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IMPROVING STUDENTS' CONFIDENCES AND SPEAKING FLUENCY THROUGH COMIC STRIPS AT SMA NEGERI 3 PANYABUNGAN

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ABSTRACT
This study aimed to describe students' confidence and speaking fluency before the use of comic strips and to examine how comic strips could improve these aspects among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan. The study employed Classroom Action Research based on the four-phase model of Kemmis et al. (2020), comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection, and was conducted in two cycles. The subjects were 26 students of class XI F2 in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through a speaking test using a five-component rubric, a self-confidence questionnaire based on five indicators, teacher and student observation sheets, and documentation. The findings showed progressive improvement in both speaking performance and self-confidence. The average speaking score increased from 39.2 in the pre-cycle to 60.2 in Cycle I and 80.0 in Cycle II. Classical mastery increased from 0.0% to 19.2% and finally to 100.0%. Meanwhile, the average confidence percentage rose from 43.3% to 63.8% and 79.4%, respectively. Student activity also increased from 66.7% to 93.8%. These findings indicate that comic strips supported the development of speaking confidence and fluency through contextual practice, peer interaction, and progressive speaking activities.

Keywords: Comic strips, self-confidence, speaking fluency, classroom action research, self-efficacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in education, communication, and international interaction. In the Indonesian educational context, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), and students are expected to develop the ability to communicate through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is frequently considered one of the most challenging because it requires learners to produce language spontaneously in real time. Unlike writing, which allows learners to revise and organize their ideas before presenting them, speaking requires the rapid coordination of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension during communication (Brown & Lee, 2021).

Speaking is not merely the production of grammatically correct sentences. It is a communicative activity through which learners express ideas, share experiences, give opinions, and interact with others. Effective oral communication requires learners to maintain the flow of speech while responding to the demands of a particular situation. Richards and Renandya (2020) emphasize the importance of fluency and accuracy as complementary dimensions of language performance. Learners therefore need opportunities to develop both their linguistic resources and their willingness to use those resources in actual communication.

In EFL classrooms, speaking difficulties are frequently associated with limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge, hesitation, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. These challenges can become more serious when classroom activities provide limited opportunities for meaningful oral interaction. Students who are afraid of being judged by their peers may avoid speaking, resulting in fewer opportunities to practice. Consequently, low confidence and low speaking fluency can reinforce one another.

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The problem is also evident in the context of SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan. Based on the initial classroom observation reported in the research thesis, students of class XI F2 demonstrated reluctance to speak English, anxiety during oral performance, and difficulty maintaining spoken interaction. The thesis describes students avoiding eye contact, speaking very quietly, and showing concern about making mistakes in front of their classmates. The initial speaking performance was below the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 65.

Self-efficacy theory proposed by Bandura (1977) provides the principal theoretical foundation for understanding this problem. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to organize and perform actions required to achieve a particular goal. In speaking instruction, students with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to attempt oral tasks, persist when difficulties arise, and recover from mistakes. Conversely, learners with weak self-efficacy may avoid speaking even when they possess some relevant linguistic knowledge.

Bandura (1977) identifies four major sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological or emotional states. Mastery experience develops when learners successfully complete a task. Vicarious experience emerges when learners observe others, especially peers with similar abilities, perform successfully. Verbal persuasion involves encouragement and constructive feedback from teachers or classmates. Physiological and emotional states concern the way learners interpret feelings such as anxiety, nervousness, and enjoyment during performance.

Comic strips offer a potential instructional response to these difficulties. A comic strip presents a sequence of illustrated panels containing characters, situations, and dialogue. The combination of visual and verbal information provides learners with contextual support for understanding meaning. In speaking instruction, the images can function as visual scaffolding that helps students organize ideas and retrieve expressions without depending entirely on spontaneous language production.

Susanto (2021) explains the potential of comic strips as a cognitive bridge between learners' passive language knowledge and active communicative situations. Comic strips can provide a concrete context in which students rehearse dialogues, interpret characters' intentions, and gradually produce their own utterances. The relatively light and familiar format of comics may also make oral practice more engaging and reduce anxiety.

Previous studies have reported positive contributions of comic-based media to language learning. Andini, Kurniaman, and Syahrilfuddin (2022) examined comic media in speaking instruction, while Anggraini (2021) investigated the use of comic strips to improve the speaking ability of eleventh-grade students. These studies support the pedagogical relevance of visual narrative media. However, the present study focuses specifically on the relationship between comic-strip instruction, speaking fluency, and students' confidence within a senior high school classroom action research setting.

The research gap addressed in this study concerns the simultaneous improvement of speaking performance and self-confidence through a progressively developed comic-strip intervention. Rather than treating speaking as an exclusively linguistic outcome, the study examines how visual support, structured practice, peer observation, and teacher encouragement can strengthen students' self-efficacy while improving oral performance.

The research questions are:

1. How does the use of comic strips improve students' speaking fluency?
2. How does the use of comic strips influence students' confidence in speaking English at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan?

The objective of this study was to describe students' initial confidence and speaking fluency and to examine the improvement of both aspects through the use of comic strips in class XI F2.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR). The research followed the cyclical model of Kemmis,

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McTaggart, and Nixon (2020), which consists of four interconnected phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle involved the preparation of speaking activities, implementation of the comic-strip intervention, observation of classroom participation, and reflection for the improvement of the subsequent cycle.

The CAR design was selected because it enabled the researcher to identify students' speaking difficulties, implement an instructional intervention, evaluate its outcomes, and modify the learning activities based on the results.

2.2 Setting and Subjects

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan, Kabupaten Mandailing Natal, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia. The participants were 26 students of class XI F2 in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The study focused on students' confidence and fluency in English speaking activities.

2.3 Research Instruments

Four instruments were used to collect the data.

First, a speaking test was administered to assess students' oral performance. The assessment followed five components associated with Brown and Lee (2021): pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Each component was assessed on a scale of 1–5. The overall speaking performance was also interpreted according to the KKM of 65.

Second, a self-confidence questionnaire was used to measure students' confidence in speaking English. The questionnaire employed five indicators based on Lauster: belief in one's own abilities, acting independently in decision-making, having a positive personality, courageously expressing opinions, and recognizing strengths and weaknesses. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale.

Third, teacher and student observation sheets were used to record classroom activities, student participation, oral practice, interaction, and behavioral changes during the intervention. Fourth, documentation was used to support the description of the research process.

2.4 Research Procedure

The intervention was implemented in two cycles.

In Cycle I, the students worked with the comic strip A Day at School. The activities introduced the story, supported students' understanding of the dialogue, and provided opportunities for guided oral practice. Students practiced the expressions in pairs before performing dialogues.

In Cycle II, the comic strip My Weekend Adventure was used. The story was longer, pair-practice time was extended, and students were given greater freedom to improvise their dialogues. These modifications were designed to encourage more independent speaking and to support the transfer from rehearsed dialogue to more spontaneous oral production.

2.5 Data Analysis and Criteria of Success

Quantitative data were analyzed through average scores, classical mastery percentages, and average self-confidence percentages. Qualitative data from observations and documentation were analyzed descriptively to identify changes in participation, confidence, and speaking behavior.

The criteria of success were:

1) At least 75% of students achieved the speaking KKM of 65.
2) The class average of self-confidence reached the high category, defined as at least 75%.

The intervention was considered successful when both criteria were achieved.

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Initial Condition of Students' Speaking and Confidence

The pre-cycle stage showed that students experienced difficulties in speaking English and lacked confidence during oral performance. Students were hesitant to volunteer answers, avoided eye contact, and spoke very quietly when asked to perform. These observations indicated that the problem involved both linguistic performance and affective factors. The quantitative results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Improvement in Speaking Performance and Self-Confidence

Stage	Average Speaking Score	Classical Mastery	Average Confidence	Confidence Category
Pre-Cycle	39.2	0 of 26 (0.0%)	43.3%	Low
Cycle I	60.2	5 of 26 (19.2%)	63.8%	Moderate
Cycle II	80.0	26 of 26 (100.0%)	79.4%	High

The average speaking score in the pre-cycle was 39.2, which was below the KKM of 65. None of the 26 students achieved the minimum mastery criterion. The average self-confidence percentage was 43.3%, placing the class in the low category.

These results demonstrate the initial relationship between students' affective and linguistic difficulties. Students who were reluctant to speak had fewer opportunities to practice fluency, while limited fluency could further increase their hesitation. The initial findings therefore supported the need for an intervention that provided both language support and confidence-building experiences.

3.2 Improvement in Cycle I

Cycle I introduced the comic strip A Day at School. The activity provided students with a visual narrative and dialogue that could be used as a reference during speaking practice. Instead of requiring students to generate an entire conversation without support, the comic panels helped them understand the setting, sequence of events, and expressions used by the characters.

The average speaking score increased from 39.2 in the pre-cycle to 60.2 in Cycle I. Classical mastery also increased from 0.0% to 19.2%, with 5 of the 26 students achieving the KKM. The average confidence percentage rose from 43.3% to 63.8%, moving from the low category to the moderate category.

Although the results did not yet meet the criteria of success, the improvement indicated that comic strips provided useful support for oral production. Students had access to a concrete context and could rehearse dialogue before performing. This reduced the difficulty of organizing ideas during speaking and created opportunities for successful participation.

The student activity observation score in Cycle I was 66.7%. This result indicated that students were beginning to participate more actively, although some learners still required substantial support. The observation findings showed that students were not yet fully independent in producing dialogue and continued to depend on the language presented in the comic.

From the perspective of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, Cycle I provided initial mastery experiences. Students experienced success in completing manageable speaking tasks, while observing classmates perform created vicarious experiences. Teacher encouragement also supported verbal persuasion. Nevertheless, the moderate confidence score suggested that these experiences had not yet been sufficiently developed to produce consistent confidence across the class.

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3.3 Improvement in Cycle II

Cycle II used the comic strip My Weekend Adventure. The learning activities were modified based on the reflection from Cycle I. The comic contained a longer story, students were given extended time for pair practice, and they were encouraged to improvise additional dialogue.

The results showed substantial improvement. The average speaking score increased to 80.0, exceeding the KKM of 65. All 26 students achieved the minimum mastery criterion, producing classical mastery of 100.0%. The average confidence percentage reached 79.4%, placing the class in the high category.

The student activity observation score increased to 93.8%, categorized as very good. This result indicated stronger engagement in speaking activities and more active participation during the second cycle. The achievement of both success criteria confirmed that the intervention was successful at the end of Cycle II.

The improvement was also reflected in students' classroom behavior. During the pre-cycle, students were observed avoiding eye contact, speaking in whispers, and expressing fear of being laughed at when making mistakes. Following the intervention, students spoke more loudly, maintained eye contact, and demonstrated greater willingness to perform. Some pairs also improvised additional dialogue, including conversations about weekend football matches and cooking experiences.

These changes indicate that the comic-strip intervention supported not only the reproduction of prepared language but also the development of more independent oral communication. The increased freedom to improvise in Cycle II allowed students to use the comic as a starting point rather than a fixed script.

3.3 Improvement in Speaking Components

The speaking assessment consisted of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Table 2 presents the average scores for each component.

Table 2. Average Speaking Component Scores

Component	Pre-Cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II
Pronunciation	2.04	3.08	4.08
Grammar	1.92	2.92	3.92
Vocabulary	1.96	2.96	3.92
Fluency	1.92	2.92	3.92
Comprehension	1.96	3.15	4.15

All five components increased across the three stages. Pronunciation improved from 2.04 to 3.08 and finally to 4.08. Grammar increased from 1.92 to 2.92 and 3.92, while vocabulary improved from 1.96 to 2.96 and 3.92.

The fluency component increased from 1.92 in the pre-cycle to 2.92 in Cycle I and 3.92 in Cycle II. Its absolute increase was +2.0 points, the largest increase among the speaking components. This finding is particularly important because fluency was one of the principal difficulties identified at the beginning of the research.

Comprehension also improved from 1.96 to 3.15 and 4.15. The higher comprehension score suggests that the visual context and sequential organization of the comic helped students understand the meaning of the dialogue and the communicative situation.

The improvement in fluency can be interpreted through Richards and Renandya's (2020) view that fluency and accuracy are complementary rather than contradictory. Comic-strip activities allowed students to practice expressions repeatedly while gradually becoming more willing to maintain speech. The students were not required to achieve perfect grammatical accuracy before speaking. Instead, they were given opportunities to sustain communication and develop their oral performance progressively.

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The results also support Susanto's (2021) explanation that comic strips function as cognitive bridges between passive language knowledge and active communication. The visual sequence provided a structure for students to organize their ideas, while the dialogue offered language that could be rehearsed and adapted. This combination reduced the demands of spontaneous speaking and made it easier for students to maintain the flow of communication.

3.4 Improvement in Self-Confidence Indicators

The development of self-confidence was measured through five indicators. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Development of Self-Confidence Indicators

Indicator	Pre-Cycle (%)	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (%)
Belief in one's own abilities	41.0	63.0	79.0
Acting independently in decision-making	39.5	61.5	77.5
Having a positive personality	47.0	68.0	84.0
Courageously expressing opinions	38.0	60.5	76.5
Recognizing strengths and weaknesses	45.0	66.5	82.0

All five indicators showed improvement from the pre-cycle to Cycle II. The indicator "belief in one's own abilities" increased from 41.0% to 63.0% and finally to 79.0%. This result suggests that students developed stronger beliefs in their ability to perform speaking tasks.\

"Acting independently in decision-making" increased from 39.5% to 61.5% and 77.5%. This improvement is consistent with the increased freedom provided during Cycle II, when students were encouraged to make decisions about their dialogue and improvise additional expressions.

"Having a positive personality" showed the highest final percentage at 84.0%, increasing from 47.0% in the pre-cycle. The result indicates that students demonstrated more positive classroom behavior during speaking activities. "Courageously expressing opinions" increased from 38.0% to 60.5% and 76.5%, while "recognizing strengths and weaknesses" increased from 45.0% to 66.5% and 82.0%.

The strongest qualitative evidence of improved confidence appeared in the students' willingness to speak more loudly, maintain eye contact, and participate in spontaneous dialogue. These behaviors are consistent with the development of speaking self-efficacy. Students who previously avoided oral performance became more willing to attempt speaking and to continue communicating despite possible mistakes.

3.5 Comic Strips and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

The improvement in speaking and confidence can be explained through the four sources of self-efficacy identified by Bandura (1977).

Mastery experience. Students were given progressively more challenging speaking tasks. In the early stages, they practiced dialogue through imitation and choral repetition. They then moved to pair practice and individual performance. The successful completion of these activities provided students with evidence that they could perform speaking tasks. The improvement in speaking scores from 39.2 to 80.0 supports the importance of repeated successful experiences.

Vicarious experience. Students observed their classmates performing dialogues. Watching peers with similar abilities speak successfully could help reduce the belief that English speaking was an impossible task. Peer performance also provided examples of pronunciation, expressions, and ways to continue a conversation.

Verbal persuasion. Teacher encouragement was an important part of the

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intervention. Rather than emphasizing rigid correction, the teacher provided support and encouragement that helped students continue speaking. This approach may have reduced the fear of making mistakes and strengthened students' willingness to participate.

Physiological and emotional states. Comic strips provided a light and enjoyable learning format. The visual narrative helped create a less threatening speaking environment, reducing the emotional pressure associated with oral performance. The qualitative findings of louder speech, eye contact, and spontaneous dialogue suggest that students became more comfortable during speaking activities.

These four sources were activated through the instructional design. The comic strip served as the visual medium, while pair work, progressive practice, peer observation, teacher encouragement, and improvisation provided the conditions through which self-efficacy could develop.

3.6 Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research concerning the use of comic-based media in language instruction. Andini et al. (2022) examined comic media to improve speaking skills among elementary-level students. Their study supports the use of visual narrative materials as a means of encouraging oral language practice. The present research extends this pedagogical application to eleventh-grade students and emphasizes the relationship between speaking performance and confidence.

Anggraini (2021) investigated the use of comic strips to improve speaking ability among eleventh-grade students. The findings of the present study similarly indicate that comic strips can provide contextual support for oral production. However, the present study places particular emphasis on self-efficacy and confidence as affective factors that contribute to speaking improvement.

The results also support Susanto's (2021) theoretical explanation of comic strips as cognitive bridges. The visual context helped students understand the communicative situation and organize their oral production. This is particularly relevant for EFL learners who experience difficulty retrieving language spontaneously.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study. The research involved one class of 26 students and used a classroom action research design. Therefore, the results demonstrate improvement within the particular classroom setting but do not establish that comic strips would produce the same results in every educational context.

3.7 Overall Achievement of the Intervention

The criteria of success were achieved in Cycle II. Classical mastery reached 100.0%, exceeding the minimum target of 75%. The average self-confidence percentage reached 79.4%, exceeding the required high-category threshold of 75%. Student activity also reached 93.8%, categorized as very good.

The individual gain in speaking scores ranged from +32 to +44 points, and all 26 students were classified as "Passed" at the end of Cycle II. These results indicate that improvement occurred across the class rather than being limited to a small group of high-performing students.

The findings suggest that the progressive use of comic strips was more effective than relying on a single form of practice. The first cycle established a foundation through guided dialogue, while the second cycle introduced a longer story, extended pair practice, and greater freedom for improvisation. This progression allowed students to move from supported performance toward more independent communication.

4. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the use of comic strips to improve students' confidence and speaking fluency in class XI F2 at SMA Negeri 3 Panyabungan. The findings showed that students initially experienced low speaking performance and low self-

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confidence. The pre-cycle speaking average was 39.2, with 0.0% classical mastery, while the average confidence percentage was 43.3%, categorized as low.

The use of comic strips produced progressive improvement across two cycles. The average speaking score increased to 60.2 in Cycle I and 80.0 in Cycle II. Classical mastery rose from 0.0% to 19.2% and finally to 100.0%. The average confidence percentage increased from 43.3% to 63.8% and 79.4%, reaching the high category. Student activity also increased from 66.7% to 93.8%.

The improvement occurred across all five speaking components, with fluency showing the largest absolute increase of +2.0 points. Among the confidence indicators, "belief in one's own abilities" and "courageously expressing opinions" showed substantial improvement. Qualitative observations also indicated greater willingness to speak, stronger eye contact, louder speech, and spontaneous dialogue.

The findings suggest that comic strips can support speaking development by providing visual scaffolding, contextual dialogue, progressive practice, and opportunities for successful oral performance. Through these activities, the four sources of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura were activated.

For students, comic-based speaking practice is recommended as a regular learning habit. Teachers may use comic strips as an accessible instructional medium while paying attention to students' emotional needs and confidence. Schools are encouraged to facilitate a collection of visual learning materials. Future researchers should examine the durability of the improvement through delayed post-tests, compare comic strips with other instructional media, and investigate the intervention across longer periods and different learning contexts.

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