

How Communicative Language Teaching Reduces EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a systematic strategy to reduce English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' speaking anxiety. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) is particularly prevalent in Indonesian universities, where teacher-centered and assessment systems emphasize grammatical accuracy. Although CLT has been linked to reduced speaking anxiety, a clear theoretical explanation of how and why this method produces an affective impact remains insufficiently studied. Consequently, many EFL teachers lack a strong conceptual foundation to sustain CLT implementation amid institutional pressures. Using a conceptual literature review, the researchers retrieved relevant sources from Scopus, Web of Science, Springer, Taylor and Francis, and Google Scholar; they retained 46 sources and analyzed them through thematic synthesis to identify recurring theoretical patterns. This article integrates five complementary theoretical frameworks to construct an affective framework explaining how CLT reduces speaking anxiety. The article proposes that CLT's success in addressing anxiety depends on three interrelated conditions: shifting assessment focus from accuracy to communicative success, structuring speaking tasks in stages, and fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere. These conditions carry important implications for Indonesian EFL teachers' development programs, suggesting that understanding the psychological rationale behind CLT is more essential than just mastering technical classroom activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an important and psychologically challenging ability in EFL learning. Although there is an increasing demand for proficient verbal communication in academic, professional, and intercultural settings, the situation in EFL classrooms, especially those where students have minimal interaction with authentic language use, frequently reveals that oral communication tends to evoke considerable anxiety rather than fostering genuine interaction. Recent studies continue to report that speaking remains the most anxiety-provoking language skill among EFL learners across diverse educational contexts, despite increasing emphasis on communicative pedagogy (Botes et al., 2020). This pattern is particularly pronounced in Southeast Asia, where Ady & Mardiah's (2024) review found that speaking anxiety has remained a persistent and largely unresolved concern across the region's EFL classrooms. FLSA extends beyond an emotional challenge; it is a recognized psychological issue that can severely hinder communication and oral participation, diminish learners' willingness to engage verbally, and obstruct long-term fluency development (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). In the Indonesian EFL context, this issue may be exacerbated by various structural and cultural factors, such as teacher-centered instructional methods, assessment practices that prioritize grammatical accuracy over communicative effectiveness, and deep-rooted cultural beliefs that view public speaking as socially risky. These elements contribute to making speaking anxiety a significant and often overlooked concern (Anandari, 2015; Rosniarti, 2025).

The communicative approach is widely promoted in academic discourse to transform anxious and passive EFL learners into active, communicative participants. Initially grounded in Hymes's (1972) theory of communicative competence and further developed in the classroom by Littlewood (1981) and Canale & Swain (1980), this approach reorients language instruction towards meaningful interaction based on authentic communicative activity and learner autonomy. It prioritizes fluency over accuracy in communicative tasks. It uses collaborative, low-stakes speaking tasks, giving learners a central role in activities such as conversation, which seem most conducive to reducing foreign language anxiety in the target language. However, implementing CLT to create and sustain a supportive, low-anxiety environment for learners in Indonesian EFL classrooms has been markedly inconsistent and often remains confined to theoretical debate. Recent reviews further indicate that CLT effectiveness largely depends on how communicative principles are translated into classroom assessment, task design, and interactional practices rather than on adopting communicative activities alone (Derakhshan & D Datu, 2025; Sato & McDonough, 2019). This implementation inconsistency is further confirmed by Rosniarti (2025), who concludes that CLT in Indonesian elementary EFL classrooms faces persistent challenges in translating communicative principles into everyday teaching practice, despite growing policy-level support for CLT adoption. Although CLT is often promoted as an educational policy or framework, educators still implement it sparingly, returning to form-focused, teacher-centered practices because of curriculum constraints and high-stakes assessment pressures (Hamied, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2011). As a result, there is a marked gap in its application, and the aims of CLT in reducing speaking anxiety are not typically observed in many Indonesian EFL contexts.

A corresponding gap in the literature mirrors this implementation gap. Although prior research has shown the link between CLT and reduced speaking anxiety, little attention has been paid to the theoretical underpinnings of how CLT reduces these affective outcomes. Descriptions are plentiful; explanations are few. This also persists in recent studies; Gunawan (2026) and Cahya & Churnia (2026), in their respective systematic reviews, report that while several studies document strategies for reducing speaking anxiety, comprehensive theoretical explanations of affective mechanisms are still scarce. Consequently, when a conceptual framework explaining how the communicative approach affects oral expression is missing, EFL teachers may struggle to establish a strong rationale for sustaining this approach amid conflicting educational demands. In other words, speaking anxiety is not only a learner problem, but a pedagogical failure: a symptom of instructional environments that have not yet been adequately designed to address the affective dimensions of language learning.

This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by synthesizing published empirical findings and theoretical analyses to develop a unified understanding of how the communicative approach reduces speaking anxiety in EFL contexts. It focuses specifically on the design and sequencing of communicative

tasks. Furthermore, the article pursues three interrelated objectives: (1) to clarify the conceptual relationship between the principles of the communicative approach and the affective factors contributing to speaking anxiety; (2) to investigate the mechanisms within communicative tasks that help reduce this anxiety, particularly regarding the balance between fluency and accuracy and task type; and (3) to propose evidence-based pedagogical strategies for EFL teachers, particularly in the Indonesian university context. This article supports these objectives by providing a robust theoretical framework and foundational principles for implementing the communicative approach in practice.

This article makes a dual contribution to the field. First, it proposes an integrative and multidimensional framework for understanding how CLT helps reduce anxiety. This framework draws on Krashen (1982) for the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Littlewood's (1981) theoretical framework for CLT, Rogers (1969) and Weimer (2013) for student-centered learning theory, and Vygotsky (1978) for the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), supported by Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), all integrated into a single explanatory model. Unlike existing studies, which are generally grounded in a single theoretical stance, this synthesis attempts to cover not only the cognitive and emotional, but also social and pedagogical dimensions of anxiety reduction. Second, this article recasts CLT not only as a methodological choice but as an intentional affective intervention. Such a shift in perspective has significant implications for EFL teachers in Indonesia, for example, when they need to understand, coordinate, and maintain the use of CLT while competing with curriculum demands and assessment requirements. Existing Indonesian scholarship on CLT, such as Hamied (2012), Kirkpatrick (2011), and Rosniarti (2025), predominantly discusses CLT in terms of curriculum policy, classroom activities, and implementation barriers, treating it as a methodological choice constrained by institutional context. None of these accounts explicitly frames CLT's classroom design as a deliberate affective intervention aimed at learners' emotional experience. This repositioning of the communicative approach as affective pedagogy is a contribution that, to our knowledge, the Indonesian literature on teaching EFL has not explicitly acknowledged.

This essentially conceptual article relies entirely on existing theoretical frameworks and empirical research, without referencing data from direct classroom observations. This article is primarily intended for EFL teachers who are interested in the emotional dimensions of language teaching and the practical implementation of the principles of the communicative approach. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 examines the research methodology of this conceptual paper. Section 3 presents the discussion and conceptual findings, identifying the affective architecture through which CLT reduces speaking anxiety, along with the evidence-based pedagogical strategies that follow from this synthesis. Section 4 concludes and offers pedagogical recommendations for EFL teachers.

METHOD

This study employed a conceptual literature review to synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the role of CLT in reducing FLA. Relevant studies were retrieved from Scopus, Taylor and Francis, Springer, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using combinations of the following keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, EFL speaking anxiety, Affective Filter Hypothesis, Student-Centered Learning, and ZPD. The initial search yielded approximately 1,200 records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts for direct relevance to CLT, speaking anxiety, or the five theoretical frameworks under study, the researchers retained 46 sources for full synthesis. We prioritized recent publications from 2021 to 2026 to capture current developments in CLT implementation and speaking anxiety research. Additionally, several seminal works published before 2021, including foundational studies by Vygotsky (1978), Littlewood (1981), Krashen (1982), and Horwitz et al. (1986), were retained regardless of publication date because of their essential contribution to the conceptual framework. The researchers excluded studies unrelated to speaking anxiety, communicative pedagogy, or EFL contexts.

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis. The first author generated thematic categories inductively through repeated readings of the retained sources, then the second author independently reviewed them; the authors resolved discrepancies in theme boundaries through discussion until they agreed on the final five-theme structure presented in the following section. The

analysis involved identifying recurring concepts, comparing theoretical perspectives, and integrating complementary frameworks into a coherent conceptual model explaining how CLT functions as an affective intervention to reduce speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This conceptual review's findings are organized into five interrelated thematic clusters that collectively support the argument that CLT functions as a structural affective intervention to reduce speaking anxiety among EFL learners. The discussion of each theme is integrated directly beneath its corresponding findings to maintain coherence between evidence and interpretation.

Theme One: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety as the Primary Affective Barrier

FLSA is a psychological problem that often occurs when learners must communicate in a foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that FLSA involves a combination of self-perception, self-confidence, and specific behavioral responses that occur during the language learning process. This concept demonstrates two important aspects of teaching. First, students' anxiety levels are not permanent but can be changed through interventions with learning strategies. Second, FLSA is strongly influenced by the classroom social environment, such as the teacher's teaching design, interaction patterns among students, and the assignment models used. Recent empirical literature strongly reinforces the multidimensional nature of FLSA. Khoirunnisa et al. (2026) and Damayanti & Cahyano (2026) demonstrated that EFL speaking anxiety arises from a complex interplay of cognitive, linguistic, and social drivers. Expanding on these dynamics, Surianto et al. (2026) noted considerable individual variance in anxiety levels, causal factors, and adaptive coping responses.

In contrast, Shahid et al. (2026) established language anxiety as a central determinant of broader speaking difficulties. Additionally, gender-specific variations have been established. Alamri & Qasem (2024) documented distinct patterns of anxiety and participation across male and female learners, a pattern addressed further in Theme Four's discussion of classroom climate. Based on this, the anxiety-inducing features identified above- evaluative pressure on linguistic form, one-shot public performance, and teacher-centered correction- are structural rather than incidental; an effective response must alter classroom structure itself rather than simply encourage learners to feel calmer within an unchanged structure. The CLT approach therefore presents a strategic solution to overcome these emotional barriers, precisely because its core principles directly target these same structural features.

Empirically, speaking is the language skill that most often triggers students' anxiety. This happens because others directly observe speaking activities in class; students often fear negative evaluation (Dewaele, 2007; Liu & Jackson, 2008). This fear of negative evaluation is a major problem in FLSA (Horwitz et al., 1986; Woodrow, 2006). Besides affecting students' psychological barriers, anxiety has a biological impact on students' thinking abilities. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) found that anxiety directly disrupts the brain's cognitive processes and reduces students' working memory capacity when attempting to produce language. This finding is consistent with Meyer & Patty (2024), who reported that speaking anxiety remains one of the major obstacles experienced by Indonesian EFL learners. Their classroom-based study demonstrated that appropriate pedagogical interventions could create a more supportive speaking environment, enabling students to participate more confidently in oral communication activities (Meyer & Patty, 2024). This concern remains highly relevant in contemporary research. Yen (2026) demonstrated that evaluative classroom settings significantly heighten speaking anxiety among final-year EFL students, highlighting the necessity of anxiety-sensitive instruction. Similarly, AI conversational agents fail to mitigate anxiety without deliberate, emotionally supportive design (Huang & Kakham, 2026). These findings collectively reinforce that anxiety reduction stems from pedagogical design rather than the technology itself. This is consistent with Vitta & Al-Hoorie's (2023) broader findings that participatory, learner-centered instructional formats are associated with improved second-language learning outcomes, lending indirect support to the argument that anxiety reduction is best achieved by restructuring the learning format itself rather than through motivational appeals alone.

In the Indonesian context specifically, speaking becomes particularly significant because of several structural characteristics of English language teaching. The English language teaching environment in Indonesian universities is still generally characterized by teacher-centered instruction, assessment systems that emphasize grammatical accuracy, and classroom practices that often treat mispronunciation as shameful (Anandari, 2015). This situation worsens the cycle of student anxiety in the classroom. This pattern establishes the rationale for examining CLT as a corrective pedagogical framework that can address both instructional and affective challenges. These contextual challenges are consistent with broader international findings indicating that assessment of culture and classroom climate substantially shape learners' speaking anxiety (Botes et al., 2020).

These findings indicate that speaking anxiety should not be viewed merely as an individual psychological characteristic but rather as a contextual phenomenon shaped by classroom interaction, assessment practices, and instructional design. Therefore, reducing students' anxiety requires pedagogical interventions that address both learners' emotional experiences and the learning environment in which communication occurs. This understanding provides the conceptual foundation for the following discussion on how CLT functions as an affective pedagogy capable of systematically reducing FLSA.

Theme Two: Communicative Language Teaching as an Affective Pedagogy

CLT emerged as a reaction to conventional grammar-translation methods. Anxiety reduction related to oral expression in English language teaching is generally considered an external component of CLT, rather than an internal component of CLT theory. This research challenges this assumption, arguing that anxiety reduction is embedded within explicit principles of the Communicative Approach, such as prioritizing meaning over form, fostering learner autonomy, and emphasizing authentic communication as the primary goal of language use. These structural principles prioritizing meaning over form, fostering learner autonomy, and emphasizing authentic communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Littlewood, 1981), support the argument that anxiety reduction is an inherent pedagogical consequence of CLT's design, since these very same principles directly address the classroom features that have been empirically shown to provoke speaking anxiety in the first place (Horwitz et al., 1986; Woodrow, 2006).

In traditional grammar-translation classrooms, learners typically develop knowledge of language structure rather than the ability to use communicative skills, particularly in authentic communicative situations. This idea aligns with Hymes's (1972) theory of communicative competence, which was expanded by Canale and Swain (1980). This framework classifies communication competence into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Together, these components emphasize successful communication rather than linguistic accuracy. However, this shift from linguistic form to communicative meaning represents not only a methodological change but also a theoretical commitment that significantly influences students' affective experiences during classroom interaction.

This approach addresses the problems associated with grammar-translation instruction, which often contributes to FLSA through an overemphasis on formal correctness, public error correction, and teacher-centered assessment (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). This structural alignment has significant implications that remain underexplored in the Indonesian literature on EFL teaching. Because the affective benefits of CLT are intrinsic to its design, implementing communicative tasks while maintaining accuracy-oriented assessment creates a pedagogical inconsistency rather than a partial implementation of CLT. However, to achieve this anxiety-relieving effect, it is crucial to align CLT's communication principles and affective logic throughout the teaching process, including lesson design, classroom interaction, assessment practices, and teacher feedback.

The researchers adopted Littlewood's (1981) concept as the primary reference, as it offers a practical explanation of how communicative teaching can be implemented in classroom practice. Littlewood also differentiates between pre-communicative activities, which focus on the controlled practice of language structures, and communicative activities, which prioritize optimal interpersonal interaction. Building on this distinction, we introduce the term affective gradient, a construct proposed

in this article, not one used by Littlewood himself, defined as the deliberate, progressive ordering of communicative tasks from psychologically low demand to high demand, so that learners' tolerance for exposure and error is built incrementally rather than assumed from the outset. This sequencing enables learners to build communicative confidence gradually while avoiding excessive psychological pressure from immediate exposure to demanding speaking tasks.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Brown (2007) share a similar view, arguing that prioritizing fluency over grammatical accuracy in communicative interactions is not simply a methodological choice, but also responds to learners' affective needs. Recent conceptual discourse similarly contends that communicative pedagogy must be evaluated beyond conventional linguistic metrics, encompassing its capacity to cultivate emotional engagement and communicative confidence in learners (Derakhshan & D Datu, 2025). By prioritizing fluency in interpersonal communication, the evaluative pressure associated with grammatical errors is minimized. This fosters a psychologically safe learning environment, particularly for learners experiencing speaking anxiety, and enables them to develop greater confidence and motivation to participate actively in oral communication.

Firdausi (2024) also emphasizes meaningful communication over linguistic accuracy, arguing that authentic speaking assessment should evaluate learners' communicative performance in realistic contexts rather than focusing solely on grammatical correctness. Such assessment practices encourage students to communicate more confidently while reducing evaluative pressure. This perspective aligns with broader evidence that the quality, not merely the presence, of communicative practice shapes learning outcomes (Sato & McDonough, 2019), lending indirect support to the view that authentic, well-designed assessment tasks are more likely to translate into genuine communicative confidence than superficially communicative ones.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that CLT should be understood not merely as a communicative teaching methodology but as an affective pedagogy whose core principles inherently support anxiety reduction. By integrating meaningful interaction, progressive task sequencing, learner autonomy, and supportive assessment, CLT creates classroom conditions that simultaneously promote language development and psychological well-being. This conceptual understanding provides the basis for integrating broader psychological and pedagogical theories discussed in the following section.

Theme Three: Integrating Psychological and Pedagogical Perspectives

Although numerous studies have demonstrated that CLT contributes to reducing speaking anxiety, the theoretical explanation of how this approach produces affective outcomes remains fragmented. Existing literature tends to discuss individual theories separately without explaining how they interact to create psychologically supportive learning environments. Recent theoretical discussions increasingly call for integrative models that explain how cognitive, motivational, and sociocultural factors jointly influence learners' emotional experiences during language learning (Mercer & Gregersen, 2025). To address this gap, this conceptual study integrates five complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the affective mechanism underlying CLT.

This conceptual paper develops its framework by synthesizing relevant theoretical foundations, including Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, Littlewood's (1981) frameworks of CLT, Rogers (1969) and Weimer (2013) with learner-centered learning perspectives, and Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD supported by Deci & Ryan's (2000) theory of Self-Determination. Although these theoretical perspectives agree on the importance of minimizing evaluative pressure and creating psychologically safe learning environments, they differ in their explanations of how speaking anxiety can be reduced. These differences have important pedagogical implications because they shape different approaches to classroom practice.

Cognitively, Krashen (1982) conceptualizes anxiety primarily within the individual cognitive domain and explains that anxiety can influence an internal affective filter that can hinder the language acquisition process. Therefore, from a psycholinguistic perspective, learners are viewed as relatively autonomous cognitive individuals; lowering the affective filter becomes essential for successful language acquisition. In contrast, Vygotsky (1978) conceptualizes learning as an intersubjective social process. From the sociocultural perspective, reducing anxiety cannot be achieved solely by regulating

learners' internal emotional states; it also requires transforming classroom interaction and the social environment so that making grammatical mistakes becomes an accepted part of learning. Accordingly, the two theories prioritize different mechanisms for reducing speaking anxiety. Rather than positioning these perspectives as competing explanations, current second language acquisition research increasingly advocates complementary theoretical integration to explain complex classroom phenomena (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2023). These two accounts need not be mutually exclusive, since they address different levels of the same process rather than competing explanations of a single mechanism: Krashen's model operates at the level of the individual learner's internal state at the moment of language use, explaining why lowering perceived threat enables acquisition, whereas Vygotsky's model operates at the level of the classroom as a social system, explaining how that lowered threat is produced and sustained over time through interaction with others.

A CLT application based on Krashen (1982) would emphasize providing comprehensible input and reducing personal evaluation pressure, often through individual or pair-based communicative activities, with limited external public exposure. In contrast, a CLT implementation informed by Vygotsky's perspective would prioritize collaborative learning, peer interaction, and building a supportive classroom community. Rather than viewing these perspectives as competing approaches, this framework integrates both into a complementary explanation of anxiety reduction. Krashen provides the rationale for creating low-anxiety learning conditions, whereas Vygotsky explains how collaborative interaction sustains those conditions through classroom practice.

Another important tension arises when integrating student-centered learning theory with the structural realities of EFL classrooms in Indonesia. Rogers (1969) and Weimer (2013) described an optimal educational setting as defined by psychological safety, student autonomy, and the collaborative process of constructing knowledge. However, such learning environments require flexible assessment systems, teachers' willingness to share authority, and mutual trust among learners. In reality, these conditions remain limited in many Indonesian universities, where teacher authority remains deeply rooted culturally and institutionally, further reinforced by high-stakes examinations that restrict teachers' pedagogical flexibility (Hamied, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2011). This structural gap should not justify dismissing learner-centered theory; rather, it should be treated as a normative goal that requires gradual, context-sensitive implementation.

Rather than functioning independently, these theoretical perspectives complement one another in explaining the affective process underlying CLT. Krashen explains the psychological condition required for language acquisition, Littlewood provides the pedagogical structure for communicative learning, Rogers and Weimer describe the learner-centered environment that nurtures emotional security, Vygotsky highlights the importance of collaborative interaction, and Deci and Ryan explain how motivation is sustained throughout the learning process. Together, they form a coherent theoretical foundation for understanding why CLT can reduce FLSA beyond its role as a communicative teaching methodology.

Importantly, this integration shows that no single perspective is sufficient to explain CLT's affective effectiveness. Instead, reduced speaking anxiety emerges from the interaction among cognitive, pedagogical, motivational, and sociocultural processes. This integrated perspective provides the conceptual basis for the affective architecture of CLT proposed in the following theme. Taken together, these complementary theoretical perspectives form the conceptual foundation of the proposed affective architecture of CLT. Table 1 summarizes their respective contributions.

Table 1. Theoretical Foundations of the Proposed Affective Architecture of CLT

Theoretical Framework	Core Principle	Contribution to CLT	Affective Role in Reducing Speaking Anxiety
Krashen (1982)	Affective Filter Hypothesis	Promotes low-stress language input and meaningful communication	Lowers emotional barriers that inhibit language acquisition
Littlewood (1981)	Communicative Language Teaching	Organizes communicative tasks through a progressive affective gradient	Builds learners' confidence through gradual communicative demands

Theoretical Framework	Core Principle	Contribution to CLT	Affective Role in Reducing Speaking Anxiety
Rogers (1969) and Weimer (2013)	Student-Centred Learning Theory	Encourages empathy, autonomy, psychologically safe learning, and active learner engagement through shared responsibility	Enhances emotional security and strengthens learners' confidence and ownership of learning
Vygotsky (1978)	Zone of Proximal Development	Emphasizes scaffolding and collaborative interaction	Reduces anxiety through peer support and guided participation
Deci & Ryan (2000)	Self-Determination Theory	Supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness	Sustains intrinsic motivation and communicative confidence

Overall, Table 1 shows that the proposed affective architecture is theoretically grounded in complementary perspectives that address cognitive, pedagogical, motivational, and sociocultural dimensions of language learning.

Theme Four: CLT as a Coherent Affective Architecture

Integrating the previous theoretical perspectives indicates that CLT functions as a coherent affective architecture. This conceptualization suggests that CLT's affective impact does not arise from isolated pedagogical components but from the interaction of multiple mutually reinforcing dimensions. Based on this synthesis, the authors propose that three interrelated conditions are likely necessary for CLT to function as an effective affective intervention, a claim that would be undermined by classroom evidence showing sustained anxiety reduction in the durable absence of any one of the three. First, classroom assessment should shift its emphasis from grammatical accuracy to communicative success, thereby reducing learners' fear of negative evaluation. Second, communicative tasks should follow an affective gradient, ensuring that students are not exposed to speaking demands that exceed their psychological readiness. Third, teachers should cultivate a supportive classroom environment that encourages collaborative peer interaction and normalizes errors as a natural part of language learning, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding and Young's (1991) argument that classroom dynamics can strongly affect speaking anxiety. This supportive climate must also remain attentive to differential patterns of participation among learners, for instance, along gender lines, as documented by Alamri & Qasem (2024), so that classroom norms do not inadvertently favor one group's communicative style over another's. This condition is further supported by Marbun et al. (2026), who found that teachers who consistently apply anxiety-reducing strategies, such as positive reinforcement and tolerance of linguistic errors, are more successful at creating classroom conditions where students feel safe speaking despite imperfect language production.

Among these three conditions, task design represents the most flexible pedagogical component because teachers can directly modify it to support learners' emotional development. According to Ellis (2010), a communicative task is defined as a work plan designed to convey meaning and serve as an indicator of success. Assessment should be based on the achievement of the communicative goal itself, not solely on linguistic accuracy. This outcome-oriented perspective lets learners focus on conveying meaning rather than constantly monitoring grammatical correctness, reducing evaluative pressure during communication. A variety of communicative tasks offers different ways to minimize learner anxiety. To encourage intrinsic communication that shifts learners from anxiety about linguistic errors to an effort to acquire and convey as much information as possible, gap-filling communication tasks can help. Furthermore, role-playing creates psychological distance between learners' personal identities and required language performance, thereby reducing anxiety and emotional burden during communication (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Group problem-solving tasks also allow for a fair distribution of affective and cognitive load among group members, thereby reducing the stress often present in individual communication activities and encouraging motivation and more confident participation (Dornyei, 1997).

Recent studies support the affective benefits of communicative task design. [Alqarni \(2021\)](#) showed that learners' willingness to communicate and speaking anxiety vary between online and face-to-face settings, demonstrating that task format itself influences emotional responses. [Pratiwi et al. \(2026\)](#) reinforced these findings, showing that well-structured speaking interventions in higher education substantially reduce EFL learners' anxiety by aligning task demands with students' communicative readiness. This finding directly supports the affective gradient principle in [Littlewood's \(1981\)](#) framework.

Beyond task selection, the sequencing of communicative activities also determines the affective effectiveness of CLT. [Willis \(2005\)](#) emphasizes the importance of a pre-task phase that provides learners with linguistic and cognitive preparation before communication, while [Prabhu \(1987\)](#) argues that task difficulty should be aligned with learners' psychological readiness. Such gradual progression normalizes errors as a natural part of language learning and reduces the perfectionism frequently associated with speaking anxiety ([Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002](#)). From a cognitive perspective, [Skehan \(2010\)](#) further explains that prioritizing communicative fluency releases learners' cognitive resources from excessive self-monitoring, allowing greater attention to meaning during interaction.

Together, these perspectives suggest that CLT should be understood as a multidimensional affective system rather than merely a communicative teaching approach. Psychological safety, communicative task design, progressive task sequencing, learner autonomy, collaborative interaction, supportive assessment, and intrinsic motivation operate as mutually reinforcing dimensions that collectively reduce speaking anxiety while promoting meaningful language learning. Consequently, the affective effectiveness of CLT depends not only on the use of communicative activities themselves but also on the coherence among instructional design, assessment practices, classroom interaction, and learners' psychological development.

The synthesis above shows that the affective effectiveness of CLT emerges from the interaction of multiple theoretical perspectives rather than a single instructional principle. To illustrate this conceptual integration, Figure 1 presents the integrated theoretical architecture proposed in this study and illustrates how complementary pedagogical components collectively create psychologically supportive learning environments.

Theme Five: Pedagogical Implications for Indonesian ELT

Building upon the proposed affective architecture, this theme discusses the theoretical and pedagogical implications of CLT for English Language Teaching in the Indonesian context. Theoretically, the main implication of CLT is the reconceptualization of CLT from merely a communicative teaching method to an affective pedagogy. This reorientation suggests that English language teacher education should move beyond training teachers to implement communicative activities and instead help teachers understand the psychological principles underlying CLT and how its instructional design reduces learners' speaking anxiety. Without such conceptual understanding, teachers may implement communicative activities mechanically without achieving their intended affective outcomes.

[Meyer and Patty \(2024\)](#) showed that carefully designed speaking activities can reduce students' speaking anxiety, whereas [Firdausi \(2024\)](#) emphasized that authentic assessment practices support learners' communicative confidence by shifting evaluation from grammatical accuracy toward meaningful communication. Together, these findings reinforce the importance of integrating communicative pedagogy with psychologically supportive classroom practices. These findings accord with broader international evidence showing that teachers' pedagogical decisions strongly influence learners' emotional engagement and willingness to communicate ([Mercer & Gregersen, 2025](#)). In line with this, [Yen \(2026\)](#) advocates restructuring evaluative classroom settings around anxiety-sensitive principles, an approach directly mirrored in our proposed framework. Furthermore, [Gunawan \(2026\)](#) highlights a critical disconnect between speaking anxiety research and actual classroom practice, a gap this conceptual model specifically seeks to bridge.

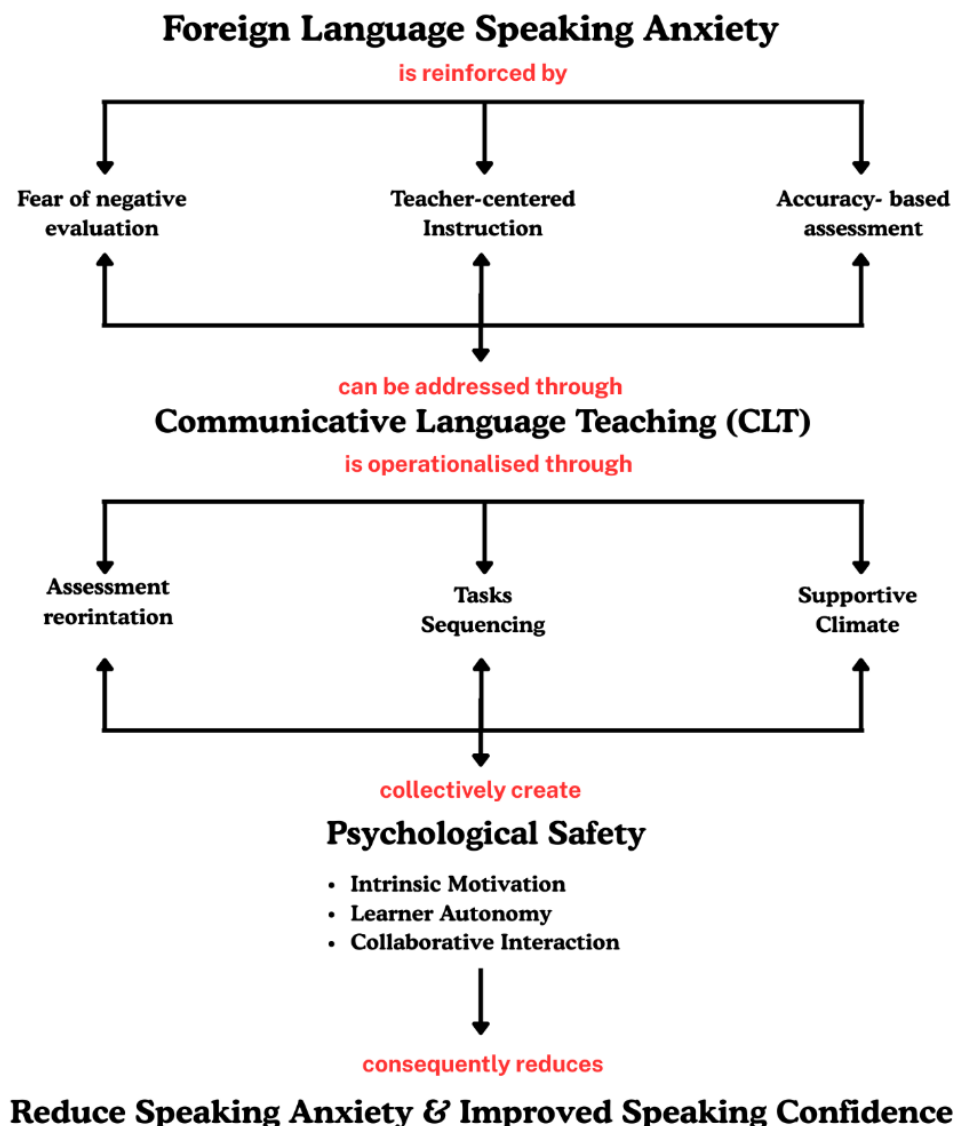


Figure 1. Conceptual Integration of the Proposed Coherent Affective Architecture of CLT

Practically, two complementary strategies can support the implementation of CLT in Indonesian universities. First, teachers implement CLT within the existing institutional framework by adapting communicative principles to curriculum requirements without abandoning its affective foundations. Second, teachers should actively cultivate a supportive classroom climate by establishing norms that tolerate linguistic errors, encouraging collaborative interaction, and avoiding punitive responses to students' mistakes. In the large classes and examination-oriented settings common in Indonesian universities, this can be operationalized through: small, fixed-membership discussion groups of four to five students, allowing every learner regular speaking turns without requiring the teacher to monitor each individually; brief, ungraded speaking warm-ups conducted immediately before graded oral assessments, so that students' first attempt at a topic is never the one being scored; and peer-mediated error feedback protocols, in which students flag communication breakdowns to each other during group work, reserving direct teacher correction for post-task debriefing rather than real-time interruption. These classroom practices help learners see errors as opportunities for learning rather than sources of embarrassment.

Finally, this analysis has important implications for teacher professional development in Indonesia. CLT's affective potential depends on coherence among its pedagogical principles,

communicative task design, assessment practices, and classroom atmosphere. Therefore, teacher education programs should move beyond activity-based training toward theoretically grounded reflective practice. Teachers need a comprehensive conceptual understanding, not merely a repertoire of classroom activities, to make responsive, context-sensitive pedagogical decisions when implementing CLT to reduce FLSA. The framework proposed in this article serves as a conceptual resource to address this need.

Building on the proposed conceptual framework, the pedagogical implications of the affective architecture can be translated into classroom practice. Figure 2 illustrates how CLT addresses the structural sources of speaking anxiety through interconnected pedagogical conditions that foster psychological safety and, ultimately, improve learners' speaking confidence.

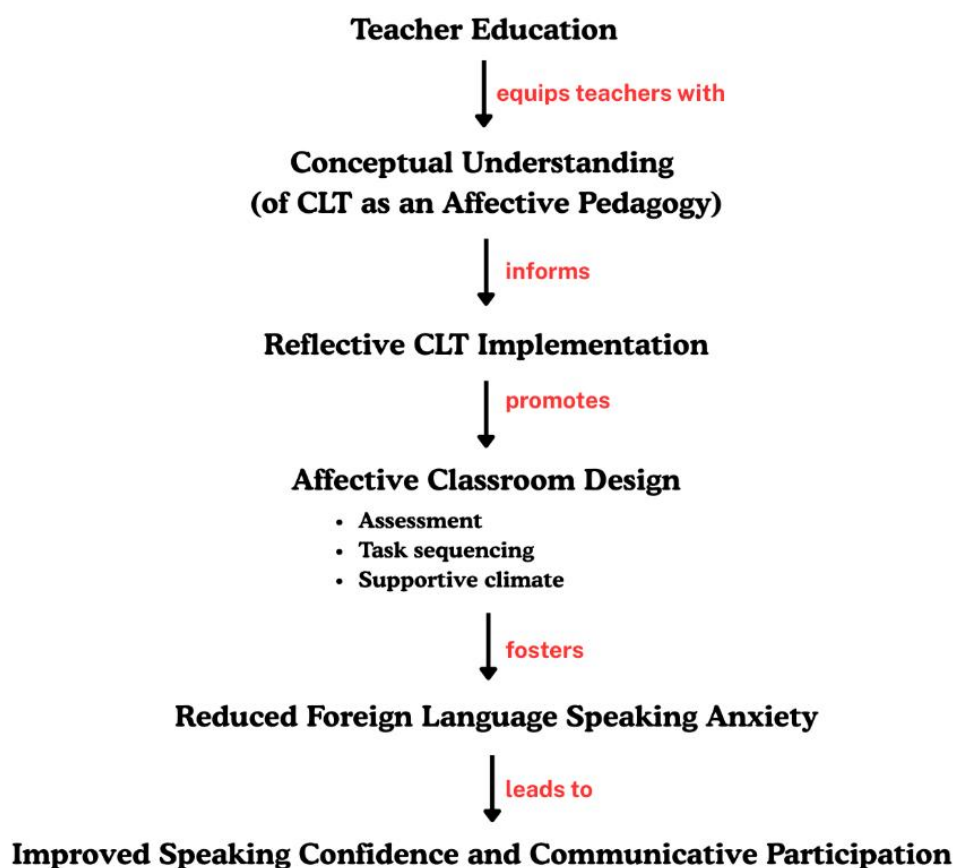


Figure 2. Proposed Pedagogical Model for Reducing FLSA through CLT

CONCLUSION

This conceptual synthesis shows that CLT is not simply an instructional method but also a pedagogical framework whose fundamental principles inherently support reducing EFL students' speaking anxiety. Based on the integration of Krashen's Affective Filter theory, Littlewood's CLT Framework, learner-centered learning theory, Vygotsky's ZPD, and SDT, this analysis generates a testable prediction: EFL classrooms that jointly implement the three conditions identified above, assessment reoriented toward communicative success, task sequencing along an affective gradient, and a supportive classroom climate, should show measurably lower speaking anxiety than classrooms implementing CLT activities without this alignment, whereas classrooms lacking one or more conditions should not.

The proposed conceptual framework has three major educational implications. First, CLT's ability to reduce speaking anxiety depends on consistently aligning assessment practices, progressive communicative task sequencing, and supportive classroom environments. When any of these

components is missing, CLT's affective effectiveness is substantially weakened. Second, sociocultural conditions in Indonesia, including teacher-centered traditions, examination-oriented assessment, and the cultural sensitivity surrounding public mistakes, require CLT to be implemented through contextually appropriate adaptations rather than direct adoption. Finally, teacher education programs should shift their emphasis from introducing classroom activities to developing teachers' conceptual understanding of the psychological principles underpinning CLT.

Accordingly, this study proposes CLT as a Coherent Affective Architecture, in which psychological safety, communicative task sequencing, assessment practices, learner autonomy, collaborative interaction, and intrinsic motivation operate as mutually reinforcing dimensions that collectively facilitate language learning while reducing FLSA.

This study is limited by its conceptual nature and the absence of empirical classroom data. Therefore, future research should empirically examine the proposed framework across different EFL contexts, educational levels, and institutional settings. As a starting point, we would prioritize testing the first condition, the shift from accuracy-based to communicative success-based assessment, since it is the condition most within an individual teacher's control even under institutional constraints. The researchers could measure its effect using a validated instrument such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) administered before and after a full semester of communicative success-based assessment, compared with a matched class retaining accuracy-based grading. Particular attention should be given to how cultural values, assessment systems, and classroom interaction influence the implementation of the proposed affective architecture. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to validate the conceptual relationships proposed in this article.

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