

Promoting English Listening and Speaking Skills for Business Communication Using Reflective Activities

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of reflective-thinking activities to enhance English listening and speaking skills among Business English major students enrolled in English for Business Conversation 2. at a public university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Although the course is designed to develop students' communicative abilities for professional settings, past performance and classroom observations revealed that many learners struggled with oral proficiency and lacked confidence in real-life communication tasks. To address these issues, the researcher implemented reflective-thinking strategies, encouraging students to record their learning experiences, assess their performance, and develop personal improvement plans.

The study applied a reflective practice framework to guide the instructional design. Selected four structured lessons incorporating reflective tasks were reported by the students, including journal writing, self-assessment, and peer collaboration. Data collection involved classroom observations and analysis of student reflections. Findings revealed that students progressively adapted to structured learning, became more responsible for their own development, and demonstrated increased confidence in oral communication. Peer interaction further enhanced their speaking and listening skills, while reflective tasks supported deeper metacognitive engagement.

Feedback from students confirmed the usefulness of the lessons in terms of clarity, structure, and real-world relevance. Learners reported improvements in vocabulary usage, pronunciation, grammar accuracy, and presentation techniques. However, challenges remained in group dynamics, script dependence, and language fluency, indicating the need for continued support and practice. Overall, the study highlights the value of integrating reflective-thinking activities into communicative English instruction, offering an effective pedagogical approach to support skill development and learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

Keywords: English Listening; Speaking Skills; Reflective Activities; Business English.

Introduction

The course “English for Business Conversation 2” taught at a public university in Chiang Mai, is designed to equip students with the knowledge and understanding necessary to use English for Business Communication, with a focus on listening and speaking skills, and to enable them to build on that knowledge appropriately in their future careers. However, because this course requires hands-on practice to develop listening and speaking skills and to boost confidence in using the language, observations of past student practice have shown that their listening and speaking abilities are still below expectations and that they lack confidence in using English in specific situations. Some students’ performance scores on practical exercises did not meet the 50% passing threshold. To address these issues, the researcher sought ways to improve teaching and learning by using reflective-thinking activities, having students keep records of their English listening and speaking practice, assess themselves, and identify development plans based on their own reflections. It is anticipated that this will enhance students’ English listening and speaking skills and guide future instructional practices.

Learning organized around reflective-thinking strategies allows students to express their thoughts and feelings, learn new and different perspectives to develop their existing ideas, and opens up opportunities for them to participate actively in the teaching-learning process. They can offer opinions, remain engaged, and be prepared at all times, which fosters deeper learning and raises their motivation (Khiewleuang et al., 2013; Boontham et al., 2015).

For example, Bunditsathitsan (2018) studied students’ reflections during their cooperative education placements over an extended period and found that systematically guided reflective practice helps students organize and structure their thinking more effectively. If students begin reflecting before starting their placements, their level of reflection during the cooperative education experience improves.

Although the English for Business Conversation 1 course aims to enhance students’ listening and speaking skills, many still struggle with low performance and lack confidence in real-life communication. Traditional teaching methods alone have not fully addressed these challenges. The researchers therefore conducted this study via implementing reflective-thinking activities in English for Business Conversation 2, which is believed to offer a potential solution by encouraging students to assess their progress, identify areas for improvement, and take greater ownership of their learning.

Research Objectives

1. To observe the development of Business English major students, who enrolled in the course English for Business Conversation 2 through the use of reflective-thinking activities.
2. To explore students’ feedback toward learning activities that incorporate reflective-thinking strategies.

Literature Review

1. Definition

Reflective thinking is a cognitive process characterized by active, persistent, and careful consideration of beliefs or knowledge in light of supporting evidence and broader context (Dewey, 1933, as cited in Ozudogru, 2021; Rani, 2022). Rooted in Dewey’s and later Schön’s foundational work, reflective thinking encompasses self-questioning, critical evaluation of experiences, and strategizing for problem-solving (Schön, 1983; Rani, 2022). This metacognitive approach not only deepens learning by linking experience to theoretical understanding but also enhances adaptability and professional development within educational and workplace settings.

A growing body of literature demonstrates the significance of reflective thinking activities in promoting higher-order thinking, metacognitive awareness, and improved academic performance. Reflective activities; such as journaling, collaborative discussion, and structured models like Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988, as cited in Jasper, 2013) provide structured opportunities for learners to analyze their thoughts, emotions, and learning processes. For example, collaborative reflective learning, integrating practices like Socratic questioning and guided peer feedback, has been shown to increase critical questioning and improve the quality of students' reflective writing and learning outcomes (Maznah et al., 2021). Empirical studies show that reflective thinking enables students not only to enhance self-awareness and self-evaluation but also to develop better problem-solving strategies and foster emotional intelligence (Afshar & Farahani, 2015; Gong et al., 2024).

Reflective teaching and learning frameworks highlight the cyclical nature of reflection, involving experience, self-evaluation, questioning, hypothesis development, and testing (Dewey, 1933; Bustami et al., 2018). Ultimately, promoting reflective thinking and structured reflective activities is widely recognized as essential for lifelong learning, adaptability, and success in diverse contemporary environments. Due to the benefits provided by reflective thinking, it is argued that the approach can be implemented in English Language teaching in that students have the opportunity to reflect what that have learned in class. Thus, they can recognize their strengths and weaknesses, especially their listening and speaking skill, providing them with guidelines to improve the skills.

2. Previous Studies

A growing body of research highlights the significance of reflective practice in supporting teacher development, shaping professional identity, and enhancing instructional effectiveness across various TESOL contexts. Farrell's (2023) five-stage reflective framework, comprising philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice has been widely employed to examine the alignment between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. In a case study of an experienced ESL teacher, Farrell (2023) found strong coherence between the teacher's espoused beliefs and pedagogical actions. The teacher demonstrated expert characteristics, such as responsiveness to learners' needs, critical reflection, and sustained engagement beyond the classroom, with rapport-building and learner-centeredness emerging as key themes.

Expanding further, Abdul et al. (2023) conducted a phenomenological study with pre-service TESOL teachers in Malaysia, emphasizing the dialogical nature of reflection on critical incidents. This study showed how collaborative reflection enabled participants to negotiate conflicting identity positions and cultivate coherent teaching identities.

Moreover, Maneepakthorn (2023) explored the use of Reflective Dialogue Journal Writing (RDJW) among 34 Thai EFL graduate students over 13 weeks. Findings showed high learner satisfaction, with RDJW perceived as a nonjudgmental space for expressing thoughts and emotions. Statistically significant improvements in writing fluency were observed, alongside increased confidence, vocabulary development, and use of transitions. In contrast, Chen and Lin (2024) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 101 Taiwanese freshmen using a reflective reading-based e-learning strategy. The experimental group outperformed the control group in reading comprehension, reflective thinking, and behavioral engagement. Participants also showed greater time-on-task, higher quiz scores, and more reflective outputs. While both studies underscore the value of structured reflection in EFL learning, Maneepakthorn emphasizes writing fluency and learner voice through individual reflection, whereas Chen and Lin focus on metacognitive development through guided, digital collaboration. Together, these studies highlight reflection's capacity to support linguistic and cognitive growth in higher education. Thus, it is worthy to investigate the integration of reflective thinking approach in English listening and speaking skills.

Conceptual Framework

Reflective practice in language teaching encompasses systematic thinking about teaching behaviors and learning processes to identify areas for improvement¹². Farrell's framework for reflective practice includes five interconnected levels: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice, providing a comprehensive approach to professional development¹. Studies indicate that reflective teaching brings positive changes to educators' teaching concepts and behaviors, with teachers becoming more learner-centered and consciously addressing student needs².

For language learners, reflection activities promote authentic learning experiences and enhance multiple competencies simultaneously. Research by Farrah and Abu Minshar (2021) found that reflective journal writing significantly improved students' language skills, critical thinking abilities, and communication competencies³. Participants reported enhanced creativity, self-confidence, and motivation, with 92.37% of learners expressing desire for continued reflective practice³.

Practical Applications

Various reflection activities have shown effectiveness in business English instruction. Learning journals facilitate end-of-lesson reflection, helping students identify achievements and areas for improvement⁵. Self-assessment tools enable learners to evaluate their communication skills systematically, fostering metacognitive awareness⁶. Digital storytelling and mind mapping provide creative outlets for reflective expression while developing language competencies⁷⁵.

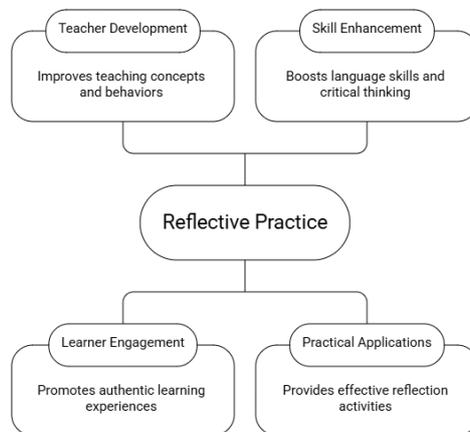


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This qualitative study employs a reflective thinking model to enhance learners' speaking and listening skills. By engaging participants in structured reflection on their speaking experiences, the research aims to foster deeper self-awareness, promote metacognitive development, and support continuous improvement in oral communication. Through reflective tasks, learners are encouraged to analyze their speaking performance, identify areas for growth, and develop strategies for more effective expression.

1. Participants

The participants in this study were 20 first-year university students majoring in Business English at a public university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. They were purposively selected based on three criteria: 1.) current enrollment in the course Business Oral Communication 2, 2.) successful completion of Business Oral Communication 1, and 3.) willingness to engage in reflective speaking and listening activities as part of the study. All participants shared a similar academic background and language proficiency level, ensuring a

relatively homogenous sample suitable for qualitative exploration of reflective thinking in oral communication development.

2. Research Instrument

The research used multiple qualitative instruments to collect rich, triangulated data. These included four developed lesson plans, an observation form, and a reflective thinking report, which were aligned with the study's objectives. The observation form was validated by three experts in English language teaching, yielding an IOC value of 0.77, to ensure content relevance and clarity.

3. Research Procedure

The research procedure followed a structured implementation of four instructional lesson plans integrating reflective-thinking activities. During each lesson, students engaged in targeted listening and speaking tasks designed to promote communicative competence and critical reflection. After completing each lesson, students completed a reflective thinking form to record their learning experiences, challenges, and insights. Throughout the sessions, the teacher observed student participation and interaction using an observation form to observe behavioral and communicative indicators. At the end of the instructional period, all student reflections were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to their language development and learning experiences.

Research Results

To answer Objective 1, the classroom observation revealed five key themes: adaptation to structured learning, enhanced learner responsibility through reflection, peer collaboration and support, increased learners' confidence, and challenges in vocabulary and group dynamics.

1. Adaptation to Structured Learning

Students progressively adjusted to the reflective-thinking-based instructional approach. Observations indicated that learners engaged in the speaking and listening activities with increasing familiarity and followed the structured sequence of tasks with greater ease over time.

2. Enhanced Learner Responsibility through Reflection

The completion of reflective thinking reports after each lesson was associated with heightened learner motivation and responsibility. Students demonstrated increased commitment to assigned tasks and appeared to internalize their learning progress, using reflection as a tool for self-monitoring and improvement.

3. Peer Collaboration and Support

Group and pair activities facilitated a collaborative learning environment. Students actively exchanged ideas and supported one another, with more proficient learners often assisting their peers. This peer scaffolding contributed to a positive and cooperative classroom atmosphere.

4. Increased Learner Confidence

An obvious improvement in students' willingness to speak in front of the class was observed over time. Group and pair presentations provided opportunities for learners to practice oral communication in a supportive setting, contributing to increased self-confidence in using English.

5. Challenges in Vocabulary and Group Dynamics

Despite overall positive outcomes, challenges remained. Students reported difficulty with advanced vocabulary, and observations indicated that uneven task distribution and insufficient preparation within groups occasionally impacted group performance and scores.



Fig.1 shows a speaking activity conducted in class, where the students collaborate and support one another.



Fig. 2 shows a group presentation conducted in class, where the students collaborate and support one another.

To answer Objective 2, the results revealed the students' feedback and improvements through their reflection as categorized into themes in the tables below:

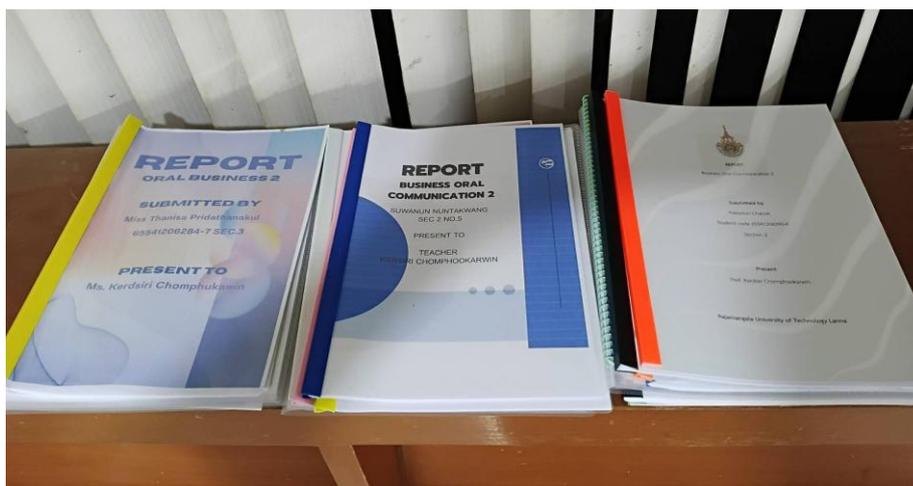


Fig.3 shows the students' reflective reports.

Table 1: Students' feedback on Lesson A

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Clarity and Ease of Understanding	Unit is consistently described as easy and clear	S1, S2, S15, S20, S8
Step-by-Step Practice	Learning to sequence sentences using connectors	S12, S13, S17, S19
Communication Confidence	Improved ability to express and communicate	S4, S17, S18
Challenges & Needs for Practice	Vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties	S7, S10, S6
Supportive Teaching Atmosphere	Engaging teaching style enhances learning	S16, S8

S = Student

This table presents a summary of the qualitative feedback from learners on lesson A. The feedback revealed five key themes: the unit was consistently described as clear and easy to understand, and step-by-step practice with sentence connectors effectively supported structured learning. Many students reported increased confidence in communication, although some encountered difficulties with vocabulary and pronunciation issues. Additionally, the teachers' engaging style was highlighted as a positive influence on the overall learning experience.

Table 2: Students' improvement on Lesson A

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Improvement in Clarity and Ease of Understanding	Unit simplicity and clear presentation foster comprehension	S1, S2, S5, S8, S16
Improvement in Step-by-Step Writing & Sequencing	Improved ability to organize and articulate steps & instructions	S1, S12, S13, S15, S19
Improvement in Communication Confidence	Increased fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking confidence	S4, S16, S17, S18
Improvement in Awareness & Need for Practice	Self-recognition of challenges (pronunciation, vocabulary, listening)	S7, S10, S17, S19
Improvement in Grammar and Sentence Construction	Focus on modal verbs and grammatical correctness in sentence building	S6, S7, S19

S = Student

Table 2 shows that learners reported notable improvements across five areas: clearer understanding due to the unit's simplicity and enhanced ability to write and sequence ideas step by step. Many gained confidence in speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation while also becoming more aware of areas needing practice. Additionally, several students showed progress in grammar, particularly in using modal verbs and constructing sentences correctly.

Table 3: Students' feedback on Lesson B

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Practical Application	Unit's usefulness in professional/management settings	S1, S9, S11, S13, S15, S16
Comprehension and Clarity	Easy to understand, well-structured lessons	S3, S4, S10, S14
Presentation and Speaking Skills	Enhanced confidence, clear speech, presentation techniques	S8, S12, S13, S16, S17, S18
Learning Graph Types and Grammar	Exposure to charts, graph vocabulary, and grammar	S2, S7, S19, S20

S = Student

This table presents a thematic analysis of students' feedback on Lesson B, highlighting four areas of perceived benefits. Learners emphasized the lesson's practical application in professional contexts, along with its clarity and structured design, which enhanced their comprehension. They also noted gains in presentation and speaking skills, including confidence and technique, and valued their exposure to graph-related vocabulary and grammar, which enriched their language repertoire.

Table 4: Students' improvement on Lesson B

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Vocabulary Acquisition Related to Graphs	Gaining new vocabulary specific to graphs.	S1, S9, S11, S13, S14, S20
Presentation Challenges and Practice Needs	Commitments to improve presentation skills through more practice.	S2, S19
Improvement in Graph Interpretation and Sentence Construction	Progress in sorting and presenting data more professionally and fluently, improving sentence formation.	S3, S4
Improvement in Grammar and Pronunciation	Developing grammar and pronunciation.	S7, S10
Improvement in Listening and Speaking Skills	Developing listening comprehension and speaking more clearly, though mispronunciations and lack of confidence remain issues.	S16, S17, S18
Solo Presentation Anxiety and Instructor Support	Finding solo presentations challenging and sometimes forgetting scripts under stress, while appreciating supportive teaching methods.	S15

S = Student

Table 4 shows that learners broadly gained new graph-related vocabulary which helped build foundational knowledge. Despite this, many found presentations challenging, particularly memorized reports, promising to practice more to improve. Students developed better skills in sorting and describing data more professionally, alongside progress in grammar and pronunciation, although difficulties with some vocabulary pronunciation persisted. Improvements in listening and speaking skills were noted, yet confidence to speak remained low for some. Solo presentations were a significant source of anxiety, but supportive teacher feedback helped learners manage this challenge.

Table 5: Students' feedback on Lesson C

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Clear and Understandable Content	Clear, detailed, and easy to grasp contents	S2, S16, S20
Grammar Focus	Correct use of future tense forms and modal adverbs	S12
Practice and Application	Practice in planning for the future, speaking & presenting plans	S8, S10, S12, S13, S16

Desire for More Practice	Wish for more speaking practice	S7, S13
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S = Student

Table 5 outlines students' feedback on Lesson C, revealing that learners value the clear and accessible presentation of the lesson, especially appreciating the teacher's diverse and clear methods. They report improved understanding of future tense grammar, including modal adverbs, which helps build their confidence in discussing future plans. Practical activities involving planning and presenting future intentions are perceived as helpful, though some students express a desire for increased speaking practice to solidify their skills. Overall, while the content is well-received, ongoing practice is deemed necessary to master the grammar and application.

Table 6: Students' improvement on Lesson C

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Improvement in Clear and Understandable Lesson Content	Easy to understand, clear, and diverse teaching methods	S2, S20
Vocabulary and Presentation Development	Progress in vocabulary acquisition and presentation abilities.	S4
Improvement in Presentation and Speaking Practice	Opportunities to present and speak, attempt to reduce script reliance, and more practice for confidence and retention	S8, S10
Requirement for Repetition and Practice for Comprehension	Repeated reading and practice for understanding the content.	S13
Improvement in Grammar Accuracy and Tense Confusion	Intention to improve grammatical errors and sentence construction accuracy	S16, S7

S = Student

Table 6 shows that students experienced improvements in their understanding of adverbs related to certainty and in their presentation skills. Many are developing better vocabulary and are reducing their dependence on scripts to speak more fluently. However, ongoing challenges remain in mastering grammar accuracy, particularly distinguishing present and future tenses, leading some students to require repeated practice for full comprehension. Overall, learners demonstrate progress coupled with a clear motivation to improve language accuracy and presentation confidence.

Table 7: Students’ feedback on Lesson D

Theme	Description	Representative Examples
Clear and Understandable Lesson Content	Facilitating learning through understandable content	S2, S20, S7
Engagement and Enjoyment due to Food Topic	Making the lesson fun and motivating students through the relatable and interesting topic of food.	S3, S4, S9
Practical Speaking Practice and Collaboration	Enhancing speaking skill through practicing dialogues with partners	S1, S5, S8
Challenges with Vocabulary and Speaking Confidence	Showing limited vocabulary and low speaking confidence while still enjoying the lessons	S9
Positive Teacher Influence	Fostering student motivation and enriching the classroom experience through the teacher’s personality and instructional approach	S18
Real-Life Practical Application	Acknowledging the lesson’s usefulness in real-life scenarios	S19

S = Student

Table 7 presents the thematic analysis of student feedback on lesson D highlighting that learners found the content clear and easy to understand. The relatable food topic increased engagement and made learning enjoyable. Practical speaking activities, such as partner dialogues using key expressions, helped improve conversational skills. Some students faced challenges with vocabulary and speaking confidence but remained motivated. The teacher’s positive influence and the real-life applicability of the lesson were important factors supporting student learning and confidence.

Table 8: Students’ improvement on Lesson D

Theme	Description	Representative Samples
Challenges with Grammar and Practice Needs	Finding grammar difficult and expressing the need for more practice to improve accuracy.	S2, S19, S20
Improvement in Vocabulary and Communication Skill	Developing vocabulary and practicing short conversations, especially about food.	S3, S4, S9
Speaking and Listening Practice	Focusing on practicing speaking, including making and responding to offers, while feeling the need to improve listening skills.	S7, S5
Positive Attitude and Motivation Despite Difficulties	Showing positive motivation, a willingness to make mistakes, and determination to improve all language skills.	S18

S = Student

Table 8 shows the analysis of student improvement which reveals that while learners find grammar challenging and recognize the need for additional practice, they also show encouraging progress in vocabulary and communication skills, particularly through short conversational practice. Listening skills are identified as an area requiring further attention.

Importantly, students demonstrate a positive attitude towards language learning, expressing motivation and openness to making mistakes as part of their development. This combination of challenges and resilience highlights key areas for focused support in instruction.

Discussion

Classroom observations in this study revealed that students gradually adapted to structured, reflective learning tasks, indicating increased metacognitive engagement. This aligns with Goh and Taib (2006), who found that metacognitive instruction enhances self-regulation and listening performance in EFL learners. Students' completion of reflective reports promoted learner autonomy and responsibility, which is consistent with Boonkit's (2010) findings in a Thai university context, where reflective strategies helped learners become more self-aware and confident in oral English production. Collaborative group work also encouraged peer scaffolding and mutual support, echoing Storch's (2002) study, which emphasized the value of peer interaction in language development.

Student feedback across multiple lessons indicated that learners valued the clarity, structure, and real-world relevance of the reflective tasks. As in Wiriyaichitra (2002), Thai learners often benefit from step-by-step instructional support that reduces anxiety and boosts willingness to communicate. Participants in this study similarly reported increased speaking confidence and presentation skills, though persistent issues with vocabulary and pronunciation remained, challenges that are frequently reported among Thai EFL learners due to limited exposure to authentic language use. Additionally, over-reliance on scripts and unequal group participation signaled the need for more balanced task design and continuous practice.

The results support theoretical perspectives on reflective learning (Schön, 1983) and confirm prior evidence that systematic reflection can bridge classroom instruction with metacognitive skill development. While the current study had strengths in its methodological triangulation and focused design, limitations such as short intervention duration and a small, context-specific sample must be acknowledged. Future studies should expand on longitudinal impacts and explore digital tools to support reflective learning, particularly within the Thai higher education context, where EFL learners continue to face challenges in oral proficiency despite increasing exposure to communicative teaching approaches.

Knowledge from Research

1. Metacognitive Empowerment: From Passive Learner to Autonomous Practitioner

The core knowledge gained is that English proficiency in a business context is not merely about linguistic input but about Metacognition. By utilizing journals and self-assessment, students transition from "passive recipients" to "active managers" of their learning. They develop the ability to diagnose their own communication gaps and formulate strategic improvement plans, which is a critical skill in Learner Autonomy.

2. Psychological Safety and Confidence Building

The study reveals that oral proficiency is deeply tied to psychological factors. Reflective activities act as a "buffer" that reduces foreign language anxiety. Through Peer Collaboration and structured reflection, students create a feedback loop that validates their progress, transforming classroom observations of "lack of confidence" into demonstrated "communicative courage."

3. The "Triple-A" Pedagogical Framework for EFL

This research contributes a specific instructional design framework for Business English:

Alignment: Lessons must align with real-world professional relevance to sustain motivation.

Assessment (Reflective): Moving beyond grades to Self-and-Peer Evaluation, allowing students to internalize language standards (pronunciation, grammar, and fluency).

Adaptation: The findings show that reflection leads to "Personal Improvement Plans," ensuring that learning continues beyond the 4-hour classroom window.

4. Bridging the Fluency Gap

A key takeaway is the identification of Script Dependence as a major hurdle. The study highlights that while reflection improves accuracy (vocabulary and grammar), achieving true "fluency" requires a shift from reflective writing to reflective doing—reducing reliance on prepared scripts to foster spontaneous interaction in group dynamics.

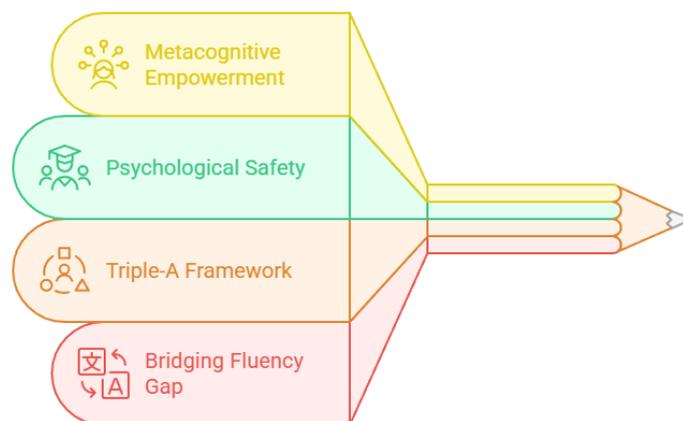


Fig.4: Knowledge from Research

Conclusion

This research provides valuable evidence for the effectiveness of reflective thinking activities in enhancing English listening and speaking skills. The systematic approach to reflection not only improved language competencies but also developed crucial metacognitive skills essential for lifelong learning. While challenges remain, particularly in vocabulary development and group dynamics, the overall results strongly support the integration of reflective practices in business English education.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for Organizing.

- 1) Bridge the Fluency Gap by Reducing Script Dependence Move beyond reflective writing toward reflective doing. Design activities that discourage reliance on prepared scripts, forcing a shift toward spontaneous interaction and group dynamics to foster genuine fluency.
- 2) Cultivate Psychological Safety and Confidence Incorporate reflective activities and Peer Collaboration to act as a buffer against foreign language anxiety. Creating a supportive feedback loop helps validate student progress and transforms classroom hesitation into communicative courage.

2. Suggestions for Further Study.

- 1) Digital Integration: Explore how AI-driven tools or digital portfolios can streamline the reflective process and provide more immediate data for self-diagnosis.
- 2) Spontaneity Interventions: Research specific pedagogical techniques that effectively bridge the gap between script-based accuracy and spontaneous oral fluency.

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