



The EFL Students' Perspective of Their Speaking Competence and Self-Confidence: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The research aims to see students' awareness of their competence based on their self-confidence in speaking English. In this study, the qualitative descriptive approach was employed to collect thorough responses and student views on their speaking ability and confidence level. The researchers introduced respondents to the notion of self-confidence before asking them to complete the questionnaire and conduct an interview. Respondents' confidence appears to be related to their perspective of their speaking ability. Students cannot claim to be at ease every time they speak a foreign language because speaking is such a vital element of communication yet they are motivated to learn and practice English. According to the respondents, while confidence is a fantastic place to start in speaking, it will not take them very far unless they consistently practice enhancing their language competence. The most typical approach is to engage in conversation whenever feasible.

Keywords: EFL, Perspective, Speaking Competence, Self-Confidence

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INTRODUCTION

Educators may realize among the language skills, speaking is indeed the skill that needs confidence the most. It plays a big and essential part in speaking (Utari et al., 2022; Ibrahim and Shahabani, 2020). Students also have the same view, speaking is judged as a tough and arduous skill. In speaking, we face other people and they are looking at us by making eye contact. It stimulates our brain with the feeling of adrenaline. Of course, different people deal with this moment differently.

Some of them can cope with it well, yet others may feel not so confident and it hinders them from speaking at the moment. They may feel anxious and not have confidence in themselves, even though everyone has it within. The drop in confidence level reason may vary. It can be about some mistakes that happened in the past or bad experiences such as going too fast or loss of words that lead to worries and anxiousness or even speech reluctance (Zondag et al., 2020). This leads to how countless of Indonesian students find it hard to practice their speaking skill in real life (Riadil, 2020).

Speaking skill is undoubtedly a pivotal matter in which it is a primary way to communicate and a media to transfer the knowledge effectively and efficiently (Allo and Priawan, 2019; Novia et al., 2023). To be able to communicate effectively, good communication skills are important in the speech sector (Montafej et al., 2021). Yet, being able to merely speak and using the speaking skill at utmost its function are two different matters. People need to speak clearly and effectively, to communicate well with each other. This is important, because without proper communication, misunderstandings, and problems will occur. It is a very important language skill as it is used to express our feelings, collect data and receive information (Imran et al., 2021; Suliyati, S. and Syahri, I., 2021; Sudirman et al., 2020). Additionally, the ability to communicate and be successful has long been associated with the ability to talk effectively (John and Yunus, 2021).

Speaking a foreign language involves mental and emotional elements, one of which is self-confidence. Confidence in this context refers to a temporary mental state that indicates a speaker's subjective level of conviction in a notion and/or word when it is recalled (Mori and Pell, 2019). Self-confidence contributes to individuals' excitement and drives to properly respond to an event that occurs (Selerang et al., 2023). Self-assurance is crucial to achieving proficiency in English speaking skills. It has evident advantages such as believing in one's ability to conquer and accomplish desires that others think tough, acting as a motivation

to quit worrying while speaking, and being able to solve issues of all sizes. EFL students who are self-assured in their skills may overcome their worries and negative thoughts and speak English successfully. They felt they could fulfill their ambitions and desires. Consequently, one of the characteristics that stimulate student advancement in participation in learning activities is students' self-confidence (Aulia and Apoko, 2022). Having strong or poor self-confidence is seldom connected to a student's real talents and is primarily determined by the student's views (Lengkoan et al, 2022). Perceptions are how students think about other pupils, and these perceptions might be inaccurate. Growing up in an unsupportive and critical environment, being isolated from kids' friends or family for the first time, evaluating pupils too harshly, or being terrified of failure can all lead to low self-confidence (Kansil et al., 2022).

On the other hand, this research aims to study the students' perspectives on their speaking proficiency and their confidence in speaking English. The writer expects that by selecting the first-semester students of the English Education Department at IAIN Kediri as their study object, the students would be encouraged actively learn English more.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive technique to obtain thorough responses and student thoughts on their speaking competence and confidence level. Based on the perspectives of the participants, this technique was deemed appropriate for comprehending social phenomena.

Population and Sample

This research was conducted at the English Education Department of IAIN Kediri in the first semester of the academic year 2022/2023. The population of this research was all students in the first semester at the English Education Department of IAIN Kediri, which ranged from class TBI A to TBI E. The researchers used class TBI C as a research sample from 5 existing classes.

Instruments

The instrument used in the data collection process included questionnaires and interviews. These instruments were used in collecting the data. The data collection started with giving the questionnaire to the respondents. Then, the researchers invited the respondents to have a depth in-person interview as the continuation step in obtaining more detailed data.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to look at the students' perceptions of their speaking abilities and self-confidence. The researchers seek students' awareness based on their self-confidence in speaking English as university students. The researchers sent the questionnaire after choosing the responders. Before requesting respondents to fill out the questionnaire, the researchers introduced the notion of self-confidence to them. The researchers assessed the response and notified the respondents of the interview after getting it. The interview was conducted in person, and each responder was asked the same question by the researchers. The questions in the questionnaire are about the reasoning behind the answers. The respondents' detailed responses were then evaluated to answer the research problem of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are several main questions for the general questionnaire which are followed by some detailed additional questions and in-depth interviews. Some questions ask about the student's perspective on their confidence in speaking English. The rest are concerned about their interest in learning the speaking skill that will show whether it affects their confidence level or not.

Students' interest in learning a foreign language may contribute to their confidence level in speaking. Their interest encourages them better, so they can master the skill faster. Students will show their efforts and consistently practice to achieve better results. The thing with learning a new language is, it has to be used regularly on a daily basis. Language skills will not flourish without hard work and self-consistent. Delivering something meaningful without delay while maintaining the pace and momentum of conversation, as well as making sure to be communicative are considered not an easy job. That is why some may think that they have to go the extra mile to be able to fluently speak a foreign language.

The figure below shows the students' interest in speaking English conducted in first semester students of the English Education department of IAIN Kediri, with 21 students as the respondents.

1. Do you like to speak in English?

21 responses

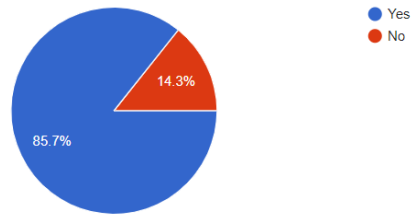


Figure 1. Students' interest in speaking English

Figure 1 shows 85.7% of the students, 18 students to be exact, like to speak English. While the rest, 3 students, does not show their favor in speaking. In other words, most of them have an interest in this skill.

2. Do you like to practice your speaking by doing a conversation?

21 responses

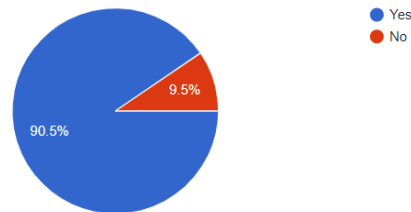


Figure 2. Students' interest in practicing speaking by conversing

Figure 2 reveals 90.5% of the respondents or 19 students think practicing speaking using the conversation is more enjoyable and effective. A further interview reveals they feel awkward and less effective practicing speaking by themselves. Students think they opt to have an interlocutor as how it is in real life. A conversation may be a form of training for these students to achieve fluency and confidence boost in engaged conversation. It is easier for them to have mental training on how to face people in real life and engage in every topic of conversation. Mostly, they practice speaking by conversing with fellow students who also dream of being eloquent in speaking English.

3. How do you learn best?

21 responses

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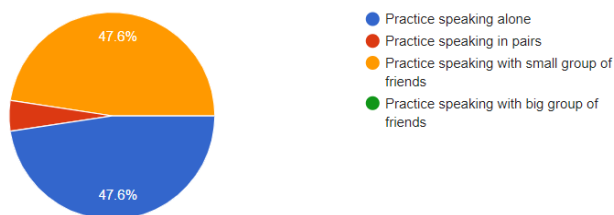


Figure 3. Students' methods preference in learning speaking

Figure 3 presents the methods used by students in boosting their speaking skills. This chart shows us how they learn best in terms of speaking skills. The authors provides some options that may have already been done by the respondents in learning to speak better. There are four options, such as practice speaking alone, in pairs, with small groups of friends, and with a big group of friends. Ten students opt to practice speaking by having a small group of friends. Ten other students learn best by practicing alone. One student thinks practicing speaking in pairs is better than other choices. None of the respondents choose to practice speaking with a big group of friends.

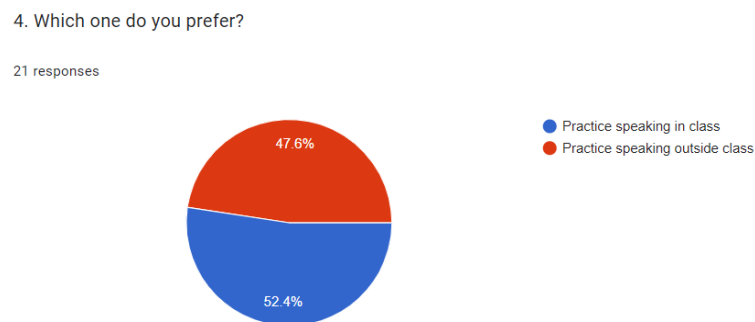


Figure 4. Students' preference to learn in or outside class

Figure 4 shows us the slightest discrepancy in students' preference for practicing speaking in or outside class. With only one more student, practicing in the class with their classmates is viewed as the most preferable result. While the rest ten students reveal how they prefer to practice their speaking skills outside the class.

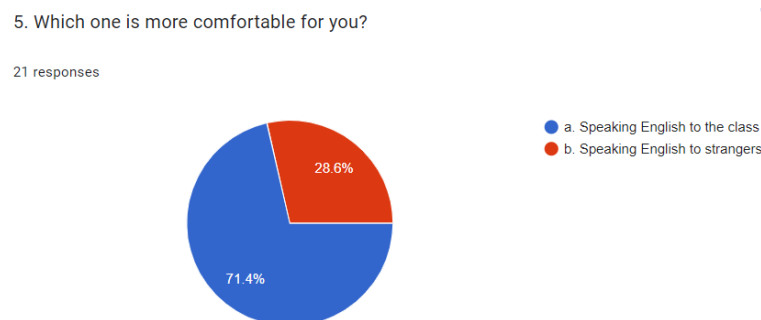


Figure 5. Students' responses of the more comfortable environment to speaking English

Having to answer a question of which one is more comfortable for the respondent to speak with, as shown in Figure 5, the majority expectedly answers to find comfort in speaking with their classmates. This answer is similar to the result of the previous question. 15 students admit that even though some of them long and wonder to speak with strangers or people that are not their classmates, their nervousness and worry win them over to acknowledge that once again familiarity plays an essential part in the process of learning and improving.



Figure 6. Students' feeling in speaking English

In giving response to a question of whether they feel happy speaking a foreign language, in this case, English, 20 students said yes. Various reasons are stated following their revelation of how and why this foreign language skill is having a special place in their heart. A classic but true answer about how English as an international language can be used in any part of the world starts their explanation. But when being asked about the particular skill, in this matter speaking, they said this skill is considered advanced and should be acquired first. They argue speaking is a basic communication skill, and when they can communicate in English by speaking, they feel happy and accomplished.

Yet, the interesting one is the only respondent who does not feel happy speaking in English. The authors pays particular attention to this one. The reason behind the answer is back to the root of this entire problem. The student feels not good enough to express themselves with limited vocabulary and it causes a drop in confidence level. Hence, the respondent does not feel particularly happy. Later it is added, that someday if eloquence and fluency have been improved along the journey, maybe the respondent can feel happy speaking English.

In the follow-up interview, the researchers asked them about the reason for answering the question. Students who show their favor in speaking, the majority reason that they love learning a foreign language no matter what the skill is. The rest admit they feel and look sophisticated if they master such skill.

Others incorporate their dream such as being an EFL teacher as well as having a desire to travel the globe.

Even though they admit their interest in speaking English, they courageously reveal their awareness of their skill. They think they have to step up their game and work extra hard to improve themselves. The students are aware that they have a long way to go, especially those who wish to teach EFL and travel the world.

Additionally, they also reason their skill will flourish later, remembering how they are still in the very first semester of their college year. The students who are interested in speaking add that they trust the process and are convinced their desire for improvement will last long.

On the other hand, students who do not favor speaking in English reveal their disinterest is based on some problems. The first students told me about their limited vocabulary in English. This hinders them to speak, which leads them to feel uninterested in speaking skills. The student belatedly admits that other skills are fun to learn and practice, yet when it comes to speaking, they feel anxious. They think they do not have the proper vocabulary to be able to deliver their thought in words. Other students also agree with it, stating that they somehow feel discouraged to express their opinion verbally because it is difficult to find suitable words to convey their meaning. Those, in the end, accumulate into a big dark cloud of worries whenever they try to speak. They do not hate English, hence they choose this major. However, they do feel certain nervous feelings when it comes to speaking.

When it comes to practice speaking, having an interlocutor leads them to be aware of their skill. Sometimes, they try to go out of their comfort zone and make use of the advanced world of social media to broaden their range. Searching for similar interest fellows in social media, increase the courage to approach a total stranger across the globe. They long to have a native or eloquent English speaker who can help them improve their speaking skills. Some of these students admit that they start shaky because of the difference in skill mastery between them and this potential interlocutor. Yet, this encourages their passion to become a compatible interlocutor for natives.

Interestingly, several students also admit by conversing they can indeed keep their memory intact. They tend to forget the previous lesson whenever they learn something new. So, by having a conversation with other people they can achieve several things. They can measure their skill as well as keep them from forgetting the previous lesson.

In contrast, two students state their hesitation to have a conversation, even with their peers. Frankly, they do not find within them the confidence in engaging someone in a conversation. These two students think they cannot keep the flow of conversation and it is such a shame to make their peers wait for them to find suitable words to express what they mean in words.

Several detailed reasons are revealed via the in-person interview.

Respondents who admit they learn best by practicing alone unexpectedly confess their low level of confidence related to speaking skills. They argue to have an inadequate ability to speak which lets them have a low level of confidence. Even though in the previous question, they admit conversation improve their speaking skill efficiently and faster. Yet, when it comes to being honest in choosing the best and most comfortable way to learn, they cannot argue that they find peace and comfort in solitude.

Others prefer solitary learning based on a bad experience in the past. They reveal to have accepted unfavorable treatment from their friends when they try to engage them in conversing in English. Their friends argue that the respondent initially does that to show off their English skills. To be treated and viewed in a negative perspective several times, lead them to opt to study by themselves in the comfort of their bubble.

While practicing in a small group allows the respondents to discuss effectively rather than in a big group. Close-knitted friends often help each other to correct the mistakes such as pronunciation, or even improve vocabulary as everyone may have different mastery of vocabulary. They argue by discussing in a small group, knowledge effectively being transferred here and there thus they also manage to learn other things. Others argued that a big group is hardly effective to focus in the matter. Practicing speaking in such a closed-knitted environment let them feel comfortable and encourages them to be better.

Strangely enough, the respondents who learn best in pairs and the ones who learn best in a small group of friends, state that they can maintain their level of confidence. Somehow, they think it will be hard to maintain composure and such a level of confidence when they are in a big group leading them to be easily stressed. Confidence level seems to surge in a tight circle of friends. They do not have a problem showing their confidence but they realize it is going to be hard to have the self-esteem to converse in a large group.

Familiarity may play a big part in the preference of the respondents. Having to interact with those whom they meet every day and study together in a four walls room creates a safe and secure place for them. Making mistake or dealing with any problems during speaking will not be such a big issue that destroys

their confidence level. Their classmates will acknowledge it as an honest mistake and quickly move on while opting to not make a big deal of it. As previously stated, bad experiences or awful treatment received as a response to making mistakes during practicing speaking may contribute to a drop in someone's confidence level.

When it comes to the point of being comfortable speaking in a foreign language, six students pay a certain mind to the setting. If the majority of their classmates find comfort in familiar faces and places, these six respondents believe in the vast knowledge provided by the outside world. Facing strangers, who may not be so familiar to them, do not hinder their passion for improving their language skill, especially speaking. One of these six students conveyed their wish to boost their confidence level by conversing with people outside their circle of friends. They appreciate the comfort their friends provide whenever a mistake happened that may or may not be found out there. Yet, they think a force to go outside and face unfamiliarity that forces them to be better is not easy to ignore. They are aware of the lack of comfort, but comfort sometimes tricks them to think they are good enough. So, they also want to test out their confidence. They are afraid of the fact that their confidence only works in the tight circle of their friends. The confidence may change drastically when they are in a different situation, far from the comfort of the familiarity of their classroom.

In contrast, those who prefer to practice speaking outside class jokingly said to seek more adventure because English does not restrict inside their classroom walls. By venturing outside the class, they long to find experiences brought by society. One respondent stated that there is a big possibility to also learn about vast different accents outside there. They may directly be in contact with a native speaker who possesses various accents that somehow can enrich their knowledge beyond their classmates.

One of the questions that are asked to the respondents is whether they look for a chance to speak English or not. This question was designed to see how far the respondents trust their confidence and also to measure their effort in developing their competency. The wise student will make use of any chance they get to improve themselves. They do not wait for the chance to come instead they look for it. Some students admirably answer that they try to look for a chance and sometimes force themselves to bravely speak. They argue on several occasions, they face a drop in confidence level but they are aware that the chance may not come twice.

To improve themselves, they have to be ready anytime to speak. One of the students believes in impromptu speaking. They believe that conversations show

up unannounced. People may engage them in conversation anytime anywhere. They have to be communicative and improve themselves so that they are understood. That is why looking for any chance to speak English becomes such a training ground for them. Pozzi and Mazzarella (2023) stated that confidence is a commitment signal. Showing confidence is a method to commit, but not displaying it is a means of avoiding commitment. The respondents, after going through all the questionnaires and interviews, show signs of commitment by being aware of their confidence in speaking English. They realize their confidence will take them far if they take it seriously.

CONCLUSION

This article delves into the respondents' recognition of their speaking skills and self-confidence. Numerous questions demonstrated how respondents identify their confidence and when it begins to decrease. However, the majorities of them love what they learn and are eager to improve themselves. They consider speaking abilities to be crucial and pivotal in learning English. To get a better version of them, several learning techniques and settings were explored. While nearly everyone agrees that conversation is one of the most effective and efficient methods to both improve their speaking skills and training to keep their confidence, being in a larger group is still quite frightening for many. Yet, they are conscious of the larger picture in the long run. Speaking and conversing are not constrained by the four walls of the classroom. As a result, they strive for excellence in both speaking ability and confidence. They may be on the very first step of a lengthy set of stairs to advanced English competence, but they have years to digest and grow, and they trust it.

The respondents' impression of their speaking abilities appears to be correlated to their level of confidence. Since the perspective of speaking is vital as the central issue to communication, students cannot yet state they are at ease and composed every time they speak a foreign language. The respondents are motivated to learn and practice English, but they appear to struggle with retaining a certain amount of apprehension, which subsequently alternate the level of confidence and leads to a new set of problems during speaking.

As stated by the respondents, whilst confidence is indeed a solid starting point for speaking, it will not get them far unless they practice relentlessly to enhance their language competence. The most popular method to accomplish this is to attempt to talk whenever possible. The respondents boldly claim that they seek opportunities and do not wait for it to be handed to them. They attempt to converse spontaneously and engage in speaking activities to practice.

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