



# The Relationship between Fear of Making Mistakes and Self-Confidence Level in Language Learning: A Review Article

## Research Article

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## Abstract

In parallel with recent developments, today it is obvious that the investigation of emotional factors shows a gradual increase in terms of language learning.. Therefore, this review identifies the connection between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence levels in order to delineate the literature. Moreover, probable solutions are demonstrated with the intense emphasis on details of the issue. Taking the individual differences into consideration, the paper discusses and reviews the studies through the lens of underlying reasons that can be revealed with the sources ranging from classroom contexts to possible interactional opportunities that trigger the fear of mistakes and self-confidence levels. This review article contributes to the theories and gives additional evidence for further development in accordance with the present literature while also providing the theoretical portrait of a better and ideal language learning journey through the necessary steps that need to be taken.

**Keywords:** self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, individual differences, language learning, emotions



## **1. Introduction**

Throughout the centuries, language learning has been viewed as a complex process engaging multifarious factors and variables with regard to individuals and emotions. Despite the vast majority of studies based mostly on cognitive factors with regard to language learning, the fundamental influence of affective factors has gained pace due to the inseparable facts that cover the language learning process. While cognitive factors have long dominated language learning research, recent studies have increasingly recognized the crucial role of affective factors, particularly emotions and individual differences. Among these, self-confidence emerges as a pivotal element influencing language acquisition, often fluctuating with emotional stages such as fear and anxiety. Therefore, in the history of language learning, affective factors have predominantly been regarded as game-changing factors. To begin with the importance of emotions and the effects of self-confidence, it is necessary to highlight to the precise definitions of concepts. As Kleinginna (1981) suggests, emotions describe a number of interactions between variables that are controlled through neural and hormonal systems, which can increase the affective experiences such as pleasure, displeasure and happiness generating motivated behaviors. In addition, it is also thought as the portrait of internal dynamics which can not be separated from physical and sensorial feelings (Lazarus, 1999). Obviously, covering a vital place in psychology, it is believed to generate both positive and negative experiences based on the perceptions of individuals. Furthermore, the relations between positive and negative emotions have generally been deemed as related to each other leading to potential outcomes that can have multiple influences in language learning and acquisition processes. One of the notable notions in the beginning of the new developments in so-called influences, Krashen (1982) proposed a groundbreaking affective filter hypothesis, which drew the attention to the roles of emotions in language acquisition. Furthermore, it does not only demonstrate the roles of emotions but also proposes advices on how to teach to lower the fear of making mistakes in terms of second language acquisition. Even though the general emphasis has been laid upon positive emotions with the intention of reducing negative attitudes towards language learning, negative emotions have significant impacts on learners' language learning processes as well. In order to pave the way for a comprehensible and effective language learning process, it is evident that negative emotions such as anxiety, fears, depression should not be ignored for the sake of learners. Known as concepts that lead to destabilization in every area of life, research demonstrates that fear of making mistakes, especially in speaking tasks, generally considered harmful on language learning by increasing fear of making mistakes and lowering the performance. Accordingly, related to the unexpected situations in terms of language learning experiences, especially speaking, fear of making mistakes holds a significant position in dealing with the topic in a detailed manner. Moreover, fear of making mistakes predominantly leaves a lasting impact on self-confidence levels, altering the attitudes and courage towards producing language. Considering the learning structures and processes, difficulties arise when cognitive and affective factors are combined in an attempt to resolve the problematic structures of language learning experiences. In a similar manner, Goleman (1995) points out to a crucial point that neither the students who have negative emotions learn nor people who stuck in negative

emotions can efficiently get the information. Hence, the issue of fear of making mistakes can be extremely controversial with regard to effects in self-confidence levels. Multuer (2006) considers self-confidence as a sense that is existent in every area of life starting from the childhood. In order to take an action to fulfill the goals and expectations, self-confidence is extremely needed. From a holistic point of view, regardless of social and cognitive backgrounds, learners who lack of self-confidence may never reach to their desired capacities. As the language learning and teaching techniques have shifted from passive and deductive phrases to active and interactive participation phrases, the undeniably impressive importance of having a high self-confidence levels became indispensable with regard to a successful language learning. Clearly, it should also be noted that low self-confidence levels probably hinder the real development and capacity of cognitive skills of learners, thus making an insecure learning environment in which they can feel unmotivated and unsuccessful. However, the tendency towards identifying the parts that make the differences in self-confidence is a difficult field and far too little attention has been paid to the role of fear of making mistakes regarding the self-confidence levels. Furthermore, it may be inadequate to just point out to the literature and therefore probable explanations can be made in order to boost students' self-confidence levels within the range of emotions. A large body of literature has mostly investigated the cognitive factors that influence language learning, ignoring the importance of emotions in terms of a successful learning. For this purpose, the review fundamentally aims at stimulating interest in the field and pave the way for precise insights into the relationship between emotions and language learning. Accordingly, one of the main purposes of this paper is to identify the multi-directional impacts of emotions concerning self-confidence levels. In an attempt to reveal the differences and similarities, this paper critically reviews the discussion of likely effects and relationships between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence levels in language learning processes. The concise review of the literature is provided with the highlightment of previous studies on the issue. Following the review, the emotions associated with fear of making mistakes such as anxiety, stress and depression are divided into parts indicating the likely relationships as to self-confidence levels. Several factors that play groundbreaking roles are revealed with including possible solutions to lower the affective filter levels of students with the aim of rejuvenating loss of self-confidence and removing the fears that keep them away from producing the language. Within the scope of language learning, primary roles of the teachers are uncovered to portray the latent stimulating and mistreating behaviours that can alter the learning environment. The paper deals with intertwined compact relation between two negative emotions and observable reasons that can be inferred from literature review with the aim of paving the way for further research to fill the gap in the literature of the field.

## **2. Literature Review**

In relation to particular mainstream of language learning in the past, the psychological and affective factors had generally been ignored due to the emphasis on cognitive aspects approximately until 1970s. In addition, competence, rather than performance, was the widespread conceptualization with regard to the language learning. In line with the importance given to accuracy over fluency, productive usage of language had been restricted, leading to a narrow and inadequate awareness on

functional language learning and its affective assumptions especially in speaking occasions. Following the period, with the developments of creative approaches in linguistics, researchers began to develop new insights taking into account the role of emotions. To illustrate, in his study, Chastain (1975) highlighted the correlation between affective factors and language learning abilities, marking a significant shift in the understanding of language acquisition. Following the growing interest, Lozanov (1978), a Bulgarian psychologist, introduced a concept named as Suggestopedia, which indicates to the importance psychological barriers students encounter while learning a language. The psychological barriers are linked to negative belief systems, including fears, boredom and low self-confidence levels. A notable study, Ayers and Gray (2006) specified the contribution of fear of making mistakes and depression factors to likely constant low-self confidence, motivation levels. Additionally, detailed examination of emotions and especially fear of making mistakes by (Horwitz, et al, 1986) demonstrated that negative emotions definitely have considerable impacts on the efficiency of language learning. Due to the variety of emotions and their likelihood representations on self-confidence levels concerning language learning, the field has become increasingly popular among scholars Arnold (2000) argued that emotions such as anxiety and motivation significantly influence language acquisition by affecting learners' willingness to engage in communicative practices. However, his study's reliance on self-reported data raises questions about the objectivity of these findings. Emphasis on affective factors paves the way for effective language learning, adding the high attention to affective factors can also make contributions to self-development as a whole. In a similar manner, analyzing emotions with their indicators and results enables researchers to discover different perspectives into how language learners manage their emotions that can lead to satisfactory learning journeys, making them attracted to positive emotions (Oxford, 2016). With the intention of identifying the effects of emotions, it is extremely necessary to take the individual differences into account for a broader comprehension. That is to say, emotions start with the individual's situational reaction to an event in the form of demonstrative behaviours (Fredrickson, 2004). From a general point of view, Kidd et.al. (2018) give a brief explanation through implying that the variety of humans is unpredictable with considerable level of descriptions ranging from biological to social structures. More importantly, the dynamics of emotional experiences might lead to the precise evaluation of success degree in terms of language learning (Rahimi & Bigdeli, 2014). Considering the whole portrait of the issue, it is not difficult to identify the fact that learners vary remarkably in the success of learning a language. In his review, Ellis (2004) proposed the notion that learners vary in both acquisition speed and the ultimate level of achievement, showing descriptive factors such as cognitive, social and affective. Regarding the undeniable significance of individual differences, Dörnyei (2005), known as one of the important pioneers in the field of linguistics, divided the concept into some categories such as personality, aptitude, motivation, strategies and beliefs, which can be considered as factors that shape the individual differences and accordingly language learning processes. From an identical point view, Arabski and Wojtaszek (2011) made contributions to the items in categories by adding gender and self-efficacy topics that may be further investigated in the light of individual differences as to understand whether the roles they play have significant impacts on other topics or not. Moreover, these differences are believed to have intimate relations with

contexts, in other words, learning situations created and altered through environmental factors. To highlight to the the crucial points of the issue, Ushioda (2015) emphasized on the fact that the dynamic relationship between individual differences and learning situations require learners to boost their adaptability skills when confronted different learning environments since learning a language is not solely based on internal factors. Obviously, regardless of the external and internal factors, emotions play flourishing roles in terms of achievement of L2 learning. According to Fredrickson (2001) regarded as vital part of emotions, positive emotions (PP) are not only considered as means of L2 learning achievement but also ideal paths to achieve desired intellectual improvement, psychological well-being that can be observable in long-term periods.

### **3. Self-confidence**

It is widely assumed that encouraging emotions can enhance language learners' performances especially in terms of self-confidence levels (Lake, 2013). In addition, Ni (2012) maintains the idea that self-confidence helps students to stimulate their motivations leading to a satisfactory language learning process. Lower self-confidence levels, as noted by Matsuda et al. (2004), are often correlated with heightened fear of making mistakes, suggesting a complex interplay between self-perception and affective barriers in language learning. That is to say, self-confidence levels tend to decrease when confronted with negative emotions, especially fear of making mistakes as it leads the mainstream reasons hindering students' performances. To elaborately comprehend how negative emotions cause transformation, Fredrickson (2013) classifies negative emotions in relation with actions of thoughts in specific directions from anger to the destructive feelings. In addition, in his study, Rubio (2007) found out that negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, feeling of isolation, are among reasons stemming from low self-confidence levels. In his major study, in accordance with the findings and conceptions, Lozarov (1978) also classified negative emotions as barriers that reducing students' abilities to learn a language. However, low self-confidence levels sometimes arise from internal factors and characteristic attributes. From an identical point of view, Daly (1997) asserted that if a language learner shows a tendency to having negative self-perception, resulting in low self-confidence levels, it is more likely h/she experiences fear of making mistakes. Similarly, fear of making mistakes may be associated to self-related negative perceptions in terms of L2 learning (Young, 1999). Furthermore, Thornbury (2005) and Schwartz (2005) stated to the crucial points that psychological factors such as lack of confidence, and fear of mistakes have significant impacts on the students' speaking abilities and language learning performances.

### **4. Fear of making mistakes**

In most cases, fears are regarded as strong barriers that inhibit the actual performances of individuals ranging from academic world to every area of life. As regards to language learning, levels of fear of making mistakes arise within the scope of failure, evaluation and embarrassment. From an identical point of view, Bassett (1985) conceptualizes fear of making mistakes is similar to fear of failure, which is a condition of restraint that makes limitations in self-confidence levels owing to the heightened

fear of making mistakes triggering sources such as stress, avoidance, depression and anger. Due to this, language learners are believed to gradually quit when confronted with obstacles, which can be removed through the inner ability of dealing with challenges. From a classroom-based point of view, the fear of making mistakes poses great difficulty, especially in speaking, which results in production of language, arising the possibility of fear of making mistakes. To a large extent, it is thought to be associated with language anxiety, which is also known as state of fear when learners expected to perform in the target language (Hu & Wang, 2014). In addition to the proposed notion, in his recent study, Adamson (2022) examined that fear of making mistakes involving fear of evaluation are common in any circumstances in which an unknown language is produced. As mentioned by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), fear of making mistakes does not only constitute speaking but also test-anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, which also can be regarded in terms of writing evaluation as well as speaking assessments. Besides, it goes beyond the learning structures and involves students' individual perceptions. As mentioned earlier, individual differences can be categorized into components that are made of external and internal factors shaping the language learning experiences.

### **5. The relationship between self-confidence and fear of making mistakes**

Generally, considering the mutual constructions that shape the environment of language learning. Recent studies, such as Bao and Liu (2021), have highlighted that fear of making mistakes is intrinsically linked to self-confidence, with low confidence levels often leading to increased language anxiety. This relationship suggests that interventions aimed at boosting self-confidence, such as positive reinforcement and stress-reduction techniques, may be crucial in mitigating these fears. In every respect, as fear of making mistakes is a psychological element, it is commonly believed that the role of "self" is indispensable and the most sparkling reason to elaborately take into account (Schwartz et al., 1972). With the aim of providing a general impression, Horwitz (2001) stated that anxious students experience fear of making mistakes related to low self competence and confidence levels. To shed a light on detailed the sources of speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes in language learning, in his research, Aydın (2008) found out that learners experience fear of making mistakes when they are not prepared and lacked of self-confidence for the lesson, indicating to a point their fears arise as a well preparation is not carried out and they tend to feel insecure about a likely dissatisfactory evaluation process. Regarding the preparedness, from a technological perspective, Technology can sometimes seem complex, and the fear of making a mistake might come from worrying about severe consequences, such as data loss or security issues. If you are not comfortable with a technology or tool, even small errors can feel overwhelming because you might not know how to fix them. There's often pressure to use technology flawlessly, whether from self-imposed standards or external expectations, which can heighten fear of making mistakes. In his recent study (Adamson, 2022) statistically found out that nearly half of the participated students identified lack of self-confidence as the main reason contributed to the fear of making mistakes and being judged or laughed by their classmates. In addition, it was also found that effective communication seemed to have significant contributions to relieve fear sources. On the other hand,

a considerable amount of literature has been published on different sources as well. The widely accepted notion of speaking anxiety relies on the productive stages that might trigger negative emotions. As Horwitz et al. (1986) remarked comprehensively, performance acts in L2 commonly challenge the individuals with regard to competence stages resulting in high self-awareness, stress and fears. Also, Hashemi (2011) identifies power relations among individuals as groundbreaking factors in increasing fear of making mistakes. In addition, it is believed that even gender may have some negative contributions in the process of language learning, leading to successive waves of fear of making mistakes. As can closely be linked to the other factors, in his review, Jones (2004) added that cultural reasons may be among the reasons since culture is a concept that involves the feelings of individuals ranging from internal factors to external ones. Besides these factors, the socio-cultural concerns are also taken into account. Clement (1986) proposed the model with the intention of indicating to assimilation fears of language learners due to the emotion-related aspects of learning a foreign language, which may yield extra reasons triggering fear of making mistakes in the production stages. Sources of fear of making mistakes include various topics starting from being anxious to low self-confidence levels. In consideration of the reasons, in another important study, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found a significant correlation between students' perceptions of keeping the positive image and fear of making mistakes, thus providing a general overview about demonstrated tendency to dealing with outside perceptions rather than focusing on their own skills. Similarly, it has been suggested that language learners with a good self-image tend to perform better (Krashen, 1982). To illustrate the details about motivation and self-confidence, Babu (2010) claims that lack of motivation also decreases students' willingness to communicate and self-confidence levels. He also proposed that the one of the salient reasons of this may be associated with teachers' inadequate assistance to boost motivation levels.

## **6. Recommendations on reducing fear of making mistakes with increasing self-confidence**

Almost every paper that has taken the relationship into account includes a section to condemn the threatening impacts altered through proposed negative emotions. Accordingly, a great deal of solution has also been proposed to reduce fear of making mistakes to foster language learning processes. Regarding the reasonable practical solutions, there is large volume of published studies describing and focusing on the role of teacher to relieve fear of making mistakes and help students to increase self-confident levels. Moreover, in addition to the solutions of likely problems, recommendations with the philosophical roots have also been proposed by scholars. Noguchi (2015) provides an in-depth analysis with the help of self-access learning centers' functions to reduce fear of making mistakes. In his findings, he argued that in traditional classroom context the tendency towards fear of making mistakes is widespread compared to self-access centers, which can be improved on the facilities in order to overcome the fears. With regard to the classroom context, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) suggested precious advices related to the role of instructor in fostering the speaking abilities and reducing fear of making mistakes. Instructors can adjust the seating order to maximize the eye contact, thus creating intimate relations and personalise the experience. Necessarily, the classroom context plays a key role in the management of emotions in terms of

language teaching and learning. Although to some extent the traditional classrooms were associated with dull environment and language learning experiences, Lozarov (1978) fundamentally presented the Suggestopedia method which demonstrated the relaxed and free environments foster learners' cognitive performance. It was asserted that both physical and mental relaxation boost learners' success which also can be supported through soft classical music during the learning. The primary aim of the approach relies on the acceleration of learning and reducing the fears with the assistance of positive emotions. In another major study, Stevick (1980) attempts to specify that teachers can foster a sense of security by offering constructive feedback that emphasizes progress rather than perfection. Techniques such as anonymous peer reviews or low-stakes speaking exercises can help reduce the fear of making mistakes, particularly for learners who are less confident in their language abilities. Bao and Liu (2021) offered a teacher-centered solution through implying the fact that in a possible event of anxiety and fear of making mistakes during a classroom, the positive intervention of teacher is necessarily required to encourage students even though the self-confidence levels reach to a low stage. According to Krashen (1982) based on theoretical assumptions, in a low anxiety learning environment, learners' affective filters also decrease and input is easily provided to LAD stage, eventually resulting in successful competence. For this reason, teachers should be also cognizant of the affective teaching abilities in order to diminish the fear of making mistakes related to high affective filter. Also, a small scale study by Ni (2012) reached to a conclusion that as it involves the learners' fears of making mistakes and fears of negative evaluation, suitable teacher guidance is an extremely indispensable fact in shaping the learners' affective factors, thus improving the active involvement in the classroom. In accordance with the proposed notions, Young (1991) recommended group and pair works can be implemented with the intention of increasing encouragement and reduce language anxiety, in other words, fear of making mistakes. Students may conceptualize the developmental paths in a clear way and comprehend that they are not alone in making mistakes. In his review of sources and solutions in terms of fear of making mistakes, Hakim (2019) mentions that instructors should have the perception to empower learners who have difficulty with fear of speaking errors through helping them to gain awareness about errors making and displaying the idea that they are actual paths to access good communication skills. Middleton (2009) argued that most ELF students are extremely afraid of looking foolish in front of their classmates in the event of a speaking opportunity. It is an indispensable fact that random classroom and school contexts preventing students from making mistakes pose great challenges in terms of providing the opportunity to learn from mistakes (Pânișoară, 2015). In the light of investigating the roles of instructors, Dornyei (1997) mentions the traditional role of teachers is not acceptable as it does not include the necessary involvement of students, preventing them from developing self-confidence in the language learning journey. In a similar manner, Pop-Păcurar (2016) stated that traditional education offering created information leads students to unproductive stages with the fear of professors, thus paving the way to fear of making mistakes and should be removed to a large extent in terms of a functional language learning. Additionally, in the mentioned environments, the possibility of being evaluated always sticks to learners' minds, shaping their thinking structures (Eharman, 1996). In accordance with fear of making mistakes, Watson et al. (1969) define fear of

evaluation as fear about others, expectations of receiving demotivating emotions. It is not related to a specific field and present in any possible situations when the requirement for a language evaluation exists. As Pânișoară and Dornyei remind, alongside with the possible factors such as anxiety, stress and antisocial characteristic attributes, classroom procedure and environment should also be positive, otherwise they may hinder the development of speaking skills and accordingly lead students to fear of making mistakes stages. Students' motivation and self-confidence levels should be increased to an extent that pleasant results may be obtained under difficult circumstances (Henter, 2014). Furthermore, Salman et al. (2022) statistically reached to a point that lack of self-confidence and fear of making mistakes hold first places in terms of language learning problems in their study contexts. Moreover, when the fear of making mistake is taken into account, it was added to the literature through highlight that diverse backgrounds and proficiencies of students should not be ignored due to the practical influence to stipulate the heightened fear of making mistakes reasons as language proficiency has long been considered a deciding factor in altering the debilitating anxiety, leading to inevitable fear of making mistakes occasions. Additionally, teachers, parents and community share the responsibility towards students' weaknesses in language learning. In promoting the students' self-confidence levels, the awareness on these issue may be constructed with the assistance of communities.

## **7. Conclusion**

In summary, the paper attempted to reach major points ranging from the theoretical roots to the theories such as Krashen's Affective filter, proving a systematic comprehension in which language proficiency, previous experience, classroom, personal and sociocultural background of learners were considered to be in an intertwined relation with fear of making mistakes and self-confidence in language learning leading to the practical formations and cooperations to elaborately rejuvenate the literature and provide metacognitive solutions covering the field. Through the precise lens of the literature and mainstream studies, it is apparent that to take the language learning process into account without the necessary detailed emphasis on the role of emotions is almost impossible. Considering the impact on language education, it is also inevitable to have complete perspectives with regard to ambiguous concepts embedding in complicated relations. In other words, consideration of negative emotions is essential in paving the appropriate ways to examine the detailed effects in language learning. The possible association between self-confidence and fear of making mistakes has pointed out to the unexpected tendencies students show in the event of producing the target languages. Including the implication and possible integration techniques that can be made from the notions, external factors such as the role of teacher, classroom contexts and peer effects are also revealed in the light of the existing literature with both theoretical assumptions and practical solutions. Accordingly, significant self-confidence levels indicate to limited levels fear of making mistakes and anxiety, thus implying that instructors and individuals should primarily put the notion into their teaching and learning differences. In addition, with the assistance of the published studies, establishing the negative correlation may be possible when the relationship between fear of making mistakes and self-confidence levels are displayed. In the scope of the self-

confidence overview, it can be concluded that it is possible to predict the reasons and the ways to comprehend the sources of fear of making mistakes for an ideal language learning journey. Therefore, maintaining of the representative balance between the mentioned negative emotions lies at the core of developing the field for further research. Even though the serious developments have appeared in the field, there is a number of changes which require to be made and implemented. One of the most potential areas to develop is the concern about the detailed education on individual differences that actually determine the reasons and impacts of mentioned negative emotions. Because of the internal latent details, the levels of self-confidence may be understood broadly when the individual differences are considered in-depth as the likely changes do not always stem from outer and recognizable factors and hinge on individual differences of students. In addition to internal factors that consist of individual differences, the crucial role of teachers also poses a great challenge with regard to the high levels of self-confidence which can be boosted with several methods ranging from creating a relaxed environment to the taking the praise into account when students need in anxious situations. Obviously, this review has come up with many questions in need of further investigation to gain deeper insights. Ensuring the ethical considerations, the policy makers and institutions require to have the necessary organizations and educative constructs to facilitate the awareness about increasing positive emotions to reduce fears of students in the event of language learning. However, unless the government policies implies the necessary steps, the awareness on the issue consisting of individual differences will not be developed. Moreover, the broader comprehension of the relationship between two emotions needs to be explored not only within the student and teacher context but also institutional assistances. With the intention of revealing the expressive perceptions through interviews, the opinions and perceptions about the issue should also be figured out to reach deeper sides of experiences. Consequently, these assumptions provide the insights for further research which can supported through the ethical consideration and practical solutions to comprehend the likely relationships of fear of making mistakes and promote the ideal strategies efficient language learning processes for all learners.

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**Bio-Note:**

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