

Students' Perceptions of Their Confidence in Speaking English in the Classroom Context

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A B S T R A C T

Speaking is one of the most essential yet challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in contexts where opportunities to use English outside the classroom are limited. Many junior high school students experience low confidence in speaking due to fear of making mistakes, peer evaluation, and limited speaking practice. Although previous studies have examined speaking anxiety, fewer have explored students' perceptions of the factors influencing their speaking confidence at the lower secondary level. Therefore, this study aims to explore Grade 9 students' perceptions of their confidence in speaking English and identify the factors shaping their self-assurance. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach involving five Grade 9 students from a junior high school in Karawang, Indonesia, who were selected purposively during the researcher's teaching practicum. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students' speaking confidence was influenced by fear of making mistakes, peer judgment, teacher support, and self-practice. Positive teacher feedback and successful speaking experiences enhanced students' motivation and confidence. These findings highlight that speaking confidence is shaped by linguistic, emotional, and social factors within the EFL classroom.

Keywords: *Students' Perceptions, Confidence, Speaking Skills, Classroom Context*

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INTRODUCTION

Learning English involves mastering four essential skills for students. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four essential skills that students need to master. One of the essential skills commonly taught in English language learning is speaking. Speaking skills are considered an active aspect of English, since using the language requires continuous practice. Students' proficiency in English is determined through their speaking ability. Those who can speak fluently with accurate pronunciation, proper intonation, and clear expression are regarded as having good English competence (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021). However, it is also believed that one of the most difficult skills for students to acquire is speaking.

Most students struggle to articulate their thoughts especially in the context of a foreign language. Many cite lack of vocabulary, a fear of being wrong, and a general lack of confidence is a factor that prevents students from performing well in speaking activities. As a result, very few actually participate and most prefer to sit in silence. It is much easier for them to write than to speak directly. Assuming that junior high school students in Indonesia have limited exposure to English apart from the classroom, this situation emphasises the need for research into the specific factors causing speaking difficulties among EFL learners in that country, as several studies have investigated related to speaking anxiety and confidence in students in various learning environments.

A number of prior studies have also examined this topic. (Shahid & Kabilan, 2025) stated that anxiety, low confidence, and hesitation are among the obstacles students face in listening and speaking. Many students experience nervousness before listening to English lectures or materials, as well as when speaking in front of their peers. Similar challenges have

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been found in other study, where students struggle to build speaking confidence despite understanding its importance. At Watnamom School, most students tend to appreciate the importance of learning, and the practical application of, the English language. However, many of them still struggle to improve their speaking skills. Challenges such as low confidence, being afraid of making mistakes, and not having enough chances to use English in real situations often hold them back. Most lessons are more focused on the grammar and structures, leaving little room for actual conversation. Even more, the overall feeling is that the learner's acquisition of English is hampered by loss of vocabulary and, the inability to articulate the language (Walisma et al., 2025). This shows that many students still have difficulty achieving fluency in speaking English.

There are several factors that cause speaking anxiety. According to study by (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020) It was discovered that a large number of students had nervousness when they were around other people. The results demonstrated that there were three primary causes of anxiety in the students' foreign language classes. It was the fear of a poor evaluation, test anxiety, and communication anxiety. The study found that high-achieving students still faced all three types of speaking anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension was linked to linguistic, personal, teacher-student, and sociocultural factors. Fear of negative evaluation mainly came from teachers and peers, while test anxiety affected students at every stage (Nuridzdzati & Akhriyah, 2023). In line to these studies, one of the biggest issue students continue to deal with in speaking English is confidence.

More recent study reinforces these findings. (Mustamir, 2024) conducted a study related to speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners and revealed that the main causes of speaking anxiety have been shown to include cultural pressures, the fear of receiving a poor grade, and a lack of confidence in their language skills. The study also highlights the critical role of educational environments and teacher-student dynamics in either exacerbating or alleviating anxiety, suggesting that classroom climate is a key determinant of learner performance. This study supports the idea that students' confidence in speaking English is also influenced not only by their linguistic ability, but also by the support they receive during the learning process.

Another study by Cahya and Churnia (2026) found that EFL speaking anxiety is closely tied to psychological challenges, including low communicative self-efficacy and fear of negative evaluation. Their findings reveal a sharp contrast in classroom dynamics: traditional teacher-centered practices and aggressive error correction heighten learner anxiety, whereas supportive pedagogical environments effectively encourage willingness to communicate. These observations mirror the core objectives of the present study by illustrating that speaking anxiety is a multidimensional issue heavily influenced by the classroom environment in shaping learner performance.

Along with anxiety and self-confidence, language barriers are also experienced by students when speaking English. The study highlighted the challenges encountered by students who don't speak in other language, it was found that non-English-speaking students face specific difficulties, such as trouble expressing complex ideas, pronunciation issue, and challenges with academic vocabulary (Anggarini, 2024). These challenges clearly illustrate that problems with speaking are not solely caused by language comprehension, but are also related to the application of language in everyday contexts. These obstacles ultimately affect their confidence, resulting in their reluctance to speak English in class.

Despite the growing body of literature on speaking anxiety and self-assurance in EFL contexts, a notable research gap remains. Previous studies have largely focused on university or senior high school students, and very few have specifically investigated Grade 9 junior high school students who have limited English exposure outside formal classroom settings. Furthermore, limited research has examined how emotional, social, and linguistic factors interact collectively to shape students' speaking self-assurance in an Indonesian Islamic school context. This gap underscores the need for a study that is both contextually specific and focused on this particular learner group.

The current study aims to address the following research questions in terms of this gap: 1) how do the 9 grade junior high school students perceive their confidence in speaking English during classroom activities (2) what factors that shape their confidence, and how do they cope with challenges that affect it. The purpose of the study is to explore students' perceptions of their confidence in speaking English, and to identify the key factors shaping it.

This research is limited to the context of EFL students at the junior high school level in Indonesia, especially in a classroom setting where students are rarely exposed to English aside from a formal learning. The scope excludes unrelated components such private tuition and unofficial informal learning. By focussing on students' own perceptions, this study can help develop teaching practices that not only improve speaking ability but also enhance learners' confidence in using English. The study has significance because it has the potential to give teachers insights into behavioural and linguistic barriers students face, while also emphasising the importance of creating supportive classroom environments.

METHOD

This study used semi structured interviews and a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate junior high school students' assessments of their confidence in speaking English language in the classroom setting. Qualitative descriptive is not focused on theorization such grounded theory, recontextualization and composition such as ethnography, or in-depth description like ethnography, compared to other qualitative approaches (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Before starting the research, the researcher created an interview guide aligned with the research questions, which was reviewed with the academic supervisor and informed by the theoretical framework from earlier studies. The researcher secured permission from the school to arrange the interviews. The researcher took detailed notes of students' responses while conducting the interviews.

This research was conducted at one of the Islamic Junior High Schools in Karawang, during the researcher's Field Experience and Student Teaching program in September 2025. The participants consisted of five Grade 9 students selected through voluntary sampling. Participants were recruited at the end of a classroom session during the researcher's teaching practicum, when the researcher invited students to voluntarily participate in the study without any form of coercion or academic pressure. The selection criteria included: (1) being a Grade 9 student at the school, (2) having received English instruction in a formal classroom setting, and (3) willingness to participate voluntarily. The classroom setting was the primary location for gathering data on students' self-assurance in speaking English. A semi-structured interview served as the primary instrument for gathering data. To ensure that participants could fully comprehend the questions, the interview guide was prepared in Indonesian. Each interview took place individually in a casual classroom setting and lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. Thematic analysis by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to examine the collected data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview data yielded four main themes: (1) Speaking Anxiety, (2) Coping Strategies, (3) Teacher Support, and (4) Positive Learning Experience. The following table summarises the representative quotations from participants that informed each theme.

Table 1. Summary of Participant Quotations and Thematic Codes

Student	Original Statement (Indonesian)	Translation (English)	Code
S1	"Takutnya aku salah penyebutan terus nanti diejek-ejek"	"I'm afraid of mispronouncing words and being mocked"	Fear of peer judgment
S2	"Aku ragu-ragu karena takut salah penyebutan, takut beda arti"	"I was hesitant because I feared mispronouncing the word, worried that it might have different meanings"	Hesitation / Fear of making mistakes

Student	Original Statement (Indonesian)	Translation (English)	Code
S2	"Biasanya saya harus tau dulu cara pengucapan artinya dengan mencari tau sendiri atau menanyakan kepada guru, dan selalu berlatih agar benar dan fasih pengucapannya tanpa belibet sedikit pun"	"Usually, I have to find out how to pronounce it first by looking it up myself or asking my teacher, and I always practice so that my pronunciation is correct and fluent without any hesitation"	Self-practice
S3	"Guru suka kasih contoh cara ngomong yang benar dan bilang gak apa-apa salah, jadi saya berani"	"Teachers give us an example of how to speak properly and told us it's okay to make mistakes, which gives me more confidence"	Support from Teacher
S3	"Membimbing, memberi contoh cara ngomongnya yang benar, bahkan bisa lebih PD (percaya diri) pas dikasih hadiah"	"Guiding us, giving examples of how to speak correctly, and I could feel more confident when given rewards"	Support from Teacher
S4	"Saya pernah merasa senang setelah bisa pake Bahasa Inggris selain dapat nilai A+ dari guru, saya merasa bangga terhadap diri sendiri karna sudah mau belajar walaupun agak susah"	"I felt happy after being able to use English. Besides getting an A+ from my teacher, I felt proud of myself for being willing to learn even though it was a bit difficult"	Sense of Achievement
S5	"Pernah disaat semuanya lagi pusing aku tetep belajar nyari kesalahan aku nya dimana, aku usahain terus akhirnya aku puas ngeliat aku bisa ngomong Bahasa Inggris, sama puas ngeliat nilai aku juga"	"There was a time when everything was confusing, but I kept studying to find my mistakes. I kept trying until I was satisfied that I could speak English, and I was also satisfied with my grades"	Sense of Achievement

Speaking Anxiety

Most students feel hesitate, nervous, and afraid when speaking English. They were afraid of making mistakes, being laughed at by their friends, or mispronouncing words.

Student 1 admitted, "Takutnya aku salah penyebutan terus nanti diejek-ejek (I'm afraid of mispronouncing words and being mocked)".

Student 2 stated, "Aku ragu-ragu karena takut salah penyebutan, takut beda arti (I was hesitant because I feared mispronouncing the word, worried that it might have different meanings)".

These responses aligns with previous research by (Annisa & Wariyati, 2023), who found that non-native speakers often face difficulties with accurate pronunciation. This suggests that their fear of making mistakes and being judged by others is the primary source of their lack of confidence. According to (Nuridzdzati & Akhiriyah, 2023), linguistic and social pressure can cause anxiety even high-achieving pupils. This is further supported by (Mustamir, 2024), whose meta-synthetic analysis identified fear of negative evaluation and cultural influences as key contributors to speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners. Non-native English speakers may find it difficult to convey complex or nuanced ideas because of their limited English language proficiency (Sukmojati et al., 2023). This shows that their fear of making mistakes and being judged by others is the main reason of their low confidence.

Coping Strategies

Despite their anxiety, some students talked about methods they used to build confidence and manage their fears. Some students rehearsed their speech in beforehand, seek assistance from teachers, or improved on their pronunciation at home. Student 2, for example, explained,

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Student 2 explained, "Biasanya saya harus tau dulu cara pengucapan artinya dengan mencari tau sendiri atau menanyakan kepada guru, dan selalu berlatih agar benar dan fasih pengucapannya tanpa belibet sedikit pun (Usually, I have to find out how to pronounce it first by looking it up myself or asking my teacher, and I always practice so that my pronunciation is correct and fluent without any hesitation)".

This finding is consistent with (Budianto, (2023); A.Rukmini, 2020; Khan, 2015; Pangaribuan et al., 2017), who noted that non-native English speakers frequently work together with classmates or seek peer feedback to enhance their speaking abilities. This also supports (Anggarini, 2024), who emphasized that many students are actively working to improve their language proficiency independently. The findings imply that students who practice beforehand are better positioned to manage anxiety and enhance their fluency, suggesting that self-directed learning strategies are an important component of building speaking self-assurance.

Teacher Support

One of the primary factors in raising student confidence appears to be teacher support. Every participant claimed to feel less nervous and more encouraged to speak when teachers smiled, given examples, or said that making mistakes was normal.

Student 3 (S3) mentioned, "Guru suka kasih contoh cara ngomong yang benar dan bilang gak apa-apa salah, jadi saya berani (Teachers give us an example of how to speak properly and told us it's okay to make mistakes, which gives me more confidence)".

S3 further added, "Membimbing, memberi contoh cara ngomongnya yang benar, bahkan bisa lebih PD (percaya diri) pas dikasih hadiah (Guiding us, giving examples of how to speak correctly, and I could feel more confident when given rewards)".

These responses demonstrate that the teacher-student relationship significantly influences students' ease when speaking English. This aligns with Damayanti and Listyani (2020), who found that students felt delighted and proud, especially when teachers gave them a good mark or compliment after speaking English fluently. This shows the essential role of teacher support in influencing student courage.

Positive Learning Experience

Students stated that they feel proud and satisfied when they were able to speak English properly, especially if the teacher granted them an excellent score and compliment. Some participant stated,

Student 4 (S4) stated, "Saya pernah merasa senang setelah bisa pake Bahasa Inggris selain dapat nilai A+ dari guru, saya merasa bangga terhadap diri sendiri karna sudah mau belajar walaupun agak susah (I felt happy after being able to use English. Besides getting an A+ from my teacher, I felt proud of myself for being willing to learn even though it was a bit difficult)".

Student 5 (S5) shared, "Pernah disaat semuanya lagi pusing aku tetep belajar nyari kesalahan aku nya dimana, aku usahain terus akhirnya aku puas ngeliat aku bisa ngomong Bahasa Inggris, sama puas ngeliat nilai aku juga (There was a time when everything was confusing, but I kept studying to find my mistakes. I kept trying until I was satisfied that I could speak English, and I was also satisfied with my grades)".

These responses indicate that students' self-confidence is often related to their sense of achievement and personal motivation. When students achieve success and receive positive feedback, they tend to feel more motivated to continue improving their speaking skills. These

findings align with (Listyani, 2022), who had found that nearly half of students were driven by their dreams or ambitions, indicating that internal motivation and personal goals play an essential factor in maintaining students' enthusiasm and perseverance in learning. Therefore, pride and satisfaction not only strengthen students' confidence but also increase their motivation to be more actively involved in classroom conversation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored Grade 9 junior high school students' perceptions of confidence in speaking English and identified the key factors influencing their self-assurance in EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that speaking confidence is shaped by an interaction of emotional, social, and linguistic factors, including fear of making mistakes, peer judgment, teacher support, and self-practice, rather than by language proficiency alone. Positive learning experiences, particularly supportive teacher feedback and successful speaking performance, were found to strengthen students' motivation and willingness to communicate. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of speaking confidence by providing evidence from Indonesian junior high school learners, a group that remains underrepresented in EFL research. Practically, the findings suggest that teachers should foster supportive classroom environments by normalizing mistakes, providing constructive feedback, and incorporating regular low-stakes speaking activities. Nevertheless, the study involved only five participants from a single junior high school in Karawang, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, classroom observations, and longitudinal designs to obtain a broader understanding of speaking confidence development.

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