhshan (2022), Dewaele et al. (2019), Resnik et al. (2025), and Wang et al. (2021), collectively frame positive psychology (PP) as a framework that focuses on flourishing and thriving rather than negative emotions and deficits. Peterson (2006, as cited in Wang et al., 2021) defines PP as “the scientific study of what goes right in life,” changing the focus from problems that can be fixed to how people can be helped to thrive and flourish from the beginning of life until death. PP is based on three main areas, which Dewaele et al. (2019), Wang et al. (2021), and Derakhshan (2022) describe as positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Hence, PP has implications for the study of and improving learners' positive experiences, such as speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate. PP has also been used to examine various aspects of education, as it can affect students' learning outcomes, particularly in oral communication. This can be particularly important in an English as a foreign language (EFL) educational setting, as educators recognize that language learning is not only cognitive but also closely connected to human emotions, classroom contexts, and interpersonal relationships.

In the EFL educational context specifically, Derakhshan (2022) emphasizes the importance of interpersonal PP constructs, such as positive classroom relationships and interpersonal connectedness. This can be seen through the learning outcomes that are specifically affected by the daily rapport teachers have with students in the classroom, through verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as humor, individual and group praise, and physical proximity. Classroom setup and student seating are also valuable, as these spatial factors can foster a sense of comfort and trust between students and teachers. Another significant point, specifically in an EFL classroom, is the strategies the teacher adopts to support students' oral communication, such as task-based



authentic activities, which are positive factors a teacher can control and can help improve students' communication abilities through direct connections between cognitively focused activities and positive qualities needed in language learning for growth (Dewaele et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

Moreover, Wang et al. (2021) connect PP to student learning and oral communication improvement, showing that when activities are too difficult or at a level they are not prepared for, their confidence levels decrease, and their self-efficacy does not improve over time if the oral communication activities they are doing are not aligned with their actual knowledge level. This is why having a clear understanding of how to appropriately motivate and engage students is so important to students' ability to attain a high level of self-efficacy (Dewaele et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). Given that positive emotions impact speaking self-efficacy, Resnik et al. (2025) emphasize that there is a significant gap in certain educational areas, specifically task-based learning and teaching (TBLT), and there is a clear gap in the research on how positive emotions affect students' self-efficacy and ability to orally communicate while participating in these types of activities.

1.2. Speaking Self-Efficacy in EFL Oral Communication

Graham (2022), Wang and Sun (2024), and Leeming et al. (2024) review and discuss Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy beliefs within his social cognitive theory to describe speaking self-efficacy, describing its four sources. These sources include mastery experience, a person's beliefs about their ability to speak and communicate, vicarious experiences or observing others succeed or fail, social persuasion or positive feedback, such as encouragement from peers and teachers, and an individual's physiological and emotional state. Graham (2022) describes self-efficacy as a task-specific construct and should not be seen as general confidence when learning a language. An example was given of a student who is strong in receptive skills but lacks the same confidence in oral communication. Therefore, self-efficacy can be important to a student's belief in their language competency goals. If students think they are incapable of speaking effectively, this may impede their participation and improvement, limiting opportunities for oral development. Moreover, Wang and Sun (2024) agree that trying to put all four skills together to measure a student's self-efficacy in a general way does not provide a clear picture of the student's self-efficacy and should be assessed task-specifically to truly understand each individual's ability, while Leeming et al. (2024) add to this discussion by connecting speaking self-efficacy and learners' willingness to communicate, task-based learning, and oral task production as essential components when measuring students' competency.

Kusuma and Waluyo (2023) emphasize this and argue that students' self-efficacy can be shaped by the strategies teachers use. Therefore, oral participation, repetition, and constant practice in authentic activities are essential to help learners develop their mastery experience. When learners do not take advantage of opportunities to participate in oral tasks, they may have fewer opportunities to develop the interactional experience needed to strengthen both their willingness to communicate and their speaking self-efficacy. This is important in EFL contexts, where opportunities for second language (L2) communication are often limited to the classroom; therefore, researchers recommend the use of task-based activities to improve interaction, output, and feedback (Karimi & Abaszadeh, 2017; Leeming et al., 2024).



1.3. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in EFL

In the original MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid model, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). However, WTC in EFL is generally established as “the intention to initiate communication, given a choice (MacIntyre et al., 2001, p.369). These definitions emphasize the importance of an individual's choice to participate or not when given the opportunity. Therefore, in the context of second language learning or EFL, this can be viewed as a student's readiness to participate in oral communication tasks when presented with them (Alrabai, 2024).

MacIntyre et al. (2001), as discussed earlier, describe a six-step pyramid model of factors that influence EFL students' ability to effectively communicate orally in a second language. This model emphasizes the importance of psychological variables such as perceived competency levels, student intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and anxiety levels. They go on to explain how these variables can affect the student in the classroom and ultimately their WTC when it is time to speak. Students may have a strong foundation, but factors such as level of English, confidence, and level of comfort in the classroom affect the student in the moment are very important for their decision to communicate. Therefore, if a student feels comfortable, is highly intrinsically motivated, and has a high level of self-efficacy, they may be even more talkative than a student who has more language knowledge but lower psychological and emotional factors (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

Hence, inside the classroom and during task-based activities, the role of the teacher, peers, and types of classroom-based tasks play a large role in a student's ability to orally produce in the L2 (Alrabai, 2024). Khajavy et al. (2016) also support this idea that when these components function together, students' WTC increases in oral activities. They found that teachers and peers can have a large influence on learners depending on various factors. Students' WTC can be affected by how teachers design tasks, choose topics, and their relationship with the individual learner. Another factor relates to peer influence, as student-to-student interactions, peer support, and how judgmental students are of each other affect their WTC. Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that WTC is shaped by both learners' internal beliefs about their speaking ability and the classroom conditions that either support or limit communication. However, further evidence from Latin America is needed, specifically from the Ecuadorian context.

1.4. Ecuadorian EFL Context and Research Gap

In Ecuador, English is promoted as a mandatory foreign language taught throughout the education system. Dos Santos et al. (2020) explain that the national curriculum includes a section promoting English as a Foreign Language (EFL), outlines clear reforms, and promotes the use of communicative teaching strategies with explicit communicative goals. However, many students still struggle to reach these goals and achieve the communicative competencies outlined in the national curriculum. Alvarez et al. (2024) reiterate this lack of learner achievement through data showing generally low levels of English fluency across the country. While Tamayo Maggi and Cajas Quishpe (2020) focus specifically on grammar, they found evidence of this when EFL teachers in universities perceived that students who had recently graduated from high school and were in



university had a much lower level of English than expected, as they had a much lower level of grammar and vocabulary.

Regarding speaking and oral communication, Alvarez et al. (2024) explained that many factors limit students' ability to improve their English-speaking skills. Those factors include classroom variables such as large class sizes, insufficient classroom time, limited L2 exposure outside the classroom, and too few speaking-focused activities. Moreover, Alvarez et al. (2024), Kalantar (2024), and Dos Santos (2020) all mention socio-emotional variables such as student self-confidence, knowledge of the language, fear of embarrassment or making a mistake, shyness, and anxiety, which affect their willingness to participate and practice speaking. These factors are not congruent with students improving their speaking competency around the country and expose many reasons why students do not have the expected level. However, research in Ecuador regarding the emotional and psychological factors affecting WTC is still in its infancy, and to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has investigated WTC from a positive psychology perspective. Additionally, the available literature implies that Ecuadorian learners possess low levels of self-confidence when it comes to speaking in English, especially when they are not exposed to English in authentic forms and do not have opportunities to be immersed in the L2 language (Dos Santos et al., 2020; Kalantar, 2024). Nevertheless, speaking self-efficacy (SSE) has not been explored.

Furthermore, given that WTC and SSE have varying underlying constructs, as explained in the literature review above, examining the levels of these latent variables according to their underlying constructs can illuminate potential areas of focus. For instance, identifying lower levels of linguistic self-efficacy compared to the other dimensions in a particular context can guide and inform the focus of practitioners on this specific dimension of SSE. Likewise, if it is identified that EFL learners in a particular context have lower levels of WTC with a particular target audience or in a specific situation, targeted remedial exercises can be deployed to respond to this particular need and improve the overall WTC level of EFL learners. Given these gaps and that the previous literature points to low self-confidence and the impact of psychological and belief factors on WTC, it is logical to inquire about the status and level of Speaking Self-Efficacy (SSE) and explore its role in relation to WTC. To fill this gap, this paper proposes the following research questions:

- What is the level of speaking self-efficacy among Ecuadorian EFL learners?
- What is the level of willingness to communicate among Ecuadorian EFL learners?
- What is the relationship between speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and Context

The study included 278 participants from a public teacher training university in Ecuador. The participants were pre-service English teachers at different stages of their academic journey, enrolled from the 1st to the 9th semester. All participants were native speakers of Spanish and enrolled in general EFL courses from A1 to C1 level. Their age ranged from 21 to 40 years. Gender



was not considered a variable in this study and, therefore, was not taken into account in the analysis.

2.2. Research Design

This study employed a survey research design, a non-experimental quantitative approach commonly used to collect data from a defined population. This design is particularly appropriate to query participants' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and self-reported behavior through the use of standardized survey instruments, as it allows the researcher to collect data from multiple participants and facilitates the analysis of patterns and trends within a target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was considered appropriate for this study because it aimed to investigate pre-service English teachers' perceptions of their Speaking Self-Efficacy (SSE) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English.

2.3. Method and Data Collection

Data for this research were collected through two validated scales, with Likert-scale options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To ensure validity in the context of this study, the researchers adapted the questionnaire items and carefully translated them into Spanish, the mother tongue of the participants in this study. These translations were also reviewed by two native Spanish-speaking researchers with extensive experience in education. Before the formal data collection stage, all instruments were piloted with a volunteer group (N=21) to ensure face validity, clarity, translation accuracy, and adequate comprehension of the scale items. Furthermore, both constructs were examined through their respective dimensions, in accordance with their underlying theoretical constructs. Speaking self-efficacy was investigated through its key domains, including linguistic ability, self-regulation, delivery, and performance self-efficacy. Similarly, willingness to communicate was explored in relation to different communication contexts and types of interlocutors. Examining these domains provided a more comprehensive view of the participants' perceptions and allowed a detailed analysis of the specific factors that contributed to their overall levels of SSE and WTC.

In the data collection phase of this study, Speaking Self-Efficacy (SSE) was measured using the scale developed and validated by Wang and Sun (2024), which assesses four dimensions: linguistic self-efficacy, self-regulation self-efficacy, speaking self-efficacy, and performance self-efficacy. The researcher specifically adapted and translated the items into Spanish to suit the participant group. For instance, one double-barreled item in this scale was divided into two separate items to ensure clarity. The WTC Scale was adapted from Lee and Lu (2023). This five-item instrument was modified to reflect classroom realities relevant to the participants, including rewording items to ensure they reflected specific classroom situations. Following these adjustments, the scale was translated into Spanish by the researcher.



2.4. Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics. According to Miksza et al. (2023), the descriptive component of a research design is to determine the levels of the variables under investigation, while the correlational component is to examine the relationships among these variables. In this process, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate descriptive statistical procedures, including reliability analysis, correlations, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarize and describe participants' responses regarding speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate.

The reliability analysis was done through the calculation of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. This analysis was conducted to determine the degree to which the items in each questionnaire measured the intended variables. In the descriptive analyses phase of this study, mean scores and percentages of the responses in each questionnaire were calculated. These calculations allowed the researchers to place the participants into three groups of low, medium, and high levels of self-efficacy and willingness to communicate based on interval distance, as described by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009). In this process, the scale range was divided into three equal parts, resulting in the following thresholds: 1.00–2.33 (low), 2.34–3.66 (moderate), and 3.67–5.00 (high).

3. Results and Discussion

To ensure the reliability of the scales used in this study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaires. As shown in Table 1, both speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate scales showed excellent reliability (SSE=0.89, WTC=0.81).

Table 1.

Reliability Statistics

Variable	Coefficient α
SSE	0.890
WTC	0.810

Source: Provided by the authors

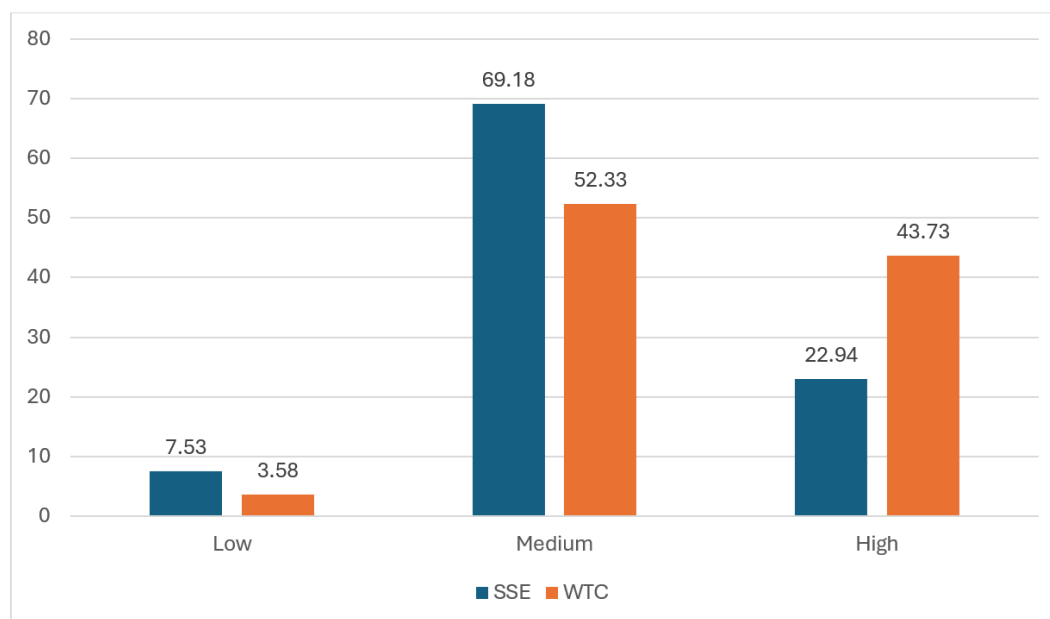
The descriptive analysis phase of this study started with placing the participants into three groups of low, medium, and high based on their levels of speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate. This analysis was carried out with reference to the guidelines provided by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) and sought to highlight the extent to which the participants feel confident in their abilities and are willing to speak English. The results revealed that the participants show moderate levels of both constructs in their English language classrooms. Specifically, only 22.94% of the participants showed high levels of speaking self-efficacy, while the majority of the participants (69.18%) reported moderate levels of confidence in their speaking abilities. The results regarding the participants' willingness to communicate were similar but at a



higher level, with 43.73% of the participants demonstrating high willingness to communicate compared to 52.33% with moderate levels of willingness to communicate. The proximity of these percentages, as evident in Figure 1, is indicative of the relationship between one's feeling of self-belief in their abilities and their desire to communicate.

Figure 1.

Levels of SSE and WTC Among Participants



Source: Provided by the authors

To gain more insight into the factors involved in the participants' speaking self-efficacy, the results obtained by this scale were broken down into the different dimensions of SSE, namely, linguistic, self-regulation, delivery, and performance self-efficacy. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the results indicate that the majority of the participants feel moderate self-efficacy in all dimensions of this construct, and about a third of the participants think highly of their speaking abilities. However, this analysis reveals that the feeling of linguistic self-efficacy is the lowest among all the other dimensions, signifying a need for more attention to the linguistic needs of the participants. Specifically, only 18.64% of the participants demonstrate high linguistic self-efficacy, while the numbers for the other dimensions are all above 30%.

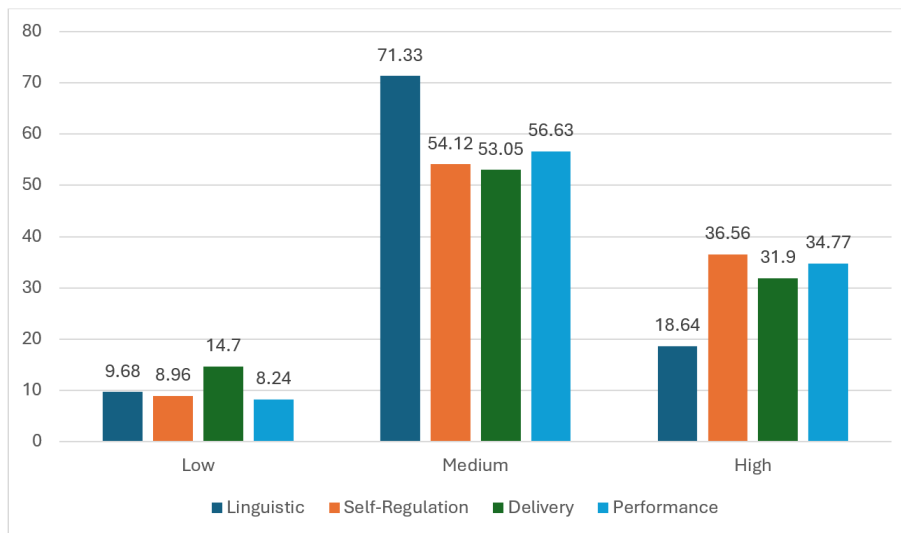
Regarding willingness to communicate in English, the analysis shows that most participants are highly willing to communicate with their peers in group and pair work activities, with speaking in pair work activities receiving the highest percentage (Group work = 56.27%, pair work = 73.48%). Nevertheless, this tendency diminishes when speaking with the teacher and when the participants are required to express themselves individually or in a presentation. As presented in Figure 3, only 30.47% of the participants show a high desire to express themselves or make a presentation in the classroom, and 35.48% are willing to communicate with their teacher to ask a question or request



clarification. Taken together, the findings mean that the students are more comfortable talking among themselves than expressing themselves in the classroom individually or initiating a conversation with their instructor to ask questions or request clarification.

Figure 2

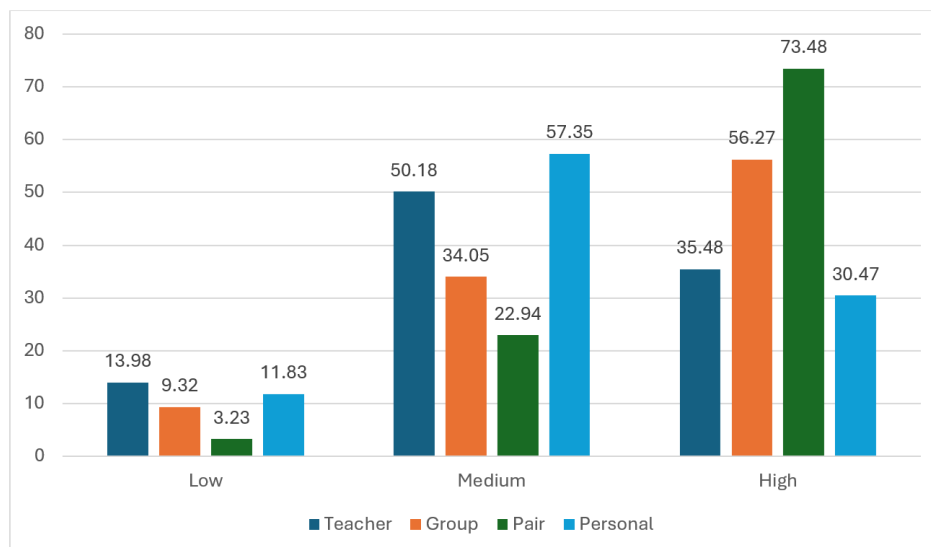
SSE Levels Based on its Underlying Dimensions



Source: Provided by the authors

Figure3.

WTC Levels Based on its Underlying Dimensions



Source: Provided by the authors



Lastly, the correlation between SSE and WTC was examined using Pearson's r to shed light on potential links between these two constructs. As presented in Table 2, the results indicate a strong, statistically significant correlation between speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate in speaking English ($r = 0.738$, $p < 0.001$). This strong correlation indicates that the participants' feeling of belief in their ability is strongly indicative of their desire to communicate in English.

Table 2

Pearson's Correlations

Variable		SSE	WTC
1. SSE	Pearson's r	—	
	p-value	—	
2. WTC	Pearson's r	0.738 ***	—
	p-value	< .001	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Source: Provided by the authors

The descriptive findings suggested that a majority of the participants perceived their SSE and WTC at a moderate level. Only a small percentage of the participants (22.94%) showed high levels of SSE, while a slightly greater percentage (43.73%) reported strong WTC. In the context of EFL learning, students who perceive themselves as less competent may avoid speaking opportunities despite recognizing the importance of communication practice. This interpretation is consistent with MacIntyre et al. (2001), who argue that learners' perceived competence and confidence influence their readiness to initiate communication in the L2, suggesting that moderate levels of SSE may be related to their moderate WTC.

The moderate levels of SSE and WTC found in the present study suggest that teachers may still need to create learning environments that foster pre-service teachers' confidence in SSE and WTC by providing them with successful speaking opportunities, peer modeling, constructive feedback, and supportive learning environments. These results align with the positive psychology guidelines that emphasize positive traits, emotions, and experiences and Bandura's social cognitive theory, which states that SSE develops through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and learners' physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, drawing on positive psychology and social cognitive theory, teachers could intentionally incorporate different types of activities to address these four sources of self-efficacy. For example, to foster social persuasion and a positive environment, a teacher may establish routines such as frequent peer feedback after performing speaking activities where students focus on the positive aspects, emphasizing efforts rather than mistakes. This could be achieved through reflection activities whereby learners use positive sentence starters such as "*One thing you did well was...*" or "*Your strongest point was...*"



Positive subjective experience is another tenet of Positive Psychology that could address the issues of low SSE and WTC. To promote positive subjective experiences, practitioners can reduce learners' speaking anxiety by incorporating preparation time before speaking. Activities such as Think-Pair-Share, or their adapted versions (read-pair-share, listen-pair-share, etc.), could foster a supportive classroom atmosphere and help learners approach speaking tasks with greater confidence. As discussed by Graham (2022), Wang and Sun (2024), and Leeming et al. (2024), these sources of SSE can shape learners' confidence in performing speaking tasks and, consequently, influence their willingness to engage in oral communication.

The results also revealed that students' perception of their linguistic dimension of self-efficacy was the lowest (18.64%) among all the SSE categories. In comparison with self-regulation, delivery, and performance, confidence in linguistic ability was reported by the fewest participants. These results indicate that pre-service teachers may feel they have limited vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or overall accuracy to express their ideas. Leeming et al. (2024) and Wang and Sun (2024) suggest that since learners may feel competent in some language skills while lacking confidence when performing speaking tasks that demand certain levels of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, speaking self-efficacy should be viewed as a task rather than as general language confidence. Similarly, Kusuma and Waluyo (2023) suggest that teachers can strengthen speaking SSE through task-based activities and communicative strategies that can gradually develop learners' confidence. Therefore, in line with the “positive institutions” tenet of Positive Psychology, it is recommended to provide students with opportunities for contextual support by modeling speaking tasks or having students observe their peers successfully complete similar activities before trying independently, thus helping learners build confidence in their own speaking abilities. This approach is further supported by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, where vicarious experience plays a vital role in an individual's sense of confidence in their abilities.

Considering their future roles as English teachers, the moderate scores of all SSE dimensions may indicate that their confidence in their ability to teach English is still developing. According to self-determination theory, learners are more likely to be motivated when they perceive learning activities as personally meaningful and aligned with their interests, values, and future goals (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Thus, learners should be engaged in interactive and authentic activities such as role-plays, debates, presentations, and discussions. Leeming et al. (2024), Wang and Sun (2024), and Karimi and Abaszadeh (2017) emphasize that these types of authentic task-based speaking activities provide learners with opportunities for interaction, output, and feedback, all of which contribute to the development of speaking self-efficacy. Moreover, providing learners opportunities for peer collaboration and support, such as peer feedback, collaborative tasks, and group presentations, can create a supportive learning environment in which students can gain confidence through shared experiences. Khajavy et al. (2016) suggest that supportive peer interactions and collaborative classroom tasks enhance learners' willingness to communicate by creating a less threatening environment for oral participation. Reflection activities, including learning journals, self-assessment, and guided reflection sessions, may also help students recognize their progress and identify areas for improvement.

Regarding willingness to communicate, participants demonstrated greater comfort when interacting with peers during pair and group work activities, as pair work obtained the highest levels of WTC. This finding may be explained by the lower levels of anxiety and pressure typically



associated with collaborative classroom interactions. In a state-of-the-art article, and in line with positive psychology guidelines, Derakhshan (2022) shows that positive classroom dynamics and supportive interpersonal relationships are the reasons for the communication behaviors in the EFL classroom setting. Therefore, students may find peer talk less intimidating as errors are not exposed to others, and communication is more informal.

In contrast, participants reported lower WTC when speaking directly to the teacher or when speaking alone in front of the class. This pattern may be influenced by sociocultural factors, taking into account that in many educational contexts, teachers are perceived as authority figures who should be respected and whom students should then avoid questioning, challenging, or initiating communication with due to norms of respect and hierarchical classroom relationships (Zarei et al., 2019). Another possible explanation is the students' fear of making mistakes or linguistic errors and being negatively evaluated by “this figure” of authority, which can reduce their willingness to communicate with teachers despite the value of these interactions. Previous research has shown that L2 anxiety, particularly fear of negative evaluation, discourages learners from participating in classroom communication and lowers their willingness to communicate (Bai, 2023). Drawing on Positive Psychology, teachers could promote positive subjective experiences in pre-service teachers by scaffolding and gradually creating opportunities for students to communicate directly with them in low-pressure situations and then in more demanding speaking tasks. As learners are exposed to these successful interactions with the teacher and receive supportive guidance, they may strengthen their SSE, reduce their fear of negative evaluation, and, consequently, increase their willingness to communicate. This is also in line with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, where mastery experience leads to less fear of failure.

Beyond the descriptive findings, the positive correlation between speaking SSE and WTC ($r = 0.738$, $p < .001$) supports and highlights the importance of fostering learners' confidence in speaking. MacIntyre et al. (2001) propose that perceived competence and self-confidence are strong signs of willingness to communicate in the L2. This result indicates that participants who feel more confident in their speaking abilities are also more likely to engage in communicative activities. To create such a positive and confident classroom environment, excellent rapport between the instructor and the learners is needed to promote more respectful and supportive spaces to encourage students to take risks without feeling fear of criticism.

4. Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between SSE and WTC among pre-service English teachers. However, several opportunities for future research are suggested. For instance, intervention research could be implemented in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed strategies in the present study. Additionally, qualitative and mixed-methods studies could provide deeper insights into the experiences and contextual factors. Investigating external factors that affect WTC and SSE, such as parental pressure, high academic expectations, and negative prior experiences during learners' formative years, could be the topic of further research. In conclusion, this study suggests that helping learners feel more confident in their speaking abilities may also encourage them to communicate more frequently in English. Teachers play an important role in strengthening both speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate by creating



supportive learning environments and providing meaningful opportunities for oral interaction. These findings offer valuable insights for EFL teacher education in Ecuador and highlight the importance of considering psychological factors alongside linguistic development.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

Ethical implications

This study was conducted with full adherence to ethical guidelines. Prior to the initiation of this study, informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Authors' contribution

Research conceptualization, design, data collection, and data analysis (Omid Kalantar). Manuscript writing (Omid Kalantar, Julia Sevy-Biloon, Paola Serrano, Valeria Chumbi Landy). Manuscript review (Julia Sevy-Biloon, Paola Serrano, Valeria Chumbi Landy). All the authors have read and approved the submitted version.

Declaration of generative AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used QuillBot and ChatGPT 5 to proofread the final manuscript. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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