

***Title: Self-Confidence and Language Teaching:
a Socio-Psychological Outlook.***

Ms. Zakia DJEBBARI

Assistant Professor

ABU BEKR BELKAID UNIVERSITY – Tlemcen –Algeria

Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages

Department of Foreign Languages

Section of English

Abstract:

In language learning and teaching, many educational psychologists place a heavy emphasis on some personality traits that may influence learning a foreign language. Self-confidence is one of the vital variants that may promote either failure or success in language learning. However, it is often reported that EFL learners may feel much anxiety and lack self-confidence in the process of language learning. What seems to be noticeable from a number of studies is that the ‘interpersonal’ aspects of language learning, namely speaking and listening, seems to be the greatest source of anxiety among students. Therefore, quite a number of researchers and language teachers seem to be aware of the urgent need to boost EFL students’ self-confidence, both in terms of oral participation and confidence in their general linguistic abilities. Hence, the present paper calls for the attention towards the ‘self’ of learners because based on the feeling about themselves, they may in all probabilities be more active and autonomous.

Key-words: *self-confidence, language teaching, sociology, psychology.*

Introduction

Individual learner differences appear to likely affect various aspects of language learning in general and may help determine what practical activities may be optimal for learners' achievements. Individual differences have been researched extensively; making this arena one of the most systematically studied psychological aspects in language research (Dörnyei 2008). The most important result from these investigations was the conclusion that there exist factors which help learners excel within the learning process through the application of individualised learning techniques. In this line of thought, Segalowitz (1997:85) wonders:

Why do individuals differ so much in second language attainment success? After all, every healthy human being in an intact social environment masters a first language to a degree of fluency that, in other skill domains, would be recognized as elite or near elite levels...

Thus, researchers emphasize on individual differences from an individual to another merely to the extent that those individualizing traits display permanence over time (De Raad, 2000). With the shift towards more education-friendly and classroom-based approaches to language study, research took another direction since the 1990s and turned its attention towards more cognitive theories of learners' *self*. Therefore, bringing language learner identity and personality research more into the line with the cognitive revolution in the field of psychology, has created the philosophy that shape learners' psychological engagement while learning. These patterns of thinking may include for example, self-perceptions, self-efficacy beliefs, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002).

In view with this, the experimental and theoretical work conducted by Clément (2001) and his colleagues was subsumed to scrutinize the interrelationship between social contextual variables (including ethnolinguistic vitality), attitudinal/motivational factors,

self-confidence, language identity, and L2 acquisition/ acculturation processes (Clément & Gardner, 2001; Dörnyei, 1999, 2001). From this angle, one would recognise that Clément and his associates' attention was turned more towards *self-confidence* as a variable which is a key component in language achievements and success.

SELF-CONFIDENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY

Over the last past few years, the approach to the research, theory, and practice of *self-confidence* seems to have generated some interest among psychologists and researchers. Self-confidence from a psychological point of view appears to represent one of the few dimensions of human behaviour which broadens across the whole range of human existence. It has created ample interest for such a long time, much like the topics of personality or identity.

It is generally acknowledged that the maintenance and enhancement of self-confidence has always been identified as an essential human impulse. Psychologists have long emphasized the crucial role played by the learners' self-image, motivation, affect, and social interactions. Therefore, self-confidence is widely regarded as a valuable individual variable. For instance, if one takes a bird eye view and dates back to William James work; one may notice an important strand in psychology which has activated "*believing in oneself*" as a key to personal success. At present, on the other hand, attention is drawn towards "*self help*", which purports to help learners improve and enhance their self-confidence, and be more optimists.

Feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy grow from mastery experiences. People who feel effective are likely to keep on in the face of failure and achieve greater success because of their unstoppable efforts (Bandura, 1997). Having the sense of confidence about the attainability of goals may generalize a sense of optimism when confronting a challenge, for instance, optimists tend to take a posture of confidence and persistence (even if progress is difficult or slow). Pessimists, on the other side of the coin,

seem to be doubtful, hesitant und unconfident. This divergence may even be amplified under conditions of serious adversity.

Form another psychological angle, people who have strong confidence in their abilities to perform and manage potentially difficult situations will approach those situations calmly and will not be excessively disrupted by difficulties. Alternatively, people who lack confidence in their own abilities will approach such situations with apprehension, thereby reducing the probability that they will perform effectively.

Led by the work of the Canadian social-psychologists Gardner and Lambert (1972), research into learners' psychological attitudes to the target language, was for many years gradually growing and influential in successful learning. It was argued that language learning entails much more than acquiring a body of knowledge and developing a set of skills. It is fairly crucial to consider the "self" of the learners and thus, their psychological state to overcome their difficulties in language achievements.

The Concept of *Self-Confidence*

A simple definition of self-confidence is the amount of reliance one has, i.e., one's knowledge and one's abilities. Self-confidence seems to be the first step to progress, development, achievement and success. Additionally, self-confidence refers to the belief that a person has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals or perform tasks competently (Dörnyei, 2008). It is also a building block for success throughout one's career and a key competency in the self-awareness cluster. It is one of the most important factor studied by psychological researchers (Clément, Gardner, and Smythe (1977) to express "*a powerful mediating process in multi-ethnic settings that affects a person's motivation to learn and use the language of the other speech community*" Dörnyei, (2008: 73).

From another angle, Norman and Hyland (2003) suggest that there are three elements to confidence:

- ❖ ‘Cognitive’, i.e., the person’s knowledge of their abilities;
- ❖ ‘Performance’, i.e., the person’s ability to do something;
- ❖ ‘Emotional’, i.e., the learners’ comfortable feeling about the former two aspects.

Having all this in mind, one may presume that a self-confident person wants to take further risks, placing himself in unfamiliar situations and examines his capacities in different contexts, and particularly making mistakes do not prohibit him to increase his ability to learn. One other significant dimension is worth considering when talking about self-confidence is the symptoms interconnected with less confidence. There are two categories namely emotional and physical symptoms. As for the emotional symptoms, they are as follows: apprehension, uneasiness and dread, feeling restless, strong desire to escape, avoidance behaviour, hyper-vigilance, irritability, confusion, impaired concentration or selective attention, self-consciousness and insecurity, and behavioural problems. The physical symptoms are noticed through racing heartbeat, chest pains, hot flashes or chills, cold and clammy hands, stomach upset, shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness, muscle tension or aches, headaches, fatigue and insomnia (Wiley 2003).

Furthermore, levels of confidence are variable for instance, a learner possesses the knowledge or skills required to do a specific task, but not be confident to act because of the specific situation or environment in which he is involved. Thus, he could be confident at one level of performance but not at another, such as being confident to write a passage but feel unconfident about starting a pronunciation learning course (Eldred 2002). Therefore, teachers need to develop both situational and overall confidence.

This is fine in principle, but as the reality turns out to be different, there are general impressions about which learners do and do not seem to have self-confidence as a general personality trait, yet remain unclear about as to how those learners are coping with different language aspects being learned. However, the learners’ over-self-confidence may interfere with the specific learning tasks at hand; just as lack of confidence may prevent some learners from fully exploit what they know.

The successes and achievements in turn will strengthen the learners' self-confidence further. It is natural that learners with a certain amount of confidence are offered leadership and other responsibilities of groups. More and more opportunities automatically come to learners with a good self-confidence. In short, success flows to those who have a genuine self-confidence. Helping learners feel good about themselves by making them believing in their capacities need to be incorporated in the teaching process. For instance, some learners are good at this and others are good at that, but they need to recognize that they are all gifted in a way or in another. Besides, it is important to acknowledge the extension provided by Clément and his colleagues (cf. Clément, 1980; Clément & Kruidenier, 1985) that self-confidence is a social product which is due to contacts between environments where different language communities exist together without excluding its cognitive components. In this vein, Dornyei (2008:73) states that:

Linguistic self-confidence—derived from the quality and quantity of the contact between the members of the L1 and L2 communities—is a major motivational factor in learning the other community's language, and determines the learners' future desire for intercultural communication and the extent of identification with the L2 group....Linguistic self-confidence in Clément's view is primarily a socially defined construct

At first glance, it might seem that despite the fact that identifying key definitions, noteworthy findings, or leading theories of self-confidence, one still needs further research to identify the most useful and accepted ways of defining such a concept. From a psychological stand point, self-confidence is illustrated with research examples about confidence-building; it may be defined as a facet of competence and of worthiness. Self-confidence is not a concept reared in the same abstract discursive tradition of self-worth or self-value, it is a more complex one.

Self-Confidence as Competence

Self-confidence appears to present knowing one's own abilities and having enough faith in them to make sound decisions in the face of uncertainty and pressure, it is

a belief in one's own abilities to take on a difficult challenge. A confident person exudes a strong *self-presentation* and expresses him- or herself in an assured, impressive, and unhesitating manner. The confident person will take on new challenges and hold on to his or her view, even if others disagree. Thus, if confidence is viewed as competence, this depends on two things: an individual's hopes, desires, or aspirations, which are termed "pretensions," and his or her ability to realize them, which in turn requires competence. Accordingly, work that stems from educational psychologists tend to focus on behavioural outcomes and the degree of discrepancy between one's "ideal" self and "real" self.

Hence, when combining confidence with competence, we may deduce a competence-based definition; we also may automatically maintain that it is a certain type of competence, notably, competence in arenas which are related to individual's developmental history, personality characteristics, values, and so forth. A variety of studies have demonstrated the positive impact of confidence on performance.

Self-Confidence as Worthiness

Shaping attitudes about the 'self' seems to be more complex than doing so for anything else. There seems to be that a person's evaluation or judgment of their own "worth" plays an important role in bringing the notion of values into play. Therefore, the domain of behaviour matters to individual's self-worth, as recognised by Rosenberg (1979:30-31):

The individual simply feels that he is a person of worth; he respects himself for what he is, but he does not stand in awe of himself nor does he expect others to stand in awe of him. He does not necessarily consider himself superior to others.

At some point, seeing self-confidence in terms of worthiness involves dealing with the issues associated with attitudes, self-image, self-representation and self-concept.

Therefore, this vision may yield at least to one tangible power: viewing self-confidence in terms of an attitude may mean that it can be measured.

Self-Confidence Vs Self-Esteem

It seems to be wiser to establish satisfactory differences between self-confidence and self-esteem. Branden (1969:110) offers such a distinction by putting self-esteem a general term that covers both self-confidence and self-respect, as follows: “*Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: it entails a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth. It is the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-respect*”.

On his part, Dorney (2008:211) establishes a fine relationship between the two concepts. He presumes the fact that “*self-esteem is closely related to the notion of self-confidence, which has a vigorous research tradition in applied linguistics and which, therefore, may have diverted scholars from the study of self-esteem*”. Undeniably, there seems to be both self-esteem and self-confidence unveil a common prominence on the “*individual’s beliefs about his or her attributes and abilities as a person, and various measures of self-esteem and self-confidence/ efficacy have been found to correlate with each other highly*” (ibid).

Confidence Strategies

Students’ confidence in language learning, especially speaking, is one of the main significant factors to drive or to inspire students to reach their goals. Confidence strategies may help students develop positive expectations and attitudes for successful achievement of language learning. In this context, Keller (as cited in Aik & Tway, 2006: 31) has developed a model which identifies four kinds of strategy known as the ARCS model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction) and then it was summarized and discussed by Small (as cited in Aik & Tway, 2006: 31) to englobe confidence strategy which:

- Informs the learner about the learning and performance requirements and assessment criteria.
- Provides challenging and meaningful opportunities for successful learning.
- Links the learning success to personal responsibility, for example, providing positive feedback to the learner about his /her efforts to learn.

On his part, Saetan (1991:8) identifies the characteristics of self-confident learners as likely to choose ways to self-check their learning outcome whereas others require someone to check their understanding of language learning.

SELF-CONFIDENCE and LANGUAGE LEARNING

In language learning and teaching, many educational psychologists place a heavy emphasis on some personality traits that may influence learning a foreign language. From a motivational perspective, the most important factor studied by (Clément, 1994; Gardner, 2001; and Dörnyei, 1999) was *self-confidence*, which was introduced by Richard Clément who added this motivational subsystem to Gardner’s motivation model. The concept of *linguistic self-confidence*, in general, is one of the vital variants that may promote either failure or success in language learning. Noels (1994), in his part, expanded the applicability of the construct of self-confidence by demonstrating that it is also a crucial motivational subsystem in foreign language learning situations where there is little direct contact with the target language members. Thus, EFL teachers need to be aware of their learners’ affective domain when dealing with a task.

The affective domain, as Brown (2000:143) believes “*refers to emotions and feelings*”. Discussing the effective factors explicitly may help us come across the fact that there seems to be a general consensus among researchers that it represents the emotional side of human behaviour and it may be a vital factor in the learner’s ability to overcome setbacks or mistakes that may take place in the learning process. Affective factors denote a very important impact on student’s outcome, for this reason, it is important to understand student’s feelings and know more about these factors. Affective factors play a very significant impact on student’s outcome and achievements. Many studies were

conducted to examine factors that may affect EFL learners' performance; indeed, there are manifold psychological factors that most pervasively obstruct the learning process.

For instance, Krashen (1981) believes that self-confidence appears to be a central aspect of the '*affective filter*' which is defined as a psychological factor which filtrates the amount of language received by learners' brain. This filter may enable learners encourage intake, or valuable input. Thus, the affective filter hypothesis embodies Krashen's (ibid) view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.

When affective factors are explicitly discussed, there seems to be a consensus among psychologists that the general notion of self-confidence may be considered as a key-factor in the learners' ability to overcome their language setbacks, it is normally assumed to have an influence on successful language learning. In this respect, Krashen (1981: 75) claims that: "*Not surprisingly, nearly all the available literature suggests that self-confidence is very much related to second language development..., the self-confident, secure person is a more successful language learner*".

Nonetheless, one should be aware that the lack of self-confidence may be an inhibiting factor for learners and this idea is shared by Naiman *et al* (1978) who believe that poor learners, in all probabilities lack self-confidence. Moreover, the higher anxiety learners experience, the lower scores they get, the less confident learners become. On the contrary, the more confident learners feel the higher scores they get. The more confident a learner feels, the less anxiety he experiences in learning.

Affective Filters in Language Learning

Krashen's affective filter, mentioned earlier, consisting of the variables of anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence may strongly enhance or inhibit second language acquisition by playing a critical mediating role between the linguistic input available in the educational setting and the student's ability to learn. He (1981:75) gathers them as following:

Self confident people have the advantage of not fearing rejection as much as those with high anxiety levels and are therefore more likely to put themselves in learning situations and do so repeatedly...[they] are less hampered by the conscious operation of the monitor because they are not so worried about how they appear.

Thus, it appears essential to have a look on anxiety, motivation and self esteem as significant affective filters.

Anxiety

Like any other affective factors, anxiety is not easy to define, it has been in the limelight of language research for decades. It is associated with “*feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension or worry*” (Scovel cited in Brown, 2000:151). Anxiety, as perceived intuitively by many language learners, negatively influences language learning and has been recognised to be one of the most highly examined variables in psychological research (Horwitz, 2001: 113). Psychologists establish a distinction between three categories of anxiety: *trait anxiety*, *state anxiety*, and *situation-specific anxiety*. *Trait anxiety* is relatively steady personality characteristic, while *state anxiety* is a transient anxiety, a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus such as an important test (Horwitz, 2001: 113). The third category, *Situation-specific anxiety*, refers to the constant and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a: cited in 2001: 113). It is aroused by a specific type of situation or event such as

public speaking, examinations, or class participation (Ellis, 1994: 480). In this context, Gardner and MacIntyre (199: 3) concluded, *“The results of these studies of language anxiety suggest that anxious students will have lower levels of verbal production ... and will be reluctant to express personally relevant information in a second-language conversation”*.

Motivation

There seem to be a considerable amount of research on motivation in the learning process. It is one of the variables which have a strong impact on student’s success or failure. The theory of the Canadian psychologists Gardner and Lambert was one of the most dominant motivation theories of the L2 field for more than three decades. Certainly the role of others in developing motivation is central to teaching and education, in this context, Scheidecker and Freeman (1999:116) believes that *“Motivation is, without question, the most complex and challenging issue facing teachers today”*. Motivation is an inner drive or emotions that move people to particular actions (Brown, 2000).

Without ample opportunities for motivation, even individuals with outstanding abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, this is what Dornyei (2008:65) deduces about motivation:

It provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved in SLA presuppose motivation to some extent.

From another layer of analysis, motivation is affected by many factors as mentioned by Danis (1993:3) *“...interest in the subject matter, perception of its usefulness, general desire to achieve, self-confidence, self-esteem as well as patience and persistence”*. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of their own possible prejudices with regard to

individual differences and psychological variables to help their learners develop the feelings about themselves and be more positive.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is an umbrella term which covers other basic characteristics and traits. Branden (2001:252) defines it as “*the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness. It consists of self-efficacy....and self-respect*”. As any psychological facet, self-esteem has multi-dimensions which are according to Brown (2000: 145): *global, situational and task self-esteem*.

- *Global Self-esteem*: represents general assessment a person makes about himself,
- *Situational Self-esteem*, on the other hand, refers to abilities in specific situation such as foreign language context.
- *Task Self-esteem*: relates to particular tasks within situations, for instance, within the educational domain, task self-esteem might refer to one subject matter.

In a more comprehensive fashion, Lawrance (2006:6) put them as follows: “*global self-esteem refers to an all-round feeling of self-worth and confidence. Specific self-esteem refers to a feeling of self-worth and confidence with regard to a specific activity or behavior*”. What is more, self-esteem contributes to people’ failure or success, as put by Brown (1977: 352): “*A person with high self-esteem is able to reach out beyond himself more freely, to be less inhibited, and because of his ego strength, to make the necessary mistakes involved in language learning with less threat to his ego*”.

All the above was an attempt to lay down the foundation of the issues of learners’ self and its development. The present research is an attempt to find out the relationship between learners’ self-confidence, pronunciation awareness and speaking achievement, thus it seems worthwhile to link learners’ confidence with their speaking competence in the following section.

Self-Confidence and Speaking Achievements

One of the most important aspects of speaking is to have self-confidence in what to say and how to say it. It is mostly recognized that what a person feels reflects what he thinks, and what he thinks determines what he says. Therefore, having a low sense of self-confidence in speaking English will create threatening atmospheres in the classroom, and learners will unconsciously focus on their deficiencies and obstacles rather than concentrating on how to perform the task given to them. Strangely enough, though they have ideas to speak and share their knowledge, they easily lose trust in their capabilities and they just give up the attempt to speak.

On the other side of the coin, having a strong belief of one's own speaking capacities will, in all probabilities, lead them approach threatening situations with great confidence and this will enhance their speaking achievements and lead them to success Dorneyei (2008).

Measuring Learners' Self-Confidence in Speaking

As all life skills strategies have evolved, new and different forms of qualified learning have been created, capturing wider ranges of learning, particularly in relation to the psychology of learners, i.e., special attention is drawn towards the 'learners 'self'. Research on language revealed the belief that progress is made only when it is evaluated and criticised; however, there are difficulties to measure learning from a psychological view point. Responding to the question about what indicates success in learning, involves both learners and teachers measurement of confidence.

There is, therefore, a wealth of empirical evidence showing that self-confidence affect academic performance, as part of general effect behaviour. The goal of confidence measurement is to more accurately measure learners' true knowledge state about themselves. A number of scoring schemes have been suggested in an attempt to account for and reflect particular information about the '*self*' of learners. Among these studies, a

number of proposed scales and surveys which seek at differences between learners involving testing and measuring learners across samples, or assessing in relation to other variables, especially clinical or academic ones.

The dynamic nature of self-confidence leads to measuring issues with which test designers need to contend. It should be recalled that self-confidence is a phenomenon that may be seen as being global, task or situational in nature because human in general and learners in particular carry out a certain basic level of self-confidence most of the time depending on the situation. The simplest example of how this factor affects a testing situation is when the subject has experienced a recent loss, gain, failure, or success, any of which can affect his self-confidence test scores. Unfortunately, many self-confidence tests are too general and seem to fail to tell us about the particular situations or specific areas of life that are important for an individual's self-confidence enhancement.

However, like any psychological test, the most important problem that may face researchers is that they are subjective in drawing conclusions about the person, since they are related to individuals reporting their own experience, behaviour, or characteristics. The problem lies on the responses, due to the fact that even the most well-meaning subjects are going to be filtered by manifold factors which usually involve characters such as the self-perception, anxiety, anger, doubt, or mental illness.

From another layer of analysis, researchers and theoreticians grapple with the fact that there is considerable methodological diversity in the psychology of self-confidence. For instance, one way of understanding such methodological divergence in the social sciences is to organize it in terms of increasing degrees of objectivity (measurability), which may result in all probabilities in a kind of pyramid, as shown in Figure 1.1. by Christopher (2006: 42).

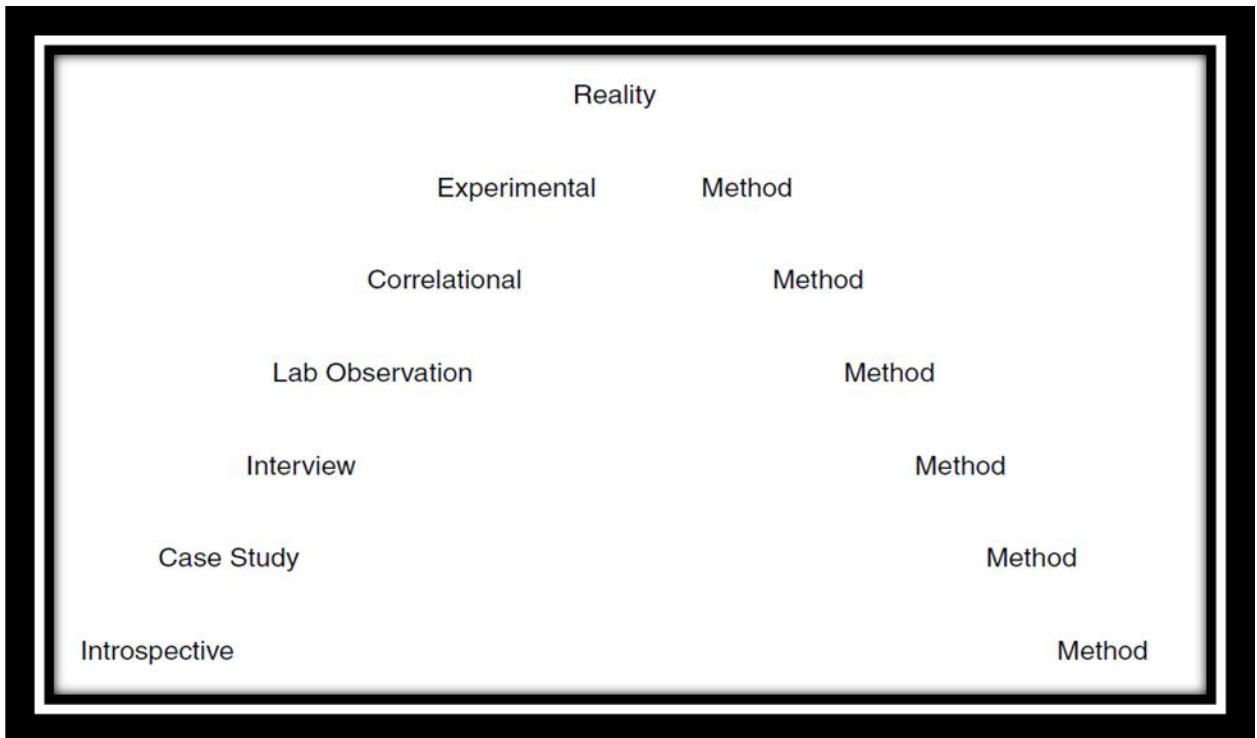


Figure 1.1. Confidence Theoretical Methodologies

Throughout this pyramid, various methods were used for searching self-confidence in terms of the strengths and weaknesses. The next adopted table from Christopher (2006) examines the range of methods from a different, more revealing angle:

Method	Strengths	Limitations
<i>Introspective</i>	It depends on the individual's perception about his\her own experience. Although introspection is at the bottom of the pyramid, it is not without value, at least as a source of insight.	It is vulnerable to problems with reliability and validity
<i>Case Study</i>	it allows us to investigate problems with the 'self' when looking at individual lives. Help establish the relationship between self-confidence and	Although studying several cases can expand the subject base, such work is time consuming and results in a number that is too

	psychological functioning by comparing individuals and noting regularities or variations from regular patterns.	small to generalize. Also, the data generated and the procedures for analysis are not often amenable to duplication.
<i>Interview</i>	Structuring the interview in advance helps to make it more reliable, and an interview can be recorded and transcribed so that others have access to the data, which reduces some subjectivity.	Sample sizes are still relatively small and establishing cause and-effect relationships is another matter: Although a hypothesis can be formed, confirmation is difficult. Time that is involved in conducting interviews can place additional burdens on valuable resources.
<i>Lab Observation</i>	This method is limited in terms of its ability to tell us about cause and effect or why something happens, but it does offer the important advantage of offering more concrete information than previous approaches provide.	Because it is not possible to see self-confidence directly, laboratory-based observational methods are not used often in researching self-confidence.
<i>Correlational</i>	Surveys and tests are an especially attractive way to study self-confidence because once an assessment instrument has been developed; it can be used to establish correlations in many types of situations. The use such measures to assess an individual's self-confidence, in relation to their behaviour, performance, grades, or even personality. We can also set up pre- and post-testing situations for measuring.	Unfortunately, this approach is difficult to implement because, developing good self confidence measures means facing some serious research problems.
	According to Wells and Marwell (1976), there are two	However, it is actually the experimenter who controls

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Experimental</i></p>	<p>basic types of experiments used to research self and both of them usually involve some pre- and post-test measures. The most straightforward format is to set up an experiment so that subjects are engaged in an activity; the outcome of which they believe depends on their efforts.</p> <p>The experimental situation helps the researcher observe or measure changes in behaviour that may be linked to self-confidence and exciting work is being done using this method</p>	<p>the results, meaning that success and failure can be manipulated so that their effects on self-confidence can be observed especially when it comes to trying to demonstrate the link between self-confidence and behaviour, this seems to stand as the major criticism against the field.</p>
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Table 1.1. Methodologies Regarding Self-Confidence Measurement

Conclusion

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