

EXPLORING STUDENTS' SELF-CONFIDENCE IN THE ENGLISH PUBLIC SPEAKING CLASSROOM

Adzani Fatimah Az-Zahroh Yuwono¹, Febti Ismiatun², Ali Ashari³

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Islam Malang

Email: ¹ 22201073010@unisma.ac.id; ² febtiismi@unisma.ac.id; ³ aliahari1967@unisma.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores students' self-confidence in the English Public Speaking classroom, focusing on five performative aspects: voice projection, eye contact, body language, facial expression, and emotional control. A mixed-methods approach with a sequential-explanatory design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through a validated Public Speaking Self-Confidence Questionnaire administered to 33 third-semester English Education students at Universitas Islam Malang. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the strongest and weakest aspects of self-confidence. Three students with the highest confidence scores were then selected for semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions and experiences. Results indicate that voice projection is the strongest aspect (mean: 12.21), while emotional control is the weakest (mean: 9.97). Eye contact, body language, and facial expression fall into medium confidence levels. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed five main themes: (1) Building Self-Confidence through Practice, (2) Transformation from Fear to Self-Confidence, (3) The Role of the Audience and Environmental Context, (4) The Importance of Feedback and Evaluation, and (5) Self-Belief and Positive Mindset. These findings align with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, demonstrating how mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states interact in EFL public speaking contexts. Self-confidence in public speaking is a multidimensional and dynamic construct that can be developed through consistent practice, supportive environments, constructive feedback, and positive self-belief.

Keywords: *self-confidence, public speaking, voice projection, eye contact, body language, facial expression, emotional control, mixed-methods*

INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential communication tool across educational, social, and professional settings globally (Bondarchuk et al., 2025). Among the four primary language skills, speaking is widely regarded as the most important, as it allows individuals to convey ideas, represent identity, and engage in authentic interaction (Khalidah, 2023; Lucas, 2018). Within the domain of oral communication, public speaking stands out as a critical competency demanded in academic and professional life, encompassing presentations, debates, seminars, and teaching activities (Jean-Pierre et al., 2023).

Beyond linguistic competence, effective public speaking requires psychological readiness, particularly self-confidence. Self-confidence in speaking refers to a person's belief in their capacity to communicate orally before an audience (Tridinanti, 2018). It determines whether students will develop their English speaking skills quickly or slowly, reduces anxiety, and supports active participation (Lee & Lee, 2020). Self-confidence can be observed through measurable performative behaviors such as voice projection, eye contact, body language, facial expression, and emotional control (Burgoon et al., 2016).

Despite its importance, many EFL students still experience a lack of self-confidence when speaking in public, often accompanied by speaking anxiety (Gebre, 2024; Ismiatun et al., 2024). Lack of confidence manifests as self-doubt, while speaking anxiety involves emotional and physical reactions in speaking situations (Tridinanti, 2018). Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) identified speaking as the skill in which students most commonly encounter difficulties.

Low self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation consistently emerge as key barriers to effective speaking performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; Nguyen & Tong, 2024).

Previous research on self-confidence in the English public speaking classroom has predominantly employed quantitative approaches using self-report questionnaires as the sole data source (Mastiasa et al., 2023; Rosyadi et al., 2022). While such approaches can describe trends in students' self-confidence levels, they do not fully explain how students interpret and experience their confidence in public speaking. Rosyadi et al. (2022) found that many students lacked confidence even when they possessed sufficient language ability, indicating a gap between quantitative measures and lived experience. Furthermore, studies specifically examining performative dimensions of self-confidence in Indonesian EFL public speaking classrooms remain limited.

To address these gaps, this study employed a sequential-explanatory mixed-methods design to provide both quantitative measurement and qualitative insight into students' self-confidence in the English Public Speaking classroom. The study was guided by two primary research questions: (1) What aspects of self-confidence (voice projection, eye contact, body language, facial expression, and emotional control) are the strongest and weakest among students in the English Public Speaking classroom? and (2) How do students perceive their self-confidence in the English Public Speaking classroom?

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a sequential-explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), beginning with quantitative data collection and followed by qualitative inquiry to provide deeper contextual understanding. The quantitative phase aimed to measure and describe students' self-confidence levels across five performative aspects, while the qualitative phase explored how students perceive and experience their self-confidence in the English Public Speaking classroom.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at the English Education Department of Universitas Islam Malang. Participants in the quantitative phase were 33 third-semester students who had completed the English Public Speaking course. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the course in January 2026. Following quantitative data analysis, three students with the highest self-confidence scores (classified as High level) were purposively selected for the qualitative interview phase.

Instruments

The quantitative instrument was a Public Speaking Self-Confidence Questionnaire consisting of 20 items measuring five aspects: eye contact (items 1–4), voice projection (items 5–8), body language (items 9–12), emotional control (items 13–16), and facial expression (items 17–20). The questionnaire was validated by an expert and revised based on feedback to improve contextual accuracy. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Student self-confidence levels were classified into three categories based on score intervals: High (60–80), Medium (40–59), and Low (20–39).

The qualitative instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide with 12 open-ended questions covering students' previous speaking experiences, factors influencing their self-confidence, emotional reactions and strategies for managing nervousness, and their participation in the Public Speaking course. The interview questions were validated by an expert prior to data collection.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through the questionnaire administered to all 33 students at the conclusion of the Public Speaking course. Qualitative data were then gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with the three selected high-confidence participants, conducted in January 2026. Member checking was applied to strengthen the credibility of qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS, calculating mean scores and standard deviations for each self-confidence aspect. The aspect with the highest mean score was interpreted as the strongest, and the one with the lowest mean as the weakest (Sugiyono, 2019). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involving systematic reading, coding, and theme identification from interview transcripts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Strongest and Weakest Aspects of Self-Confidence

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed notable differences in students' self-confidence scores across the five performative aspects. Table 1 presents the mean scores for each aspect based on SPSS analysis.

Aspect	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Voice Projection	12.21	2.571	High
Facial Expression	10.85	2.774	Medium
Body Language	10.79	2.484	Medium
Eye Contact	10.24	2.784	Medium
Emotional Control	9.97	3.187	Medium

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of self-confidence aspects (N=33)

As shown in Table 1, voice projection achieved the highest mean score of 12.21 (SD = 2.571), placing it in the High confidence category. This indicates that students are relatively capable of controlling the volume, clarity, and stability of their voice when speaking in front of an audience. This finding aligns with Burgoon et al. (2016), who identified voice quality as the most readily perceived nonverbal indicator strongly associated with speaker self-confidence. Voice development is naturally emphasized in Public Speaking courses through repeated presentations and direct lecturer feedback, which explains why it emerged as the strongest aspect (Rosyadi et al., 2022).

In contrast, emotional control received the lowest mean score of 9.97 (SD = 3.187), indicating that students still struggle to manage nervousness, anxiety, and tension when speaking publicly. This supports McCroskey's (1977) theory of oral communication apprehension, which explains that speaking anxiety can undermine self-confidence even when technical speaking skills are relatively developed. Horwitz et al. (1986) further emphasized that fear of negative evaluation in EFL contexts intensifies anxiety and weakens emotional control during performances. The high standard deviation (3.187) also indicates considerable variability among students, suggesting that emotional regulation is a particularly uneven and challenging aspect of self-confidence development (Gallego et al., 2022).

Eye contact ($M = 10.24$), body language ($M = 10.79$), and facial expression ($M = 10.85$) all fell in the Medium confidence category. This suggests that while students possess a basic understanding of nonverbal communication, they have not yet applied these skills consistently. Burgoon et al. (2016) noted that nonverbal behaviors are strongly influenced by emotional state; when students experience anxiety, the deployment of these aspects tends to be suboptimal. Grieve et al. (2021) similarly found that students often understand the importance of effective public speaking behaviors but struggle to implement them under psychological stress. Among the 33 participants, the overall self-confidence level was predominantly Medium (mean total score: 2.15), consistent with findings from Indonesian EFL contexts (Rosyadi et al., 2022).

Students' Perceptions of Their Self-Confidence

Thematic analysis of interview data from three high-confidence participants (S1, S2, and S3) revealed five main themes describing how students construct, experience, and develop their self-confidence in the English Public Speaking classroom.

Theme 1: Building Self-Confidence through Practice

All three participants consistently identified practice as the central factor in building their self-confidence. Students reported practicing through a variety of strategies beyond formal class activities, including speaking in front of mirrors, recording themselves on video, and conducting self-assessments of their performance. S1 described this process: “When I practice a lot, the nervousness gradually goes away... That’s why I try to practice in front of a mirror as often as possible, or during recording sessions” (S1, Interview, January 2026). S3 similarly emphasized preparing material the day before, stating that understanding the material in advance removes reasons to feel insecure. This finding directly aligns with Bandura’s (1997) concept of mastery experience, which posits that successful performance experiences are the most dominant source of self-efficacy. Wang and Sun (2024) validated this claim, confirming that mastery experience gained through repeated speaking practice is the strongest predictor of speaking self-confidence. Wicaksono et al. (2023) further found that EFL learners’ self-confidence is positively influenced by self-evaluation and continuous improvement of their own performance.

Theme 2: Transformation from Fear to Self-Confidence

Participants described self-confidence as a gradual transformational process rather than an innate trait. All three reported beginning the course with high levels of anxiety but progressively developing confidence through repeated experience. S1 noted: “At first, I felt insecure, but over time, I became more confident. I had an inner drive to keep practicing” (S1, Interview, January 2026). Most notably, S2 described a shift in perception toward public speaking: “It started with fear... but precisely because it was so challenging, I wanted to keep trying, and eventually, I became addicted” (S2, Interview, January 2026). This transformation reflects Bandura’s (1997) theory that self-confidence accumulates through successive successful experiences over time. It also aligns with McCroskey’s (1977) model, which suggests that communication apprehension diminishes with repeated practice and exposure. Gallego et al. (2022) revealed that individuals with higher levels of public speaking anxiety show visible signs of nervousness, such as unstable voice delivery and limited eye contact; the participants in this study demonstrated that these anxiety responses can be managed through consistent engagement.

Theme 3: The Role of the Audience and Environmental Context

All three participants reported that the composition and perceived competence of the audience significantly influenced their self-confidence levels. They expressed greater

confidence when speaking in front of classmates, whom they perceived as learning partners in a safe and non-judgmental environment. In contrast, speaking before lecturers or expert audiences triggered heightened anxiety due to fear of evaluation. S2 explained: “When I speak in front of my friends, I feel confident and happy. I feel like we are all learning together. But when I speak in front of a professor, I am definitely nervous” (S2, Interview, January 2026). S3 also stressed the importance of environment: “If I am constantly being judged, it does not boost my confidence—instead it makes me feel insecure” (S3, Interview, January 2026). These findings are consistent with Horwitz et al.’s (1986) framework of foreign language anxiety, where fear of negative evaluation is a primary anxiety trigger. Eni et al. (2024) similarly confirmed that positive interactions and social support from peers can meaningfully enhance self-confidence levels in public speaking situations.

Theme 4: The Importance of Feedback and Evaluation

Feedback from lecturers emerged as a vital mechanism for self-confidence development across all three participants. Constructive post-performance feedback provided clear direction for improvement and reinforced students’ motivation. S1 stated that lecturer feedback helped identify weaknesses and prompted further practice: “This really impacted my self-confidence. Every time I presented in front of the class, the lecturer gave me feedback on my performance” (S1, Interview, January 2026). S3 gave a specific example: “The lecturer gave me feedback on my stiff body language and lack of eye contact with the audience. This helped me better understand what I need to improve” (S3, Interview, January 2026). These findings are consistent with Bandura’s (1997) concept of verbal persuasion, one of the four primary sources of self-efficacy, which holds that encouragement and targeted feedback from others can strengthen individuals’ belief in their abilities. Eni et al. (2024) confirmed that lecturers who create supportive learning environments and provide structured feedback can gradually enhance students’ self-confidence. Li et al. (2024) further demonstrated that teacher-supported learning, particularly through feedback and opportunities for successful experience, is effective in boosting learners’ speaking confidence.

Theme 5: Self-Belief and Positive Mindset

Participants identified self-belief and a positive mental orientation as foundational psychological conditions for effective public speaking. S2 explicitly articulated the primacy of self-belief: “First, because I am believing I can do it... When I am confident, everything goes smoothly” (S2, Interview, January 2026). S3 adopted a more realistic but equally empowering mindset: “If I cannot give my best, at least I can give a good performance” (S3, Interview, January 2026). This approach to avoiding perfectionism aligns with Asnaini et al.’s (2025) finding that self-perception and internal mental preparation are critical aspects shaping EFL students’ speaking confidence. Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory provides the theoretical foundation for this theme, highlighting that individuals’ beliefs in their ability to execute required actions are central determinants of performance outcomes. The participants’ statements demonstrate that self-confidence in public speaking is not merely a product of technical skill, but also of psychological orientation and internal motivation.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings confirms that self-confidence in public speaking is a multidimensional, dynamic construct that develops unevenly and non-linearly across aspects. While voice projection emerged as the strongest quantitative indicator, this strength appears to be the product of extensive practice, direct feedback, and mastery experience—consistent with Bandura’s (1997) framework. Emotional control, despite being the weakest aspect statistically, was an area where high-confidence students had already developed active management strategies (e.g., deep breathing, structured preparation), suggesting that the gap between high- and lower-confidence students may be most pronounced

in this domain. Gale et al. (2021) confirmed that mastery experience is the dominant source of self-efficacy, while Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrated that peer collaboration and co-regulation contribute to speaking self-confidence development. These findings collectively underscore the importance of creating structured, supportive, and feedback-rich public speaking learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' self-confidence in the English Public Speaking classroom using a sequential-explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative findings revealed that voice projection is the strongest aspect of self-confidence (mean: 12.21), while emotional control is the weakest (mean: 9.97). Eye contact, body language, and facial expression fall in the medium confidence range, indicating inconsistent application. Overall, most students demonstrated medium self-confidence levels.

The qualitative findings revealed five themes characterizing how students perceive and develop their self-confidence: (1) Building Self-Confidence through Practice, (2) Transformation from Fear to Self-Confidence, (3) The Role of the Audience and Environmental Context, (4) The Importance of Feedback and Evaluation, and (5) Self-Belief and Positive Mindset. These themes align with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, demonstrating the interplay of mastery experience, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and physiological state management.

Self-confidence in public speaking is not innate but can be systematically developed. Students should engage in regular independent practice and anxiety-management techniques such as deep breathing and positive self-talk. Lecturers are advised to cultivate supportive classroom environments, provide specific and constructive feedback, and gradually increase speaking challenges across varied audience contexts. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, include students of varying confidence levels, and explore longitudinal trajectories of public speaking self-confidence development.

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Advisor I

Febti Ismiatun, S.Pd., M.Pd.
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