

Directness and Dignity in EFL Speaking Feedback: Students' Confidence Trajectories

Amra Ariyani^{1*}, Muhammad Arham²

Email: amra.ariyani@unm.ac.id*, muhammadarham@unm.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

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Abstract

Oral corrective feedback is essential in English as a foreign language (EFL) speaking instruction, yet feedback that students experience as unusually firm, harsh, or direct may create a tension between linguistic improvement and confidence. This qualitative study examined how EFL undergraduates perceived strong lecturer feedback, how it influenced their confidence and participation immediately and over time, and which delivery conditions shaped constructive or harmful outcomes. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Four themes were developed: (1) directness is not the same as harshness; (2) the evaluative spotlight produces an immediate affective shock; (3) one feedback event can fork into productive vigilance or protective silence; and (4) students want clarity with dignity and a usable next step. Public correction frequently generated embarrassment, anxiety, and an immediate decline in confidence. However, longer-term responses diverged. Some students converted discomfort into greater preparation, pronunciation, and grammar practice, and eventual confidence recovery, whereas others reduced volunteering, became quieter, or participated only when they felt safe. Clear correction was often welcomed when it was respectful, specific, and actionable; perceived humiliation was associated more strongly with tone, interruption, judgmental wording, and public exposure than with directness itself. The findings show that strong feedback does not have a uniformly negative influence. Its effect is appraisal-mediated and relational, depending on how learners interpret the lecturer's intent, preserve social dignity, and identify a feasible route for improvement. The study recommends confidence-preserving directness rather than either harshness or vague praise.

Keywords: *EFL speaking, oral corrective feedback, speaking confidence, language anxiety, willingness to communicate*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking in a foreign language is simultaneously a linguistic task and a public performance. Unlike private rehearsal or receptive work, classroom speaking exposes learners' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and ideas to immediate evaluation. A student may therefore know that correction is pedagogically useful while still experiencing it as a judgment of competence in front of peers. This distinction matters because opportunities to speak only become learning opportunities when students are willing to take them. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is not simply a stable personality characteristic; it changes with perceived competence, anxiety, interlocutors, task conditions, and classroom climate (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Kang, 2005; Cao, 2011; Peng, 2012). Learners' perceptions of their speaking ability and of whole-class interaction likewise shape whether they contribute orally (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009). In an Indonesian higher education context, teacher reinforcement, confidence, and interpersonal conditions have also been associated with students' WTC (Weda et al., 2021). How

lecturers correct speech is thus relevant not only to accuracy but also to whether students continue speaking.

Oral corrective feedback (OCF) provides information following a learner's spoken error and may take forms such as recasts, prompts, elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic information, repetition, or explicit correction. Foundational classroom research showed that feedback types differ in the uptake and learner-generated repair they elicit (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). Subsequent meta-analytic and review evidence indicate that OCF can facilitate second-language development, although its effectiveness varies with feedback type, instructional context, target feature, learner characteristics, and outcome measure (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Lyster et al., 2013). Corrective episodes may support noticing, draw attention to a gap between intended and target-like production, and create an opportunity for modified output (Mackey, 2006). Consequently, the pedagogical question is not whether lecturers should abandon correction. It is how correction can remain informative enough to improve performance without suppressing the learner's participation through which speaking develops.

General feedback research provides an important caution: feedback is powerful but not uniformly beneficial. Its effect depends on the information it contains, the level at which it is directed, and the learner's interpretation and use of it (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wisniewski et al., 2020). Students themselves consistently value feedback while responding differently to the form and evaluative tone of particular messages (Lipnevich & Smith, 2009). Formative feedback is most useful when it is specific, supportive, credible, and connected to an achievable improvement strategy rather than functioning as undifferentiated evaluation (Shute, 2008). More recent feedback studies, therefore, conceptualizes feedback as a process that requires learner sense-making and action, not merely information transmitted by a teacher (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Student feedback literacy includes appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action (Carless & Boud, 2018). These dimensions are especially relevant in speaking classrooms, where a correction is processed while the learner is already managing real-time language production and social visibility.

The affective dimension complicates the processing of OCF. Foreign language classroom anxiety incorporates communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986), while speaking-specific anxiety can disrupt oral performance and participation (Woodrow, 2006). A meta-analysis across 97 reports found a moderate negative relationship between second-language anxiety and achievement, although the relationship varied across contexts and measures (Teimouri et al., 2019). Anxiety also interacts with enjoyment rather than simply occupying the opposite end of one emotional continuum (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Most pertinent to the present study, embarrassment has recently been theorized as a self-conscious classroom emotion arising when learners perceive that an inadequacy has been exposed to others; it can promote corrective action in some situations but avoidance and withdrawal in others (Khajavy et al., 2025). A public correction may therefore be linguistically precise yet affectively costly.

Research connecting OCF and affect shows similarly conditional patterns. Language anxiety influences how learners perceive feedback and how effectively they respond to it (Rassaei, 2015a, 2015b). Sheen (2008) found that anxiety moderated output and learning following recasts, whereas Lee (2016) showed that carefully implemented pronunciation correction could reduce anxiety among international graduate students. Learners commonly value receiving correction, but their preferences may differ from teachers' practices and may vary

by feedback type, error, proficiency, beliefs, and prior experience (Loewen et al., 2009; Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Roothoof & Breeze, 2016; Yoshida, 2008). In other words, explicitness itself is not a dependable proxy for harm. A direct correction can be experienced as useful attention, while a vague, mocking, interruptive, or person-focused remark can be experienced as threatening even when the linguistic content is valid.

This issue is visible in Indonesian EFL studies but remains insufficiently resolved. Indonesian students have reported anxiety connected with public speaking, fear of mistakes, and teacher-related classroom practices (Anandari, 2015). Hartono et al. (2022) found that teacher OCF did not uniformly damage students' psychological domain, but reluctance, anxiety, and other barriers remained relevant to speech production. Irfani and O'Boyle (2024) further identified mismatches between teacher practices and student preferences in Indonesian EFL classrooms. These studies establish that correction is both necessary and socially situated, yet the category students call *tegas*, *keras*, or "very direct" remains analytically blurred. Those Indonesian terms can refer to clarity, seriousness, a raised voice, public correction, pressure, bluntness, or humiliation. Treating them as a single feedback type risks concealing the conditions that make correction productive for one learner and silencing for another.

Much OCF research has prioritized linguistic outcomes, feedback taxonomies, experimental comparisons, or preference ratings. Those traditions have produced essential evidence, but they are less suited to tracing how students narrate the emotional and behavioral trajectory of a feedback event: what happened at the moment of correction, how they interpreted it later, and whether it led to practice, caution, silence, or a combination of these responses. Open-ended qualitative survey data can capture a wider range of experiences than a small interview sample while allowing participants to describe sensitive experiences privately and in their own terms (Braun et al., 2021). The present study, therefore, examines strong lecturer feedback as a relational event rather than a fixed OCF technique. It does not test whether harsh feedback objectively causes lower confidence. Instead, the this study investigates students' retrospective accounts of perceived influence and the conditions through which directness becomes either a constructive challenge or a confidence threat. Hence, the study aims to address the following three research questions:

1. How do EFL students define and experience strong, harsh, or highly direct lecturer feedback during speaking practice?
2. How do students perceive its immediate and longer-term influence on speaking confidence and classroom participation?
3. What feedback conditions distinguish constructive challenge from confidence-threatening correction?

METHOD

1. Research design

The study used an interpretive qualitative survey design. Qualitative surveys are appropriate when the purpose is to examine patterned meaning across a relatively broad set of written accounts rather than to estimate population prevalence or generate numerical scale scores (Braun et al., 2021). The design was selected because the research questions concerned how students interpreted feedback, how they described changes across time, and what they considered confidence-preserving practice. Written responses also gave participants space to report potentially embarrassing experiences without the immediate interpersonal demands of an interview.

The analysis was informed by a contextualist position. Participants' accounts were treated as meaningful descriptions of experience, but not as transparent recordings of an objectively identical feedback stimulus. Meanings were understood as produced through an interaction among the lecturer's delivery, the public or private setting, the student's prior confidence and expectations, peer visibility, and later reflection. This position supported attention to both semantic content, such as explicit reports of shame or motivation, and latent patterns, such as the distinction between correction of a performance and exposure of the person.

2. Participants

The supplied dataset was from EFL students in an English language education context at an Indonesian higher education institution. Participants self-identified by semester or cohort rather than by name. Their entries referred to cohorts from 2021 to 2025 where most described themselves as being in or entering semesters three to five, with a small number in later semesters. They reported experience in courses including Intensive Speaking, Interactive Speaking, Extensive Speaking, Pedagogy of Speaking, Critical Speaking, and Public Speaking. The dataset did not contain age, gender, proficiency scores, lecturer identity, or other direct personal identifiers. These omissions limit demographic comparison but reduce the risk that critical accounts can be connected to particular students or lecturers.

3. Data collection

The online questionnaire was written primarily in Indonesian, with participants free to code-switch into English. It contained two background questions and eight open-ended prompts. The background items asked about the semester/cohort and speaking courses taken. The substantive prompts asked participants to: define firm, harsh, or highly direct feedback; narrate a specific experience; describe their immediate emotion and confidence; explain longer-term confidence effects; identify changes in participation or behavior; appraise whether the feedback helped, hindered, or did both; advise lecturers on effective delivery; and add any further comments.

The questionnaire structure intentionally moved from definition to event, immediate reaction, longitudinal interpretation, behavioral consequence, overall appraisal, and recommendation. This sequence made it possible to compare a participant's emotional response with the action later attributed to the same event.

4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), following Braun and Clarke's contemporary guidance (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). RTA was appropriate because the purpose was to develop interpretive patterns of shared meaning rather than to apply a pre-existing coding frame, calculate coder agreement, or reduce responses to frequency categories. Themes were treated as analytic constructions that organized meaningful relationships across the dataset.

Analysis proceeded iteratively through six phases. First, all responses were read in Indonesian and organized under anonymous identifiers P01–P50. Familiarization notes recorded recurring emotions, delivery features, temporal shifts, participation changes, and apparent contradictions within individual records. Second, initial codes were generated across all eight substantive questions. Early codes included *public exposure*, *interrupted performance*, *correction as care*, *embarrassment*, *fear of another mistake*, *more preparation*, *reduced volunteering*, *praise before correction*, *private for sensitive issues*, and *individual differences in*

tolerance. Third, related codes were clustered into candidate patterns. For example, public exposure, peer attention, and fear of judgment were linked by the concept of an "evaluative spotlight."

Fourth, candidate themes were reviewed against the entire dataset and against negative cases. The analysis deliberately retained accounts in which direct correction was welcomed, produced no confidence loss, or was interpreted as evidence that the lecturer cared. This prevented the research question from becoming a search only for harm. Fifth, themes were refined around an explanatory sequence linking delivery cues, learner appraisal, immediate emotion, subsequent coping, and participation. The final thematic structure comprised four themes: directness versus harshness; immediate affective shock; divergent longer-term pathways; and confidence-preserving feedback design. Sixth, illustrative excerpts were selected and translated into English for reporting. The Indonesian originals were revisited during translation to preserve intensity and meaning; colloquial wording was rendered in readable English without changing the direction of the response.

Reflexivity was maintained by recording the initial expectation that harsh feedback could damage confidence and then examining data that complicated that assumption. The analysis did not use inter-coder reliability because RTA treats researcher interpretation as a situated analytic resource rather than a source of error to be eliminated (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Quality was supported through complete-dataset engagement, an explicit audit trail linking codes to themes, attention to within-case temporal development, negative-case analysis, and alignment between claims and excerpts. The reporting strategy also followed the principle that themes should express a central organizing concept rather than merely summarize questionnaire topics; Byrne's (2022) work on RTA informed this emphasis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis generated four themes that answer the research questions as a connected process rather than as four independent topics. Students first interpreted the type of event the feedback represented: a clear correction, supportive pressure, public exposure, or personal judgment. That appraisal shaped the immediate emotion, but it did not fully determine the longer-term trajectory. Subsequent access to a usable correction, opportunities to prepare, and the perceived safety of the classroom helped redirect some students toward renewed participation, while lingering fear led others toward silence. Table 1 summarizes the thematic structure.

Table 1. Thematic map of students' experiences

Theme	Central organizing concept	Typical indicators in the data	Confidence/participation implication
1. Directness is not the same as harshness	"Strong" feedback is constructed through tone, wording, timing, audience, interruption, and perceived intent	Clear correction, serious or raised tone, public/private delivery, correction of performance versus judgment of person	Directness can remain acceptable; humiliation emerges when clarity is combined with exposure or disrespect

Theme	Central organizing concept	Typical indicators in the data	Confidence/participation implication
2. The evaluative spotlight produces an immediate affective shock	Correction in front of others heightens self-conscious attention	Shame, embarrassment, nervousness, anxiety, feeling watched, temporary loss of concentration	Confidence often drops at the moment of feedback, even when students later recognize its value
3. Feedback can fork into productive vigilance or protective silence	Immediate discomfort is converted into different coping trajectories	Preparation, deliberate practice, careful monitoring, reduced volunteering, silence, conditional participation	Technical improvement may coexist with reduced spontaneity; long-term confidence can recover, remain fragile, or decline
4. Students want clarity with dignity and a usable next step	Effective firmness preserves social standing and makes improvement actionable	Calm tone, specific modeling, genuine acknowledgment, feedback after the turn, private correction for sensitive issues	Students remain willing to speak when corrections communicate both standards and a feasible route forward

1. Directness is not the Same as Harshness

Participants did not agree that "firm," "harsh," and "very direct" described the same pedagogical behavior. Firmness was often associated with clarity, seriousness, and an expectation that errors should be corrected. Harshness was associated with excessive pressure, an intimidating tone, ridicule, interruption, or language that appeared to evaluate the student rather than the spoken performance. P22 expressed the distinction explicitly: "'Firm' and 'very direct' can be good, but 'harsh' is not good for students because it can cause trauma and make them inactive later." The issue was therefore not a simple preference for gentle speech. Students wanted standards to be communicated, but they objected when the delivery converted a learning problem into a threat to dignity.

The public/private distinction mattered, although public correction was not automatically rejected. Several students argued that a brief pronunciation or grammar correction in front of the class could help peers learn from the same error. P17 considered whole-class feedback acceptable after a presentation or opinion because "it can also become a lesson for the other students." P29 felt "motivated and happy" when a lecturer corrected one mispronounced word publicly, interpreting the correction as evidence that the lecturer had listened carefully. These accounts show that publicness did not operate alone. Public feedback remained constructive when it was limited, respectful, relevant to the group, and clearly directed at an improvable feature.

By contrast, public feedback became harsh when students felt exposed before they could complete a thought or when the lecturer's language implied a stable personal deficiency. P01 described an online class in which a lecturer concluded, before the student had finished

answering, that the student had no independent view. The lingering effect was not primarily a concern about grammar or pronunciation; it was fear of “being seen as wrong again.” P36 similarly recalled being stopped during a presentation and told not to repeat a basic error that had already been taught. The correction supplied a model, but the interruption and public reminder of expected competence made the event feel more judgmental.

Students repeatedly framed acceptability as person- and context-dependent. P04 argued that firmness “cannot always be measured by tone, time, or place” because students differ in how they receive feedback, concluding that lecturers should understand which form of input enables a particular learner “to correct mistakes without feeling humiliated.” P49 likewise distinguished a firm lecturer who gives appropriate, concise direction from a harsh lecturer who “does not think about the surroundings” and chooses the wrong moment. Strong feedback was thus relational: the same explicit correction could be experienced as care, pressure, or humiliation depending on how its delivery met the learner and the situation.

2. The Evaluative Spotlight Produces an Immediate Affective Shock

The most consistent immediate response to public correction was some combination of embarrassment, nervousness, anxiety, and a temporary decline in confidence. P05 summarized the reaction as “embarrassed, anxious, and down.” P16 felt ashamed because classmates heard the correction and worried that they would judge the speaking performance as poor. P24’s correction occurred in an online class combined with another group, and the presence of unfamiliar peers intensified the embarrassment. These accounts positioned peers’ attention as an amplifier: the linguistic error became socially consequential because it was witnessed.

Importantly, the “evaluative spotlight” could be activated even when the lecturer was not harsh. P06 reported never receiving feedback in an attacking tone, yet still felt embarrassed and anxious because classmates were looking on. The gaze of peers reduced concentration and made the student hurry to finish. P22 similarly reported that even gently delivered correction generated persistent fear of being selected and making another mistake. These cases caution against treating lecturer tone as the sole affective variable. Whole-class visibility, existing speaking anxiety, and the student’s interpretation of peer evaluation could produce distress even during well-intentioned correction.

The emotional response was also temporally layered. Some students experienced shame and motivation at the same moment. P10 felt “embarrassed and anxious” when pronunciation and pausing were corrected publicly, but also motivated to improve. P35 described a direct comment on unclear pronunciation and flat intonation as both pressure and a precise indication of what needed work. This combination suggests that negative affect did not mean the informational content had been rejected. A student could believe the lecturer was correct, understand the correction, and still experience an immediate confidence cost.

A smaller counter-pattern involved neutral or positive appraisal. P19 considered correction of a mispronounced word “normal, because making mistakes is reasonable” and read it as the lecturer’s care. P03 felt happy after a public correction of pronunciation because it provided the correct form. P29 likewise interpreted correction as close attention rather than exposure. These students appeared to separate error from identity: being corrected indicated a specific knowledge gap, not an overall lack of speaking ability. Their accounts became important negative cases because they showed that an affective shock was common but not inevitable.

3. Feedback into Productive Vigilance or Protective Silence

Immediate discomfort did not lead to a single longer-term outcome. For some students, an uncomfortable event became a cue for deliberate practice. P21 reported paying greater attention to vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar before speaking. P30 prepared more carefully and practiced more often so that the same error would not recur. P48 described becoming more disciplined about preparation and eventually more confident because the correction made the target for improvement concrete. In these accounts, confidence was not preserved by avoiding error. It was rebuilt through a sense that the error could be acted upon.

P45 expressed the most explicit feedback-seeking trajectory: “Now I feel that I need feedback, so I often speak in order to get feedback.” The willingness to expose an unfinished performance indicated that correction had become useful information rather than a verdict. Other students reached a similar outcome more cautiously. P35 used the lecturer’s comment about pronunciation and intonation to focus on later practice, and P24 became more careful after an embarrassing online correction. These students converted social discomfort into heightened monitoring.

However, increased preparation was not always evidence of stronger communicative confidence. P26 practiced pronunciation and prepared content more thoroughly but became less willing to volunteer. The student’s technical effort increased while spontaneous participation decreased. P34 also practiced privately, yet used less English in class and chose to be silent more often. For these students, careful preparation functioned partly as self-regulation and partly as protection against further public error. The behavioral direction depended on whether practice restored a feeling of control or merely raised the threshold for speaking.

The protective-silence pathway was strongest when the feedback event remained associated with personal exposure. P11 became afraid to answer unless certain of being correct. P22 continued to fear being selected despite describing the lecturer’s delivery as relatively gentle. P38 reported the most sustained withdrawal: “After that, I preferred to remain silent. I only came, sat, and listened.” The student also believed that reduced participation affected the course grade, creating a cycle in which avoidance of embarrassment generated an additional academic cost. Silence was not indifference; it was an attempt to avoid another threatening evaluation.

Several narratives, therefore, contained a double outcome: the student learned what to improve, but became less free to speak while learning it. This pattern answers the confidence question more precisely than a simple positive/negative judgment. Strong feedback commonly lowers confidence at the moment of delivery. Over time, it built confidence by producing a manageable repair task and a credible opportunity to try again. It undermined confidence when vigilance became a fear of public recurrence. Linguistic benefit, emotional cost, and participation loss could coexist in the same account.

4. Students want Clarity with Dignity and a Usable Next Step

Students’ recommendations did not ask lecturers to stop correcting their speaking. They asked for a combination of clear standards, respectful delivery, and guidance for the next attempt. P31 recommended feedback that was “polite, clear, and constructive,” followed by an explanation of how to correct the problem. P09 similarly preferred a calm tone and wording that focused on the mistake rather than making the student feel incapable. These recommendations preserved directness while removing unnecessary interpersonal threat.

Timing was part of respectful clarity. P13 advised lecturers to allow the student to finish speaking before giving feedback: “Do not interrupt in the middle, because it can make the

student lose focus.” Participants generally accepted immediate correction for a discrete feature, such as a single mispronounced word, especially when communication would otherwise break down. Broader comments about fluency, organization, intonation, or repeated difficulty were more often preferred after the speaking turn. This timing allowed the student to complete the communicative act before shifting attention to form.

Privacy was recommended when feedback was extensive, sensitive, or easily heard as a judgment of ability. P28 preferred private delivery because it avoided humiliation and made the student more receptive. Participants did not demand that all corrections be kept private; rather, they wanted lecturers to judge whether the point genuinely benefited the class and to depersonalize it when discussing it publicly. Public feedback was acceptable when brief and generalizable. Individual conferences or messages were preferred when the issue required a longer explanation or involved a vulnerable student.

Students also asked lecturers to recognize effort and courage. P45 suggested appreciating the willingness to try before identifying errors. This was not a request for indiscriminate praise. It was a request to establish that an imperfect performance still counted as legitimate participation. Finally, participants emphasized adaptation. P04, P17, P40, and P49 argued that lecturers should consider a student's confidence, prior experience, and tolerance for directness. P46 captured the overall boundary: extremely harsh feedback can produce silence, whereas firmness combined with careful wording can sustain participation. Confidence-preserving feedback was therefore neither vague nor permissive. It made the next step unmistakable while leaving the student's social standing intact.

Discussion

1. Strong feedback has a conditional, not uniform, confidence effect

The study asked whether overly strong lecturer feedback negatively influences EFL students' speaking confidence. The answer from these accounts is conditional. A negative immediate effect was common: public attention, interruption, and severe wording often produced embarrassment, anxiety, reduced concentration, or a momentary drop in confidence. A uniform long-term negative effect was not evident. Some students used direct correction to prepare more carefully, practice specific features, and rebuild confidence. Others increased private practice while volunteering less, and a smaller group described sustained withdrawal. The crucial distinction was not correction versus no correction, but correction appraised as an attainable learning task versus correction appraised as public judgment.

This conclusion is compatible with the established value of oral corrective feedback (OCF). Classroom studies show that feedback can prompt uptake and draw attention to linguistic form (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Mackey, 2006; Panova & Lyster, 2002). Meta-analytic evidence indicates that OCF can support durable second-language development, although effects vary by feedback type and research context (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010). Comprehensive reviews similarly resist a single best technique and emphasize the interaction among instructional purpose, learner characteristics, and classroom conditions (Ellis, 2009; Lyster et al., 2013). The present findings do not challenge the need for correction. They show that “strong feedback” is not itself a recognized linguistic feedback move. It is a student appraisal based on tone, wording, timing, audience, interruptions, and perceived intent.

That appraisal explains why explicitness cannot be equated with harm. Direct correction was welcomed when it named a specific problem, supplied a usable model, and signaled the lecturer's attention. Harshness emerged when the message shifted from an observable

performance to an apparent judgment of the speaker. This distinction parallels general feedback research: information is most useful when it clarifies the current performance, the desired goal, and an actionable route between them (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). The average influence of feedback is substantial but highly variable, and poorly targeted feedback can be ineffective or counterproductive (Wisniewski et al., 2020). Feedback is therefore not a treatment whose meaning resides only in the lecturer's words; it is a designed interaction that must become usable by the learner (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

2. The evaluative spotlight links feedback delivery to confidence

The “evaluative spotlight” theme provides a mechanism for the immediate confidence decline. Speaking makes performance public in real time. When correction occurs before peers, students may interpret a local error as evidence that a broader inadequacy has been exposed. This interpretation closely reflects the fear-of-negative-evaluation dimension of foreign language classroom anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) and evidence that speaking anxiety is associated with oral communication demands (Woodrow, 2006). The wider anxiety literature also demonstrates a meaningful negative relationship between second-language anxiety and achievement, without implying that anxiety operates identically for every learner (Teimouri et al., 2019).

Embarrassment is especially useful for interpreting the participants’ accounts. Khajavy et al. (2025) conceptualize classroom embarrassment as a self-conscious emotion with both corrective and avoidant possibilities. The present data show both. A witnessed error sometimes increased effort because the student wanted to prevent recurrence; at other times, it increased silence because speaking itself had become the route to another exposure. Control-value theory helps explain this divergence: achievement emotions depend partly on the importance of an activity and the learner’s perceived control over success (Pekrun, 2006). A specific pronunciation model may restore control, whereas a broad personal criticism leaves the learner with high stakes and no manageable repair.

Research on OCF and affect supports this account. Anxiety influences how feedback is perceived and can moderate subsequent learning and output (Rassaei, 2015a, 2015b; Sheen, 2008). Yet correction need not intensify anxiety; Lee (2016) showed that sensitively implemented pronunciation correction could reduce language anxiety. The participants who interpreted correction as normal, caring, or precise illustrate that possibility. Lecturer tone matters, but the present negative cases show that a respectful tone alone may not neutralize the peer gaze. Classroom norms, the learner’s existing anxiety, and whether the performance can be retried also shape the emotional meaning of public feedback (Goo & Takeuchi, 2021).

3. Confidence changes through a participation trajectory

The longer-term findings are best understood through willingness to communicate (WTC), not confidence as a fixed possession. The L2 WTC model treats communication as the result of both enduring and situational influences, including perceived competence, anxiety, interpersonal relations, and immediate context (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Classroom studies likewise show that WTC emerges dynamically through topic, interlocutor, task, teacher support, and moment-to-moment classroom conditions (Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005; Peng, 2012). Learners’ own perceptions of competence and classroom experience can change their readiness to speak over time (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009).

The fork between productive vigilance and protective silence fits this dynamic view. A student may become more accurate yet less spontaneous, or may initially withdraw and later recover after practice. These are not contradictory outcomes if confidence is understood as an

evolving relation among competence, emotion, and opportunity. Feedback literacy offers a complementary explanation. Students need capacities to interpret information, manage affect, make judgments, and take action (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020). When a correction provided a specific target and the student could practice and retry it, feedback became an action resource. When shame consumed attention, or the message lacked a route forward, feedback recipience stalled (Winstone et al., 2017).

Self-determination theory provides a further, cautious interpretation. Motivation is strengthened when learning supports competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The present questionnaire did not measure these needs, so this is an inference rather than a tested explanation. Nevertheless, the constructive accounts preserved competence by identifying an improvable feature, relatedness by communicating lecturer care, and autonomy by enabling the student to act. The silencing accounts threatened competence through global judgment and relatedness through public humiliation. Strong delivery became motivational when it conveyed high expectations alongside attainable support, not when intensity substituted for instructional information.

4. Contribution to Indonesian EFL research

The findings extend evidence from Indonesian EFL settings. Anxiety in Indonesian speech production has been associated with fear of mistakes, limited preparation, and classroom evaluation (Anandari, 2015). Indonesian higher-education WTC is also shaped by psychological, linguistic, and classroom factors (Weda et al., 2021). Hartono et al. (2022) found that OCF can have both facilitative and inhibiting psychological consequences, while Irfani and O'Boyle (2024) documented differences between student preferences and teacher practices. The present study adds a process account: delivery cues are appraised as instruction/care or exposure/judgment; that appraisal produces an immediate emotion; and the emotion is redirected through practice, retry opportunities, classroom safety, or avoidance.

Students' varied reactions also reinforce evidence that feedback preferences and beliefs matter. Learners frequently seek correction, but their preferred form does not always align with teachers' choices (Roothoof & Breeze, 2016; Yoshida, 2008). Beliefs influence what learners notice and take from classroom feedback (Kartchava & Ammar, 2014), and attitudes toward grammar and error correction vary within as well as across learner groups (Loewen et al., 2009). Accordingly, culturally broad claims that Indonesian EFL learners either require forceful feedback or are uniformly harmed by it would both exceed the data. The more defensible conclusion is that clear correction is widely valued, while public personal threat is not.

5. A confidence-preserving directness protocol

The practical implication is not to make feedback weaker; it is to make directness more usable. Table 2 translates the findings into a short sequence for speaking classes. The sequence keeps the linguistic target visible while reducing avoidable threats to attention and social standing.

Table 2. Confidence-preserving directness protocol for speaking feedback

Step	Lecturer action	Rationale
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Step	Lecturer action	Rationale
1. Protect the speaking turn	Allow the learner to finish unless communication has broken down or immediate repair is essential	Preserves communicative intention and reduces loss of concentration
2. Anchor the feedback	Briefly acknowledge a genuine success, effort, or communicative achievement	Signals that an error is local rather than a verdict on overall ability
3. Specify and model	Name one or two observable features and provide a correct example or contrast	Converts evaluation into a manageable learning target
4. Return agency	Invite a brief retry, self-correction, or concrete practice plan	Restores control and lets the learner experience improvement
5. Choose the audience	Keep public feedback brief and generalizable; move extensive, sensitive, or person-specific feedback to a private channel	Retains peer learning while limiting unnecessary exposure

The protocol reflects the importance of goal-relevant, specific, and actionable information in formative feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). Its sequence also encourages active use rather than passive reception (Carless & Boud, 2018). A brief acknowledgment can support uptake, but praise should remain authentic and informational. Praise that merely “sugars” criticism can obscure the message or seem formulaic (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Likewise, privacy should not become secrecy around normal error. Lecturers can explicitly establish that mistakes are expected evidence of language development, use anonymous or collective examples for peer learning, and invite students to state preferences for timing and mode. Responsiveness does not require 50 individualized systems; it requires a repertoire and periodic checking of how students are using the feedback.

6. Theoretical implications, limitations, and future research

The study proposes a relational and temporal model of strong speaking feedback:

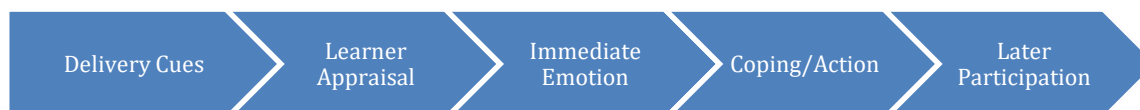


Figure 1. Model of Lecturer Speaking Feedback

Tone, wording, timing, audience, and interruption constitute the delivery cues. Students appraise these cues as instruction/care or exposure/judgment. That appraisal contributes to

embarrassment, anxiety, neutrality, or motivation, but later behavior also depends on whether the feedback supplies a feasible next step and whether the learner expects the classroom to remain safe for another attempt. The model explains why the same event can lead to both technical improvement and communicative withdrawal. It also reframes confidence as an outcome of repeated participation opportunities rather than merely a trait that precedes them.

Several limitations bound this interpretation. First, the data are retrospective self-reports. They establish participants' perceived influence but cannot determine whether lecturer feedback caused changes in confidence or participation. No classroom observations, audio/video records, lecturer accounts, confidence scale, or performance measures were available to compare with the narratives. Second, the available sample came from one institutional context, and recruitment procedures were not included. The distribution of experiences should not be treated as a prevalence estimate for Indonesian EFL students. Third, responses varied in detail, and some participants described ordinary correction or hypothetical harshness rather than a first-hand harsh event. Their inclusion strengthened boundary analysis but also increased experiential heterogeneity.

Future research should combine classroom observation with immediate stimulated recall interviews to compare the same feedback event from the student and lecturer perspectives. Longitudinal designs could trace confidence, WTC, participation, and speaking development across repeated correction-and-retry cycles. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could compare timing, audience, and opportunity to retry while holding the linguistic target constant. Sampling should also examine how prior anxiety, proficiency, lecturer–student relationship, and course norms shape appraisal. Such work would test whether the proposed sequence predicts when directness becomes a productive challenge and when it becomes a barrier to communication.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that strong lecturer feedback does not have a uniform influence on EFL students' speaking confidence. Across the case-based written interview transcripts, many students described an immediate decline in confidence when feedback was delivered publicly, interrupted their performance, or appeared to judge them as individuals rather than address a specific speaking difficulty. However, this immediate discomfort did not inevitably result in lasting harm. Some students translated direct correction into focused practice, greater linguistic awareness, and gradually renewed confidence. Others became more technically prepared but less willing to volunteer, while a smaller group described sustained silence and withdrawal from classroom speaking.

The findings suggest that the decisive issue is not directness itself, but how students appraise the feedback event. Feedback became constructive when students understood the correction as specific, respectful, and actionable, and when they could identify a realistic opportunity to improve or try again. In contrast, feedback became confidence-threatening when it was experienced as public exposure, humiliation, interruption, or a judgment of personal ability. The study therefore reframes strong feedback as a relational and temporal process: delivery cues shape learner appraisal, appraisal shapes immediate emotion, and subsequent opportunities for repair influence whether learners participate, monitor themselves cautiously, or withdraw.

For EFL speaking pedagogy, the alternative to harshness is not vague or overly protective feedback. It is confidence-preserving directness. Lecturers should, where possible, allow students to complete their communicative turn, identify one or two observable speaking features, model

an appropriate repair, acknowledge genuine effort, invite a retry or practice plan, and move sensitive or extensive correction to a private setting. These practices maintain high expectations while protecting the willingness to communicate through which speaking competence develops. Although the present findings concern students' retrospective perceptions rather than causal effects, they underline a central pedagogical principle: feedback is most valuable when learners can use it to improve without feeling that they must withdraw from speaking.

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