


EFL Learners' Perceptions of Small Group Discussion Technique for Building Speaking Confidence in Non-Formal Education

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ABSTRACT

Speaking in English remains challenging for many EFL learners because oral performance requires confidence. Small group discussion (SGD) is one activity used in EFL speaking instruction. Previous studies have examined SGD from various perspectives in EFL learning. However, the role of SGD in supporting students' speaking confidence before oral performance in non-formal EFL settings remains underexplored, especially the aspects of confidence supported by SGD and the discussion features that contribute to students' confidence. This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of SGD in supporting speaking confidence before oral performance. Using a qualitative descriptive design, this study involved seventh-grade EFL learners at a non-formal English course institution in Central Java. Data were collected through classroom observation, a screening questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that students perceived SGD as a structured preparatory activity that helped them understand the material, exchange ideas, rehearse speaking parts, and organize ideas before oral performance. SGD also supported students' confidence through peer support, respectful responses, clear role distribution, equal speaking opportunities, and manageable group size. These findings suggest that SGD serves as a preparatory activity in EFL speaking instruction to encourage participation and help students approach oral performance with greater confidence.

Keywords: *Small Group Discussion, Speaking Confidence, Oral Performance, Social Scaffolding, EFL Learners*

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INTRODUCTION

In EFL speaking classrooms, students are often expected to express ideas orally while they are still developing confidence to use English in front of others. This expectation becomes challenging because speaking requires language accuracy as well as the ability to manage anxiety and fear of mistakes. (M. Liu, 2018) noted that speaking anxiety can affect EFL students' oral performance, especially in public or classroom-based speaking tasks. In the Indonesian EFL context, (Mulyono & Saskia, 2021) showed that self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, and grit contribute to students' willingness to communicate in face-to-face and digital environments. (Quvanch et al., 2024) further explained that EFL learners' speaking anxiety is associated with low self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, limited exposure to English, and the need for regular practice. (Ismail & Jaya, 2026) found that students' difficulties in oral presentations included nervousness, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and difficulty organizing ideas, which they addressed through preparation, repeated practice, and support from peers and teachers. This indicates that speaking confidence needs to be developed through learning activities that provide practice, emotional support, and preparation before students perform orally.

One activity that can support this process is small group discussion (SGD). Through SGD, students can discuss ideas, distribute roles, practise speaking parts, and receive peer support before performing orally. (Hadijah & Musfirah., 2022) stated that SGD provides students with opportunities to speak, express opinions, increase motivation, and develop speaking ability in EFL learning. This process is also consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural

theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction before learners are able to perform independently (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, SGD can be understood as a form of social scaffolding because students build confidence through interaction, rehearsal, and support from their peers before speaking individually. This study was conducted with seventh-grade students at an English course institution in Central Java. This context is important because non-formal learning provides a learning space that differs from formal school settings. (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017) argued that non-formal education is related to learning processes outside the formal school system and has a more flexible character in supporting learners' learning experiences. In the context of this study, students participated in speaking activities that involved SGD before oral performance. These activities gave students opportunities to understand the material, rehearse speaking parts, and receive peer support before performing. Therefore, SGD in this study is positioned as a preparation stage that helps students build speaking confidence before and during oral performance.

Recent studies have discussed SGD and collaborative learning in relation to speaking development, self-efficacy, anxiety, and students' perceptions. Tan et al. (2020) revealed that SGD could influence ESL learners' oral communication self-efficacy, while (Silvana et al., 2018) demonstrated that SGD could support EFL students' speaking ability and self-belief. (Valentine et al., 2023) confirmed that SGD was effective in improving students' speaking skills and reducing problems related to low self-confidence in using English in class. (Hoque et al., 2025) also reported that group discussion was perceived as effective in improving students' oral communication skills and supporting their confidence in expressing ideas. Research on learners' perceptions also shows that SGD is generally viewed positively in speaking activities. (Puspitasari et al., 2023) reported students' perceptions and challenges in using SGD during speaking activities. (Hadijah & Musfirah., 2022) highlighted that students and instructors perceived SGD positively because it supported speaking skill development, motivation, and confidence. Beyond SGD, studies on collaborative learning have also shown its relevance to speaking development. (Ha et al., 2022) showed that collaborative learning could help learners manage anxiety and improve speaking performance in an English center context. (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023) indicated that collaborative tasks influenced foreign language learners' speaking anxiety in face-to-face and online learning environments.

The reviewed literature indicates that SGD and collaborative learning have been discussed in relation to speaking development, self-efficacy, anxiety, and students' perceptions. However, the existing literature has not fully explained how EFL learners experience SGD in non-formal education as a structured preparation process for building speaking confidence before oral performance. In particular, students' perceptions of SGD as a preparation process, the aspects of confidence supported by SGD, and the discussion features that contribute to speaking confidence remain underexplored. This gap is important because the preparation stage supports the development of students' confidence through organizing ideas, practising speaking parts, and receiving supportive responses before performing orally.

Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of the use of small group discussion in building speaking confidence before and during oral performance in a non-formal English learning context. Specifically, this study examines how students perceive SGD in relation to their speaking confidence, what aspects of confidence are most influenced by SGD, and which features of SGD contribute most to their confidence. This study contributes by examining SGD as a structured preparation process rather than merely as a speaking technique. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, it also provides insight into SGD as a social scaffolding process that supports students in building speaking confidence through peer interaction and shared preparation.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore EFL learners' perceptions of the use of small-group discussions in building speaking confidence before oral performance. This approach was chosen because students' confidence is a personal experience that needs to be explored through their own perspectives rather than measured through statistical relationships between variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection involved observation, questionnaires, and interviews with seventh-grade EFL learners in a speaking course at an English course institution in Central Java. Through interviews, students can express their perceptions and experiences in their own words about how discussion and practice in SGD help them reduce anxiety and become more confident, allowing the researcher to obtain more detailed data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Respondents

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria were: (1) the students were seventh-grade learners, (2) they had joined the English course program for approximately one year or more, and (3) they had participated in small group discussion activities before oral performance tasks. During the classroom observation, the researcher initially identified students who appeared to show varied levels of speaking confidence. To minimize researcher subjectivity, a screening questionnaire was distributed to 14 students. The questionnaire was used to confirm students' experiences with SGD and to identify students whose responses were relevant to the focus of the study. From the 14 respondents, six students were selected for semi-structured interviews. They were chosen because they met the selection criteria, provided relevant responses in the screening questionnaire, participated consistently during the observed speaking activities, and were willing to be interviewed. To protect the participants' identities, their real names were replaced with pseudonyms, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants Demographic Information

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Age
1.	Ashqyb	Male	13
2.	Dintriv	Female	13
3.	Infaj	Female	15
4.	Mannow	Male	13
5.	Trayuz	Male	12
6.	Winshaq	Female	13

Instruments

The data were collected using three instruments, which included an observation checklist, a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview guide. The observation checklist was used to identify the specific features of small-group discussion (SGD) and the indicators of students' speaking confidence during SGD and oral performance activities. The checklist consisted of three sections. The first section focused on the features of SGD, such as peer support, equal participation, clear turn-taking or role distribution, a safe group climate, on-task discussion, communicative tasks, rehearsal before performance, and feedback during SGD. The second section focused on indicators of speaking confidence during SGD, including initiating speaking, taking turns, responding to others, sustaining speech, reducing hesitation, managing nervousness during speaking, and continuing after making mistakes. The third section focused on oral performance indicators, including readiness, voice and delivery, sustained speech, fluency, anxiety management, and the use of ideas rehearsed during SGD. Each indicator was marked using yes/no responses. A short notes section was also provided to record important events that occurred beyond the checklist items.

The questionnaire was used only to identify students who were suitable for the interview based on their responses related to speaking anxiety and confidence. It consisted of

20 closed-ended items using a Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was not used as the main source of data analysis, but only as a participant screening tool. The distribution of the questionnaire items is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Questionnaire Items

Aspect	Number of Closed-Ended Items	Focus of Items
Perception of small group discussion technique	6	Perceptions of the usefulness of SGD as a speaking activity and perceptions of speaking ability in front of others
An aspect of speaking confidence	9	Perceived competence, anxiety reduction, fear of negative evaluation, willingness to speak, and persistence after mistakes
Features of SGD that contribute to confidence	5	Peer encouragement and feedback, peer support, equal participation, clear turns and roles, safe and comfortable group situation

The semi-structured interview guide served as the main instrument of the study. It was used to examine students' perceptions of SGD in more detail, particularly regarding how SGD helped them build speaking confidence during oral performance. The interview questions explored students' perceptions of SGD, the aspects of speaking confidence they encountered during speaking activities, and the features of SGD that they perceived as helpful in reducing anxiety and building confidence. The interview guide consisted of 15 questions, and each interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes.

Procedures

Before the data collection began, the researcher prepared the research instruments, submitted them for expert validation to ensure their relevance and clarity, and obtained permission from the tutoring institution. The data collection process was conducted from February 21 to March 4. First, the researcher conducted classroom observation during speaking lessons involving small-group discussion (SGD) and oral performance activities. During this stage, the observation checklist was used to record the features of SGD and students' confidence-related behaviors, while short notes were written to capture important events outside the checklist.

Following the observation, the questionnaire was distributed to the students through a Google Form link shared in the class WhatsApp group. Before completing the form, the students were given instructions and a brief explanation to ensure that the questions were clearly understood and to avoid miscommunication. After the questionnaire responses were collected, six students were selected as the main participants based on their responses related to speaking anxiety and confidence. In the last stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six selected participants. The interviews were completed within three days, depending on the students' schedules and availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview transcripts served as the primary data source for the analysis. The analysis followed six stages: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report. The researcher read the interview transcripts several times to gain a clear understanding of the data before coding. Significant statements related to students' perceptions of SGD and their speaking confidence were then coded and grouped into themes based on common patterns across the interviews. During the analysis, the participants' responses showed recurring patterns, and no substantially new information emerged. The themes were

reviewed and refined before being presented in a coherent narrative supported by relevant participants' quotations. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was used by comparing the interview data with the classroom observation results. Although observation was not used as the main source for theme development, it helped support the interpretation of the interview findings by providing contextual information about students' participation during SGD activities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that students generally perceived small-group discussion (SGD) as helpful in supporting their speaking confidence during oral performance. The findings were mainly based on semi-structured interviews with six selected students and were supported by classroom observation data. The observation provided information about how SGD was implemented in speaking activities, while the interviews revealed students' experiences and perceptions of how SGD helped them feel more prepared and confident. From the data analysis, four themes were identified: 1) pre-performance scaffolding through rehearsal, 2) collaborative peer support and constructive feedback, 3) structured teamwork with clear roles, and 4) preference for a manageable group size in speaking activities. These themes show that students tended to feel more confident when they had time to prepare, received support from peers, understood their speaking roles, and received respectful responses during discussion. The themes are presented and discussed in the following sections. The following sections present the findings through four themes, supported by students' responses and discussed in relation to relevant theories and previous studies.

Pre-performance Scaffolding through Rehearsal

Small Group Discussion (SGD) helped students prepare themselves before oral performance by giving them a collaborative learning environment to practice before presenting. Through this process, students became more familiar with the material and with the content they needed to deliver in front of the class. This familiarity helped reduce their nervousness because they had already practiced their speaking parts within the group. As a result, students felt more prepared and more capable of performing orally.

"Kan kalau diskusi kita jadi lebih paham materinya dan bisa latihan bicara dulu sebelum tampil." (Ashqyb)

"Bisa mempersiapkan diri, dan bisa latihan bareng lawan bicara. Jadi terbantu banget untuk inget-inget giliran." (Mannow)

Translations:

"If we have discussions, we will understand the material better and be able to practice speaking before we present." (Ashqyb)

"I can prepare myself and practice with the person I'm talking to. It really helps me remember the speaking sequence." (Mannow)

Based on the information, SGD helped students feel more prepared before performing. Through rehearsal, students developed confidence during the preparation stage before oral performance. This process became an important part of SGD because it helped students remember their speaking parts and reduced their nervousness before presenting. As their speaking parts became clearer, their nervousness appeared to diminish as the performance approached. This result can be discussed in relation to studies on preparation and repeated practice. A similar point was reported by Al et al. (2026), who identified preparation and repeated practice as strategies used by students to manage nervousness during oral presentations, which contributed to the development of their speaking confidence. This is also supported by (Hadijah & Musfirah., 2022), who argued that small group discussion created opportunities for students to speak and participate actively in speaking activities.

Mannow also noted that rehearsal helped students practice with a speaking partner and remember the speaking sequence. As a result, the oral performance became more organized and easier to follow. (Wotring et al., 2024) noted that productive small-group talk provided EFL learners with meaningful opportunities to develop ideas before speaking

tasks. This aligns with the classroom observation, which showed that rehearsal was present during the SGD activity. Students also used ideas that had already been discussed in the group during their oral performance. Therefore, rehearsal appeared consistently in both the interview data and classroom practice. (Ranjbar et al., 2025) suggested that collaborative oral presentation practices were associated with learners' self-efficacy. Similarly, the students' responses show that rehearsal within SGD strengthened their sense of capability before performing. The role of rehearsal in SGD can also be interpreted through Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction before it becomes an individual ability (Vygotsky, 1978). From a sociocultural perspective, rehearsal in SGD was not merely an act of repeating speaking parts. It functioned as a socially mediated process through which students gradually gained control over their speaking content before performing individually. Peer discussion became a form of social scaffolding because it helped students prepare the content, rehearse the delivery, and manage procedural difficulties before presenting in front of the class.

This process can be seen in the responses of Ashqyb and Mannow, who described SGD as helping them understand the material better and practice speaking with others before presenting. Their responses indicate that peer practice in SGD helped students prepare themselves before performing individually. After discussing the material and practicing their speaking parts within the group, students experienced less nervousness during the presentation. Since the material had already been discussed and rehearsed with their peers, they did not have to focus too much on organizing the content. As a result, they could concentrate on delivering their ideas with confidence.

Collaborative Peer Support and Constructive Feedback

Students perceived SGD not simply as a discussion forum for exchanging ideas, but also as a supportive learning environment where they could support, trust, and respond to one another during speaking activities. In their experience, speaking confidence was built through both speaking practice and interaction with group members. This finding shows that the social atmosphere of SGD played an important role in shaping students' confidence. (Wang et al., 2020) also noted that students' positive perceptions of classroom interaction were related to their willingness to communicate and communication behavior in class. Their study also highlighted the importance of supportive and non-judgmental classroom interaction in encouraging students to use the target language. Therefore, peer support and the quality of feedback within the group play a crucial role in explaining how SGD supports students' speaking confidence before oral performance.

Peer Support and Encouragement

The students' responses indicate that peer support was closely linked to their experiences during speaking activities in small group discussion. For several students, the presence of supportive group members made speaking feel less intimidating and easier to carry out. As a result, their confidence and willingness to speak developed from practice as well as from feeling encouraged and trusted during the discussion. This experience can be seen in the following responses.

"Teman-teman pada support, jadi tidak ada yang diam, tidak yang mendominasi, dan semuanya berkontribusi." (Ashqyb)

"Disupport teman kak, karena kan berarti temen ku udah percaya nih sama aku, aku harus bisa buktikan nih." (Infaj)

Translation:

"My friends support one another, so no one stays silent, no one dominates, and everyone contributes." (Ashqyb)

"When my friends support me, it means they trust me, and I feel that I have to prove that I can do it." (Infaj)

These responses suggest that peer support helped students feel included and trusted in the group. In Ashqyb's experience, support was reflected in balanced contribution and the absence of domination. This is important because students felt more comfortable speaking when each member had equal space to participate. In addition, Infaj's statement indicates

that support was not only expressed as help but also as a sign of trust. When students felt trusted by their peers, they were encouraged to show that they were capable of speaking well, which led them to make a greater effort in participating. Peer support was also reflected in the exchange of ideas. When one student offered an idea and another continued it, speaking activities became easier because they understood what they were discussing together.

"Temenku ngasih ide terus ku tambahin ku lanjutin terus jadinya bisa lebih gampang ngomongnya pas tampilnya." (Mannow)

"My friend gave an idea, then I added to it and continued it, so it became easier to speak during the performance." (Mannow)

Based on this statement, the ideas students wanted to express became clearer, more organized, and easier to remember during performance. As a result, they did not rely too much on memorization because they already understood the main idea or concept of what they were going to say. The exchange of ideas shows that students processed the content through understanding rather than simple memorization. This is in line with (Ausubel, 1968) Meaningful Learning theory, which emphasizes that conceptual understanding becomes more meaningful when students develop and connect ideas rather than simply memorizing them. In SGD, the exchange of ideas with peers allowed students to process and build on ideas together. This also reflects (Craik & Lockhart, 1972) Levels of Processing framework, which explains that information processed more deeply is easier to retain. Through this process, students understood the main ideas they wanted to express, depended less on memorization, and were able to speak in a more organized way during performance. This peer-supported process also relates to students' willingness to speak. Sarwari (2024) also reported that group work and comfortable classroom interaction could encourage students to be more willing to communicate. This was also reflected in the data, where students showed that their willingness to speak grew when they felt supported and involved by their group members. Therefore, peer support in SGD assisted students in organizing and developing what they wanted to express, which helped students feel more confident when speaking

Affirming and Respectful Responses

In addition to general support from peers, the way students responded to one another during discussion was also closely related to their confidence. The students did not refuse correction or feedback on their opinions. Instead, they accepted feedback because it helped them develop in learning. However, they felt more hesitant to accept feedback when it was delivered unpleasantly. They were more willing to accept criticism when it was conveyed properly.

"Ketika saya salah dikasih tau, diberi kode, dan tidak mengejek juga" (Ashqyb)

"Sama menerima feedback dari orang lain itu saya suka sekali karena saya jadi tahu kalau saya didengar." (Winshaq)

Translation:

"When I was "When I make a mistake, they give me hints and also don't mock me" (Ashqyb)

"I really like receiving feedback from others because it makes me know that I am being heard." (Winshaq)

Based on Ash's and Winshaq's statements, it can be seen that students did not simply need correction, but also a way of delivering it that made them feel safe and respected. In Ash's experience, correction from peers was still acceptable when it was conveyed without mockery. In Winshaq's experience, the feedback she received made her feel heard and noticed. For this reason, students were more willing to accept feedback when the responses given still respected them as speakers. Through such feedback, they also became aware of which parts were still less accurate, so that they could learn from the mistakes they made. As EFL learners, errors in using a second language are still common. The issue, however, is not

the existence of the error itself, but how the error is explained and addressed within the learning environment. This highlights that feedback in SGD was not only about correction, but also about how correction was delivered. In SLA, feedback can be delivered in several ways. (Ellis, 2017) emphasized that, based on its timing, feedback can be divided into immediate feedback and delayed feedback. Immediate feedback is given as soon as an error occurs, and its purpose is to prevent the error from recurring and potentially becoming fossilized. Delayed feedback, by contrast, is given after students have finished speaking, so that the flow of communication is not interrupted. In addition, recast refers to an implicit form of correction in which a student's utterance is reformulated into the correct version without direct blame. (Long, 1996) argued that recast can draw students' attention to correct language forms without interrupting communication or meaning. These forms of feedback can be applied by both teachers and peers because they are relevant to the students' experiences in this study, where gently delivered correction tended to be more acceptable. In small group discussion and presentation activities, correction given after students finish speaking, as well as correction delivered implicitly, tended to preserve their sense of safety more than direct and discouraging correction. This is also in line with (Le et al., 2025) who revealed that both EFL students and teachers valued oral corrective feedback when it supported communication without creating excessive pressure. In other words, the quality of feedback lies not only in the accuracy of the correction, but also in the way and timing in which it is delivered. On the other hand, students also had personal ways of maintaining their confidence during speaking activities, one of which was self-affirmation.

"Ngasi-ngasih pujian gitu... terus afirmasi diri juga biar tetap PD...."
(Dintriv)

"They give praise and affirmation so that I can stay confident." (Dintriv)

In addition to receiving praise, trust, and support from peers, students also had personal ways of calming themselves down. This indicates that each student may have a different way of dealing with anxiety when speaking. In Dintriv's experience, self-affirmation seemed to be one way of maintaining calmness and sustaining confidence. This finding is close to the study by (Hidayatulloh & Tahir, 2025), which revealed that self-affirmation contributed to mental readiness and helped reduce nervousness, although it was not sufficient on its own without consistent speaking practice. This means that self-affirmation does not replace practice, but can serve as emotional support that helps students remain calm while speaking. (Vattøy & Gamlem, 2024) highlighted that students' experiences of peer feedback were closely related to self-efficacy, anxiety, and enjoyment. This is consistent with the present data, because feedback from peers not only addressed students' spoken output, but also influenced their emotional condition during speaking activities and oral performance. (Le et al., 2025) also emphasized that oral corrective feedback was more easily accepted when correction supported communication and did not discourage students. Ash's response suggests that correction encouraged students to continue speaking by reducing the fear of making mistakes. Winshaq emphasized the emotional value of feedback, explaining that it made her feel noticed, while Dintriv highlighted the importance of praise and affirmation in maintaining confidence. It can be seen that what matters most is not merely the presence of feedback itself, but how it is delivered and how it is interpreted by students.

Overall, affirming and respectful responses can be understood as one element of SGD that helped students maintain speaking confidence. Responses that are delivered without mockery, without humiliation, and with acknowledgment of students' opinions tend to make students view errors not as something embarrassing, but as part of the learning process. This condition allowed them to continue speaking, keep trying, and avoid losing confidence immediately after making mistakes. For this reason, peer support and the quality of feedback within the group were interconnected in shaping a learning environment that was safe, respectful, and conducive to the development of students' speaking confidence.

Structured Teamwork with Clear Roles

In the implementation of small group discussion, the way teamwork was organized within the group also shaped how students engaged in speaking activities. Students perceived discussion as manageable when each member understood their own task and role. As a result, students approached speaking activities with a clearer sense of what needed to be done and how each member was expected to contribute.

"Terus juga saya akan merasa nyaman jika teman-teman saya paham akan peran mereka masing-masing." (Infaj)

"Kalau setiap anggota mendapat kesempatan yang sama, saya merasa lebih percaya diri." (Trayuz)

Translation:

"I also feel comfortable if my friends understand their respective roles." (Infaj)

"When each member gets the same opportunity, I feel more confident." (Trayuz)

These responses indicate that clear roles and equal opportunities helped students feel more comfortable during SGD. As described by Infaj, ease was closely related to each member's understanding of their own role. Such an arrangement made the task feel manageable because the workload was shared across the group rather than being placed on one individual. Students could initially try to understand the part for which they were responsible and then bring it into the group discussion. If there were still parts that had not been fully understood, group members could support and complement one another as the discussion continued. In this way, the discussion could proceed smoothly. A similar point appears in Trayuz's response, where equal opportunities to speak were closely associated with confidence. When each member had the same chance to speak, students felt that they had a place within the group and did not depend entirely on one dominant peer. This condition gave Trayuz an equal opportunity to participate and strengthened his belief that he was capable of delivering his part well. Structured teamwork in SGD ensured that the discussion was organized and gave students the sense that their group work was genuinely ready to be presented because each part had been distributed and discussed together. This point can be discussed through the role of shared responsibility in collaborative learning. He et al. (2023) explained that the roles students take during group work shape group interaction and influence how collaboration develops. They also emphasized that collaborative learning functions effectively when each member has a clear role and is expected to make a concrete contribution. This is closely connected to what Infaj described, as the comfort she referred to also emerged when each member understood their own task and role, so that the discussion felt manageable and the responsibility did not rest on one person alone. Equal participation also reflects the idea of cooperation in group learning. (Wang et al., 2020) emphasized that jigsaw cooperative learning is associated with collaboration, participation, interdependence, and shared responsibility. In their study, such a structure of cooperation was followed by increased self-efficacy among EFL learners. This is relevant to what Trayuz expressed because equal opportunities to speak enabled him to participate and reinforced his confidence in presenting his assigned part.

Through clearly assigned roles that were agreed upon during discussion, students were able to avoid a situation in which the task was concentrated on one person alone. In addition, opportunities to express opinions or to perform during role play became balanced because each student received a fair portion that could be adjusted to individual ability through discussion. This condition allowed students to carry out oral performance with greater confidence because each person already knew which part was their responsibility and was not burdened by the group task as a whole. Therefore, organized teamwork in SGD made the discussion effective and created an opportunity for students to develop their speaking confidence.

Preference for a Manageable Group Size in Speaking Activities

For some students, a group consisting of around three to four members was considered ideal for speaking activities. A limited number of members helped maintain the flow of discussion, made the conversation easier to follow, and allowed participation to be distributed in a balanced way.

"Kelompoknya jangan banyak-banyak anggotanya, ee.. biar ini, biar diskusinya lebih fokus terus semuanya bisa ikutan ngomong." (Trayuz)

"Diskusi lebih gampang soalnya kadang kalau terlalu banyak itu malah susah nyambung ke semua. Mungkin orangnya cukup 3-4 orang." (Mannow)

Translation:

"Don't have too many members in the group, um... let's keep it this way so the discussion stays focused and everyone can have a chance to speak." (Trayuz)

"Discussions are easier because sometimes, if there are too many people, it's actually hard to keep everyone engaged. Maybe three or four people would be enough." (Mannow)

Trayuz emphasized that having fewer group members helped the discussion remain focused and allowed all members to participate in speaking. This indicates that group size was related to the distribution of participation. In a manageable group, students were able to take speaking turns more clearly, so their involvement in the discussion became more balanced. Mannow further explained that discussion became easier when the group did not have too many members. In his view, an overcrowded group made it difficult for students to connect their ideas with all members. This indicates that group size was related not only to speaking turns, but also to the quality of interaction among students. A group of around three to four members was seen as sufficient to keep communication focused and easy to follow. (Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2024) found that group size was one of the situational factors associated with second language willingness to communicate, as the number of group members appeared to influence students' willingness to engage in communication. In this way, a manageable group helped students follow the discussion, take speaking turns, and interact with other members effectively during SGD. Furthermore, (Z. Liu et al., 2025) showed that classroom interaction could encourage willingness to communicate, both directly and through speaking self-efficacy and foreign language enjoyment. In this study, a manageable group size can be understood as one way of creating interaction that remains focused and participatory. Where interaction is well organized and speaking turns are distributed fairly, students are more likely to use their speaking ability with confidence.

Consequently, a manageable group size can be understood as one feature of small group discussion that contributes to students' speaking confidence. In relation to the research question, this finding suggests that students' speaking confidence was shaped by group activities as well as by the way groups were organized to support effective interaction and balanced participation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored EFL students' perceptions of using small group discussion (SGD) to develop speaking confidence before oral performance. The findings indicate that students viewed SGD as a valuable preparatory activity that helped them build confidence through rehearsal, peer support, and active participation in a structured learning environment. By providing opportunities to exchange ideas, practice speaking, and receive feedback from peers, SGD enabled students to approach oral performance with greater readiness and reduced anxiety. The findings suggest that SGD should be integrated into speaking instruction as a preparatory stage rather than merely a discussion activity. Teachers play an important role in maximizing its effectiveness by providing clear guidance, ensuring balanced participation, assigning meaningful tasks, and creating a supportive atmosphere that encourages students to speak. The study also highlights that speaking confidence

develops gradually through structured social interaction, where learners are given opportunities to prepare, participate, and receive constructive feedback. Despite its contributions, this study was conducted in a nonformal educational setting and focused only on students' perceptions of speaking activities. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future research is recommended to involve more diverse participants, compare formal and nonformal learning environments, and investigate the use of SGD in developing other language skills, such as writing, listening, and reading.

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