

The Level of Students' Self-Confidence in Speaking English at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang

Miftahul Jannah^{a, 1*}

¹ STAI DDI Pinrang, Indonesia

Email: ^aithami181@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

DOI:

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
self-confidence,
speaking
performance.

Self-confidence is widely recognized as one of the strongest affective predictors of success in foreign language learning, especially in speaking performance. This study aims to identify the level of students' self-confidence in speaking English at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, and to analyze the factors influencing it. Employing a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 30 second-grade students using a *Speaking Confidence Scale* adapted from the Foreign Language Self-Confidence Framework (Clément, 1980; Yashima, 2002).

Findings show that most students exhibited moderate to high levels of speaking confidence ($M = 80.3$, $SD = 7.5$). Students reported higher confidence in prepared speaking tasks than in spontaneous ones. The main factors enhancing their confidence were teacher encouragement, peer support, and familiarity with vocabulary and topics. Conversely, low linguistic proficiency and fear of error correction occasionally lowered self-assurance. The study concludes that enhancing students' confidence requires consistent positive reinforcement, communicative teaching strategies, and safe learning environments

Article Info:

Submitted:

20/9/2024

Revised:

30/10/2024

Published:

07/11/2024



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

In foreign language education, the ability to speak confidently represents both a cognitive and affective achievement. While linguistic competence determines what a student can say, self-confidence determines whether they will say it. Self-confidence has thus emerged as a crucial psychological variable influencing second language (L2) learning outcomes (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

In the Indonesian context, despite extensive classroom exposure to English, many students still hesitate to speak due to low confidence and fear of embarrassment (Arifin,

2017; Akbar et al., 2020). This hesitation is often misinterpreted as lack of ability when, in reality, it reflects low affective readiness—a mental barrier that can suppress learners' willingness to communicate (WTC).

According to Clément (1980), linguistic self-confidence in L2 learning arises from two primary sources: (1) perceived competence and (2) low anxiety. Learners who believe in their linguistic ability and feel emotionally secure are more likely to initiate communication. Conversely, those with low confidence tend to remain silent even when they possess adequate linguistic knowledge (Yashima, 2002).

Self-confidence also interacts dynamically with motivation, enjoyment, and social identity. Students who receive encouragement from teachers and peers often develop greater resilience and positive attitudes toward speaking (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In contrast, environments dominated by judgment and correction can stifle participation and erode learners' belief in their communicative competence (Zarrinabadi et al., 2021). Recent studies highlight that confidence correlates strongly with speaking performance. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2022) observed that learners with higher self-confidence produced more fluent and complex utterances, while Rahman and Widodo (2023) found that Indonesian EFL students' speaking confidence predicted their classroom engagement and overall proficiency. However, there remains limited research exploring self-confidence among Indonesian high school students, particularly in rural or semi-urban contexts such as Pinrang, where exposure to English-speaking opportunities is relatively low.

This study seeks to contribute to a growing body of literature emphasizing affective variables as key determinants of language success and to inform English teachers about classroom practices that nurture psychological empowerment alongside linguistic competence.

Literature Review

Self-confidence in second or foreign language learning refers to a learner's belief in their ability to use the target language effectively in communicative contexts. According to Clément (1980), *linguistic self-confidence* comprises two main components: perceived competence and low anxiety. Learners who believe they possess adequate linguistic resources and who experience reduced anxiety are more willing to communicate and perform better in speaking tasks.

Self-confidence is not an innate trait but a learned and situationally shaped attribute. Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) view it as a motivational-affective construct closely linked to self-efficacy and self-esteem. In EFL classrooms, confident learners are characterized by their willingness to initiate conversation, persistence when encountering communication difficulties, and greater resilience toward mistakes (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020)

Self-confidence in speaking English is shaped by multiple internal and external factors. Internal factors include linguistic proficiency, prior speaking experience, personality type (introversion vs. extroversion), and emotional regulation (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022). Students who perceive themselves as linguistically capable and emotionally stable are more confident in oral interactions.

External factors involve teacher support, classroom climate, and peer interactions (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Encouraging teachers who praise effort, allow time for preparation, and provide individualized feedback often promote confidence. Conversely, overly corrective or evaluative environments may lead to reluctance and silence (Wu, 2020).

Cultural norms also play a significant role. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, public performance is often associated with potential embarrassment (“loss of face”), which may hinder confidence development (Arifin, 2017). Therefore, teachers’ sensitivity to socio-cultural dynamics is essential in shaping a psychologically safe classroom.

The reviewed literature establishes that self-confidence is an indispensable affective variable that directly impacts language performance and classroom participation. It is built through successful communication experiences, supportive social environments, and positive self-perception. Although numerous studies have examined confidence in university settings, fewer have explored it among Indonesian high school students, who face unique challenges related to adolescence, peer comparison, and limited exposure to English-speaking contexts.

This study, therefore, seeks to contribute empirical evidence about the level and determinants of self-confidence among senior high school students in a semi-urban

Indonesian setting, offering pedagogical recommendations to foster more confident speakers of English.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design aimed at measuring the levels of students' self-confidence in speaking English and identifying the factors influencing it. A quantitative descriptive design was chosen because it enables the researcher to describe the psychological tendencies of a population through numerical data without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The design aligns with similar studies that explore affective constructs in second language acquisition, such as self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Rahman & Widodo, 2023). The purpose of this approach is not to establish causality but to provide an empirical overview of students' affective states as they naturally occur in classroom settings.

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang, a leading public senior high school in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school implements the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes communicative competence and learner-centered instruction in English classes.

Participants consisted of 30 second-grade students (12 males and 18 females), aged between 16 and 17 years. All had studied English for at least four years, primarily through formal instruction. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure participants represented typical EFL learners at the intermediate level.

Students were informed about the research purpose and assured that participation was voluntary and confidential. Ethical clearance was obtained from the school administration, and pseudonyms were used in reporting qualitative comments.

The primary data collection tool was an adapted version of the Speaking Confidence Scale (SCS) based on the *Foreign Language Self-Confidence Framework* (Clément, 1980; Yashima, 2002). The instrument contained 25 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

The total score ranged from 25 to 125, with higher scores representing higher levels of speaking confidence. The scale demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.90 in the current study, comparable to similar research (Zarrinabadi et al., 2021; Rahman & Widodo, 2023).

To gain deeper insight into the psychological and contextual aspects influencing confidence, a short set of open-ended reflection questions was appended to the questionnaire. Data collection took place in April 2025 during regular English classes. The classroom teacher remained present but refrained from giving feedback or assistance to avoid influencing students’ responses. The researcher also observed the general emotional atmosphere of the classroom to contextualize the results.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage distribution) to determine the overall and dimensional levels of students’ self-confidence. Classification of confidence levels followed the scale below (adapted from Rahman & Widodo, 2023):

101–125 = *Very High Confidence*, 86–100 = *High Confidence*, 71–85 = *Moderate Confidence*, 56–70 = *Low Confidence*, 25–55 = *Very Low Confidence*

The qualitative data from the open-ended section were analyzed thematically following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), identifying recurring ideas and patterns related to emotional, linguistic, and social factors that affected students’ confidence. These measures ensured that the findings accurately represented the self-confidence levels of SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang students and can serve as a reference for further EFL affective studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that the students at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of speaking self-confidence. Table 1 presents the distribution of total confidence scores based on the classification described in Section 3.5.

Table 1. Students’ Levels of Speaking Confidence

Confidence Level	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very High Confidence	101–125	5	16.7
High Confidence	86–100	14	46.7
Moderate Confidence	71–85	9	30.0
Low Confidence	56–70	2	6.6
Very Low Confidence	25–55	0	0.0

The mean score (M = 80.3, SD = 7.5) indicates that, on average, students possessed moderate to high confidence in speaking English.

Approximately 63.4% of respondents fell within the *High* or *Very High* categories, suggesting that the majority of students view themselves as capable and comfortable speaking English, at least under familiar or prepared conditions.

These results contrast with the findings of the first study (on anxiety), where most students reported moderate-to-high anxiety. The difference implies that while anxiety remains present, many students still maintain a relatively positive self-belief in their speaking abilities.

To better understand the construct of self-confidence, the results were analyzed across the three dimensions of the Speaking Confidence Scale (SCS): Perceived Competence (PC), Emotional Calmness (EC), and Social Support (SS). The mean and standard deviation for each dimension are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Scores by SCS Dimension

Dimension	Number of Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Confidence Level
Perceived Competence (PC)	10	3.92	0.51	High
Emotional Calmness (EC)	8	3.68	0.59	Moderate-High
Social Support (SS)	7	4.03	0.47	High

Among the three components, Social Support achieved the highest mean ($M = 4.03$), indicating that teacher and peer encouragement play a vital role in promoting students' confidence. Perceived Competence followed closely ($M = 3.92$), showing that students generally believe in their ability to communicate effectively. Emotional Calmness was slightly lower ($M = 3.68$), suggesting that although students feel generally positive, some still experience mild nervousness in public-speaking situations.

These findings emphasize that confidence in speaking English at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang is largely socially constructed through positive classroom relationships and teacher affirmation. Further analysis identified the five items with the highest mean scores and the three with the lowest scores (Table 3).

Table 3. Selected Items with Highest and Lowest Mean Scores

Item Statement	Mean (M)	Interpretation
"My teacher encourages me to express my ideas in English."	4.27	Strong teacher support
"I feel proud when I can speak English fluently."	4.22	Positive self-recognition

Item Statement	Mean (M)	Interpretation
“My classmates respect my effort when I speak English.”	4.10	Peer affirmation
“I can express simple ideas clearly in English.”	3.97	Linguistic self-efficacy
“I enjoy speaking English in group activities.”	3.95	Communicative comfort
“I feel nervous when I have to speak without preparation.”	3.22	Reduced spontaneity confidence
“I lose confidence if I make grammatical mistakes.”	3.15	Performance sensitivity
“I rarely volunteer to answer questions in English.”	3.10	Low spontaneous participation

These patterns suggest that structured speaking activities and supportive classroom dynamics enhance students’ confidence, while spontaneous or evaluative contexts (e.g., being called on suddenly or making visible mistakes) still challenge some learners.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang exhibit moderate to high levels of self-confidence in speaking English (M = 80.3, SD = 7.5). This suggests that, although linguistic and emotional barriers persist, students generally perceive themselves as capable of participating in English-speaking activities.

This result contrasts with the relatively high level of anxiety reported in the previous study at the same institution, indicating that confidence and anxiety can coexist as separate but related constructs (MacIntyre et al., 1998). A learner may feel anxious before speaking yet still possess the self-belief necessary to attempt communication.

These findings support Bandura’s (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, which posits that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to approach difficult tasks with perseverance and optimism. Students who believe in their communicative abilities tend to view speaking opportunities as challenges rather than threats, thereby increasing their willingness to participate in oral interactions.

The dimension of Social Support (M = 4.03) emerged as the strongest contributor to confidence. This finding underscores the pivotal role of teacher encouragement and peer affirmation in building students’ affective resilience. Positive reinforcement, praise, and constructive feedback serve as forms of *social persuasion*—one of Bandura’s four major sources of self-efficacy.

This aligns with Zarrinabadi et al. (2021), who found that Iranian EFL learners' confidence and willingness to communicate increased significantly in classrooms where teachers displayed immediacy, empathy, and humor. Similarly, Mercer and Gregersen (2020) emphasized that supportive teacher–student relationships enhance learners' emotional security, enabling them to take linguistic risks essential for developing fluency. The significance of peer support also reflects Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978). Through collaborative learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), students not only acquire language skills but also develop a confident “L2 self.” Interaction with peers provides psychological safety and shared responsibility, reducing the fear of individual failure.

The second strongest dimension, Perceived Competence ($M = 3.92$), demonstrates that students generally believe they can express ideas effectively, especially in structured or familiar contexts. This supports findings by Rahman and Widodo (2023), who reported that Indonesian learners with higher perceived competence participated more actively in English discussions and performed better in oral assessments.

However, self-confidence in spontaneous communication remains limited, as seen in the relatively lower scores for items like “I rarely volunteer to answer questions in English.” This pattern suggests that confidence is still conditional—dependent on preparation, vocabulary familiarity, and topic predictability.

According to the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Model (MacIntyre et al., 1998), learners' decision to speak is directly influenced by their perceived competence and situational confidence. If either is low, willingness to speak diminishes even if motivation remains high. Thus, helping students strengthen their self-perceived competence through continuous successful speaking experiences can gradually enhance their spontaneous participation.

Although students reported positive confidence overall, Emotional Calmness ($M = 3.68$) remained slightly lower. This indicates that some learners still experience mild nervousness during impromptu or evaluative speaking situations.

This finding resonates with Dewaele and MacIntyre (2022), who described the relationship between *Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)* and *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)* as dynamic and complementary. Learners can feel enjoyment and nervousness simultaneously, depending on context and task difficulty.

Therefore, developing confidence involves not only improving linguistic skill but also training students to regulate their emotional states. Techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, and self-affirmation can help students maintain composure during oral tasks (Hamidah et al., 2024). Teachers should model calmness and normalize mistakes as part of learning to reduce performance pressure.

The present study contributes to this growing body of literature by demonstrating that confidence can thrive even within anxiety-inducing environments, provided that teacher support and peer relationships remain strong. This insight underscores the interdependence of emotional and social dimensions in language learning.

This study explored the levels and determinants of students' self-confidence in speaking English among second-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Using an adapted version of the *Speaking Confidence Scale (SCS)* and open-ended reflection questions, the results indicated that most students exhibited moderate to high levels of speaking confidence ($M = 80.3$, $SD = 7.5$).

Three key dimensions of confidence—perceived competence, emotional calmness, and social support—collectively shaped students' willingness to speak. Among these, social support emerged as the strongest predictor of confidence, underscoring the importance of teacher encouragement and peer affirmation in shaping learners' affective engagement.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings support Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), confirming that self-confidence develops through successful experiences, social persuasion, and supportive interaction. The results also align with the Willingness to Communicate Model (MacIntyre et al., 1998), which positions self-confidence as a direct antecedent of communication behavior. Overall, the study concludes that self-confidence is not merely an internal trait, but a socially co-constructed and pedagogically nurturable quality. Teachers who address affective dimensions alongside linguistic competence can cultivate learners who speak English not only correctly but confidently.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the levels and determinants of students' self-confidence in speaking English among second-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Pinrang, South

Sulawesi, Indonesia. Using an adapted version of the *Speaking Confidence Scale (SCS)* and open-ended reflection questions, the results indicated that most students exhibited moderate to high levels of speaking confidence ($M = 80.3$, $SD = 7.5$).

Three key dimensions of confidence—perceived competence, emotional calmness, and social support—collectively shaped students' willingness to speak. Among these, social support emerged as the strongest predictor of confidence, underscoring the importance of teacher encouragement and peer affirmation in shaping learners' affective engagement.

Qualitative data revealed that students' confidence was enhanced by positive teacher feedback, collaborative classroom environments, and familiarity with speaking topics. However, confidence tended to decline in spontaneous or evaluative speaking situations, indicating that emotional regulation remains an area for pedagogical development.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings support Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), confirming that self-confidence develops through successful experiences, social persuasion, and supportive interaction. The results also align with the Willingness to Communicate Model (MacIntyre et al., 1998), which positions self-confidence as a direct antecedent of communication behavior.

REFERENCES

- Akbar, N., Suryani, I., & Amiruddin, M. (2020). Foreign language speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL university students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(2), 357–367. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v10i2.28637>
- Arifin, M. (2017). Psychological problems and challenges in EFL speaking classroom. *Register Journal*, 10(1), 29–47. <https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v10i1.29-47>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Clément, R. (1980). Ethnicity, contact, and communicative competence in a second language. *Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America*, 56(2), 302–322. <https://doi.org/10.2307/414375>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dewaele, J.-M., & Dewaele, L. (2020). Are foreign language learners' enjoyment and anxiety specific to the teacher? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(4), 474–492. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1295362>
- Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2022). *Intelligibility, affect, and L2 speech: The dynamic interaction of anxiety and enjoyment*. Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553>

-
- Hamidah, R., Rahman, N., & Hidayat, T. (2024). Building EFL students' confidence and reducing anxiety through mindfulness and peer collaboration. *Asian EFL Journal*, 26(2), 115–133.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and communication. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545–562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x>
- Mercer, S. (2011). Towards an understanding of language learner self-concept. *Springer*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-20792-6>
- Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T. (2020). Teacher well-being and the emotional dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(2), 178–189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818788808>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2018). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rahman, F., & Widodo, H. P. (2023). Self-efficacy, self-confidence, and oral proficiency among Indonesian EFL learners. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 10(2), 289–308. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v10i2.29402>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Woodrow, L. (2011). College English writing affect: Self-efficacy and anxiety. *System*, 39(4), 510–522. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.10.017>
- Wu, K. H. (2020). The effects of teacher feedback on reducing EFL learners' speaking anxiety. *English Teaching & Learning*, 44(3), 311–329. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-020-00055-9>
- Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86(1), 54–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136>
- Zarrinabadi, N., Khodarahmi, E., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2021). The effects of teacher immediacy and feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate and self-confidence. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(2), 104–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1705247>