



## Original Article

# Psychological Safety as a Driver of Employee Voice: A Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract:

This study aims to regularly examine the relationship between psychological safety and employee voice in an organizational context. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following PRISMA guidelines. Literature was retrieved from the Scopus database using keywords related to psychological safety and employee voice. Based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 13 peer-reviewed quantitative empirical articles published between 2019 and 2025 were selected. The selected studies were analyzed using narrative and thematic synthesis to identify patterns, roles, and relationships between variables. The findings indicate that psychological safety consistently has a positive influence on employee voice across various organizational environments and cultures. Psychological safety primarily serves as a mediator linking leadership style, organizational systems, and social relationships with employee voice. Several studies also identified psychological safety as a moderator that strengthens or weakens the effectiveness of organizational practices in encouraging employee voice. Employees are more likely to voice ideas, suggestions, and concerns when they perceive a psychologically safe work environment. This study is limited to a single database (Scopus) and focuses only on quantitative empirical studies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. This study contributes to the literature on organizational behavior and human resource management by synthesizing empirical evidence on the role of psychological safety in promoting employee voice and offering practical implications for organizational leadership. Its novelty lies in regularly mapping psychological safety as a mediator and moderator in the employee voice literature.

**Keywords:** Psychological Safety, Employee Voice, Organizational Behavior, Systematic Literature Review

## Introduction

In the increasingly dynamic, complex, and uncertain modern organizational environment, the role of human resources is no longer limited to carrying out routine

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tasks, but also includes contributing ideas, suggestions, and constructive criticism that can improve organizational performance and sustainability. One form of this contribution is known as *employee voice*, which is the behavior of employees in conveying ideas, opinions, concerns, or input aimed at improving work processes and organizational performance (Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2018). *Employee voice* is seen as an important prosocial behavior because it can encourage innovation, organizational learning, and prevent errors that have the potential to harm the organization.

Although *employee voice* has many benefits, in practice, not all employees are willing to voice their opinions. Many employees choose to remain silent due to perceived risks, such as fear of being negatively evaluated by their superiors, damaging work relationships, or even facing career consequences. This situation suggests that employees' decisions to speak up are not solely driven by individual intentions or motivations, but are heavily influenced by the psychological and social context of the workplace.

One key factor explaining why employees are willing or reluctant to voice their opinions is *psychological safety*. *Psychological safety* is defined as an individual's belief that the work environment is safe for taking interpersonal risks, such as expressing ideas, asking questions, or criticizing work practices without fear of embarrassment or punishment (Edmondson, 1999). In an environment with high *psychological safety*, employees feel valued, supported, and trusted, making them more likely to speak up openly.

Various empirical studies have shown that *psychological safety* has a positive relationship with *employee voice*. Xu et al. (2019) found that proactive personality alignment between superiors and subordinates increases *psychological safety*, which ultimately encourages voice behavior. Other studies have shown that leadership styles such as ethical leadership, inclusive leadership, and supportive leadership play an important role in building *psychological safety*, which then increases *employee voice* (Teo et al. (2003), Fatoki (2024)). In addition, social environmental factors such as coworker knowledge sharing and coworker support have also been shown to strengthen *psychological safety* and encourage employees to speak up (Lee et al., 2023).

A previous *systematic literature review* confirmed that *psychological safety* is a key psychosocial mechanism that bridges the influence of the organizational context on various proactive behaviors, including *employee voice* (Newman et al., 2017). However, empirical findings regarding the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice* are not always consistent. Differences in cultural context, industry characteristics, type of voice (*promotive* or *prohibitive*), and methodological approaches lead to variations in research results (Tian et al., 2025). This suggests that the relationship between psychological safety and *employee voice* is complex and contextual.

In the contemporary organizational context, particularly with the rise of remote work practices, the digitalization of work processes, and the demands for post-pandemic flexibility, the issue of *psychological safety* has become increasingly important. Limited face-to-face interactions, increased job uncertainty, and high performance pressure can increase perceived interpersonal risks among employees, potentially reducing *employee voice*. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the role of *psychological safety* in fostering *employee voice* is highly relevant for organizations and leaders.

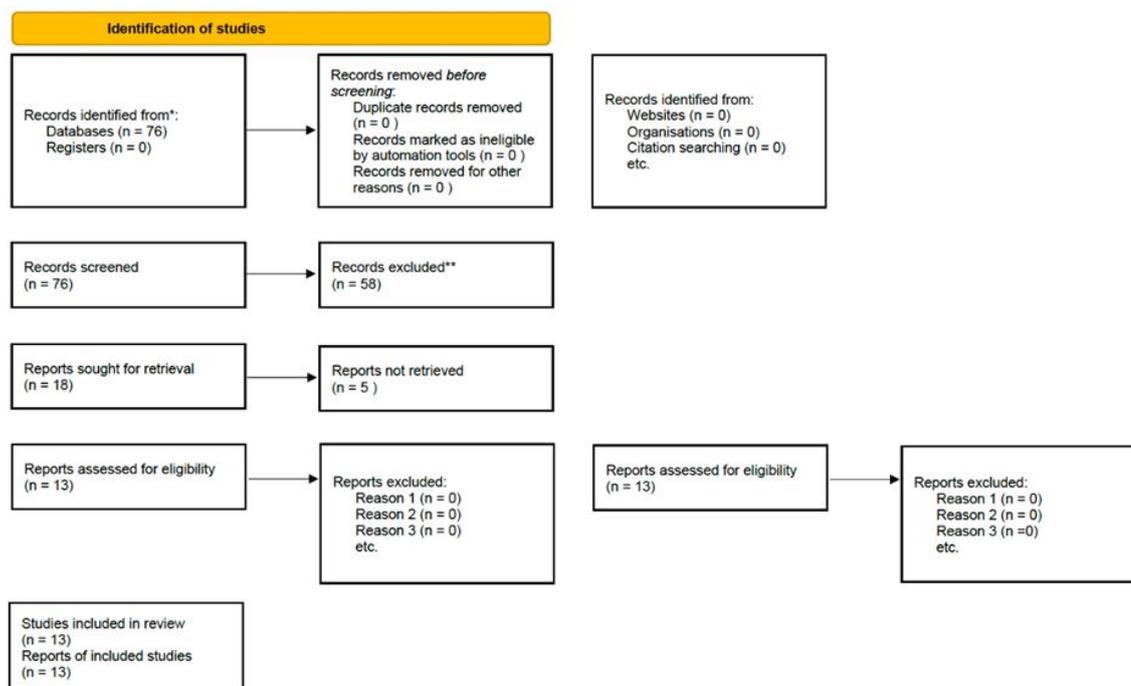
Based on the above description, this study aims to conduct a *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) on the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice*. Through this SLR, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of existing

empirical findings, identify relationship patterns, mediators and moderators that play a role, and uncover open research gaps. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of organizational behavior literature as well as practical contributions to organizations in building a psychologically safe work environment and encouraging employees to speak up.

## Method

### 1. Research Design

This study uses a *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) approach to comprehensively examine the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice*. The SLR approach was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically and transparently identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant empirical findings. The SLR process in this study refers to the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines*. (PRISMA) to ensure research accuracy and replicability.



### 2. Data Sources and Literature Search Strategy

The data source for this research comes from the Scopus database, which was chosen because of its reputation as a reputable international journal index and its extensive coverage of scientific literature. The literature search was conducted using the following keyword combination:

- "psychological safety"
- "employee voice"
- "employee voice behavior"

Keywords were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR. Additionally, search filters were applied to limit results to journal articles, English, and relevant disciplines such as business, management, psychology, and social sciences.

### 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the articles analyzed, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were established.

Inclusion criteria:

- a. The article discusses *psychological safety* and *employee voice* directly.
- b. The article is a quantitative empirical research.
- c. Published in a scientific journal that goes through a *peer-review process*.
- d. Publication year range 2015–2026.
- e. English language articles.
- f. The document is a journal article, not a proceeding or book chapter.

Exclusion criteria:

- a. The article is not available in *full-text form*.
- b. The article is not empirical research (e.g., editorial, conceptual paper, or literature review).
- c. The article does not examine the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice*.

### 4. Literature Selection Procedure

The literature selection process is carried out through several stages according to the PRISMA flow, namely:

- a. Identification  
Articles were identified through a search of the Scopus database using predetermined keywords.
- b. Screening  
is selected based on the title and abstract to ensure the topic matches the research objectives.
- c. Eligibility  
Articles that pass the screening stage are thoroughly evaluated through *full-text examination* to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria.
- d. Articles  
that met all criteria were included in the final analysis. This resulted in 13 articles for further analysis in this study.

### 5. Data Extraction Procedure

Data extraction was performed systematically using a tabular format to ensure consistency and completeness of information. The extracted data included:

- Author and year of publication
- Country or research context
- Characteristics and sample size
- Research design
- Variables studied
- Method of analysis
- The role of *psychological safety* (as a primary variable, mediator, or moderator)
- Key findings of the study

## 6. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a narrative and thematic synthesis approach. This approach was used to identify patterns in the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice*, as well as to map factors that act as antecedents, mediators, and moderators. Furthermore, cross-study findings were mapped to identify consistency of results and any remaining research gaps.

### Research result

#### 1. Study Characteristics

*Systematic Literature Review* process described in Chapter III, this study analyzed 13 quantitative empirical articles that directly examined the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice*. These articles were published between 2019 and 2025 and covered various organizational and country contexts, such as [China \(Xu et al., 2019\)](#), Wei et al., 2021; Meng & Yang, 2022; Li et al., 2024; Ok et al., 2025; [\(Tian et al., 2025\)](#), South Korea [\(Lee et al., 2023\)](#), Thailand [\(Sudharmadi & Promsri, 2021\)](#), Pakistan [\(Jabbar et al., 2023\)](#), Nigeria [\(Ononye & Maduemezia, 2024\)](#), and South Africa [\(Fatoki, 2024\)](#).

The majority of studies used a cross-sectional design, although some studies employed a two-wave design and a multilevel approach to improve the accuracy of causal inference [\(Li et al., 2024; Ok et al., 2025; Tian et al., 2025\)](#). The most commonly used analytical method is *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) and *Partial Least Squares-SEM* (PLS-SEM) [\(Wei et al., 2021; Jabbar et al., 2023; Fatoki, 2024\)](#).

#### 2. The Relationship between Psychological Safety and Employee Voice

The synthesis results show that all analyzed studies report a positive relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice*. This finding is consistent across various organizational and cultural contexts. *Psychological safety* has been shown to increase employees' courage to express ideas, suggestions, and concerns related to work and the organization [\(Xu et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023\)](#).

Several studies confirm that *psychological safety* plays a crucial role in encouraging *prohibitive voice*, which involves communicating problems, mistakes, or potential risks that could harm the organization. Because this type of voice carries a higher interpersonal risk, its existence is highly dependent on employees' perceived psychological safety [\(Tian et al., 2025\)](#). Therefore, the higher the *psychological safety*, the greater the tendency for employees to speak out openly.

#### 3. Psychological Safety as a Mediating Variable

Most of the articles in this SLR position *psychological safety* as the primary mediator in the relationship between contextual factors and *employee voice*. Ethical, inclusive, and supportive leadership has been shown to enhance *employee voice* through increased *psychological safety* [\(Wei et al., 2021; Fatoki, 2024\)](#). [Li et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that *leader emotional labor*, particularly *deep acting*, enhances *psychological safety*, which in turn promotes employee voice, while *surface acting* actually decreases both *psychological safety* and *voice*.

Similar findings were found in the context of *leader humor*, where *psychological safety* mediated the relationship between leader humor and *employee voice*. In addition to leadership, organizational system factors also play a role through *psychological safety*. [Jabbar et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Miao et al. \(2020\)](#) found that *high-performance work systems*

(HPWS) increased *employee voice* through *psychological safety*, suggesting that fair and participatory HR management practices can create a sense of psychological safety for employees.

#### 4. Psychological Safety as a Moderator Variable

Several studies have also identified *psychological safety* as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between organizational practices and *employee voice*. Miao et al. (2020) found that the influence of HPWS on *employee voice* and innovation was stronger when *psychological safety levels* were high.

However, the effects of *psychological safety* are not always uniform. Ok et al. (2025) showed that close personal relationships between superiors and subordinates (*leader-member guanxi*) can weaken the influence of *psychological safety climate* on *employee voice*, as employees are reluctant to disrupt relational harmony. Furthermore, individual factors such as *self-efficacy* also influence the strength of the relationship between *psychological safety* and voice (Tian et al., 2025).

#### 5. Psychological Safety in the Context of Leadership and Organizational Culture

Several additional studies confirm that *psychological safety* plays a central role in bridging the influence of leadership and cultural context on *employee voice*. [Hu et al. \(2018\)](#) found that *ethical leadership* encourages employee voice behavior by improving the quality of *leader-member exchange (LMX)*, which then strengthens *psychological safety* and psychological empowerment.

These findings suggest that interpersonal relationships between superiors and subordinates are an important mechanism in creating a sense of psychological safety. In a cultural context with high power distance, [Subhakaran & Dyaram \(2018\)](#) showed that coworker voice behavior and *pro-voice manager attitudes* increase employee *upward voice* through *psychological safety* as the main mediator. This indicates that *psychological safety* becomes increasingly crucial in a hierarchical work environment, where expressing opinions to superiors tends to be perceived as risky.

[Potipiroon & Ford \(2021\)](#) found that *leader humor* positively influenced both *promotive* and *prohibitive voice* through *psychological safety*, with *team humor* acting as a moderator. This finding broadens the understanding that informal social signals from leaders also contribute to creating a climate of *psychological safety* that supports employees' courage to speak up.

#### 6. Social and Relational Factors in the Formation of Psychological Safety

SLR results show that *psychological safety* is not only shaped by superiors, but also by horizontal relationships in the workplace. Coworker knowledge sharing has been shown to increase *psychological safety*, which in turn encourages *employee voice*, especially in employees with a high *promotion focus* ([Lee et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, coworkers' voice behavior and managers' pro-voice attitudes create social signals that speaking up is acceptable behavior, thereby enhancing *psychological safety*.

Non-structural work environment factors also play a role. [Meng and Yang \(2022\)](#) found that a pleasant work environment, such as the use of appropriate music, can improve *psychological safety* and *employee voice*. These findings suggest that *psychological safety* can be influenced by emotional and situational aspects of the work environment.

## 7. Discussion of Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings from 13 articles indicate that *psychological safety* is a fundamental prerequisite for *employee voice*. *Psychological safety* functions as a psychological mechanism that reduces the perception of interpersonal risk and enables employees to actively engage in expressing their opinions (Xu et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2021).

*Employee voice* in its various forms—both promotive and prohibitive—does not emerge automatically, but rather results from the interaction between leadership, organizational systems, social relationships, and employees' psychological well-being (Jabbar et al., 2023; Ononye & Maduemezia, 2024; Fatoki, 2024). Therefore, organizational efforts to enhance *employee voice* need to be directed at creating a psychologically safe work environment through supportive leadership practices and organizational policies.

## Conclusion

This study aims to examine the relationship between *psychological safety* and *employee voice* through a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach*, analyzing 13 quantitative empirical articles indexed by Scopus. The synthesis of results indicates that *psychological safety* is a key factor driving *employee voice* across various organizational and cultural contexts.

All the studies analyzed consistently found that employees who feel psychologically safe are more willing to express ideas, suggestions, and concerns about their work and the organization. *Psychological safety* allows employees to take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences, making it a key prerequisite for *employee voice*.

Furthermore, *psychological safety* generally acts as a mediator, bridging the influence of leadership, human resource management systems, and social relationships on *employee voice*. Several studies also demonstrate its role as a moderator, strengthening or weakening the relationship depending on the individual and organizational context. These findings confirm that *employee voice* is the result of an interaction between psychological well-being, leadership, and supportive organizational systems.

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