

**BY ON CONFIDENCE: SELF ESTEEM OF STUDENTS AT SMAN 1 UNGARAN****Muhammad Mahdawi^{1*}, Girindra Putri Dewi Saraswati²**^{1,2} Universitas Negeri SemarangE-mail: ¹mahdawi1224@students.unnes.ac.id, ²girindraputrids@mail.unnes.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

English speaking is a deal for students and how they feel about themselves is really important. This study looks at how students feel about their worth when they speak English and how that affects their participation in class. The study was done at SMA N 1 Ungaran. It used a special kind of research design. They gave questionnaires to 35 tenth-grade students. Also did interviews with five students who had different levels of self-esteem. What they found out was that students feel good about themselves when they have experiences speaking English, when their teachers and friends appreciate them when they learn something new successfully and when they achieve their own goals in speaking English. The study also found that students who feel good about themselves are more confident, motivated and willing to participate in class. However many students still feel unsure about speaking English in class. This means that helping students develop their self-esteem is still a challenge for teachers. The study shows that how students feel about themselves is really important for their confidence, motivation and participation in speaking activities. So it is really important for teachers to create a classroom environment and give students positive feedback to help them feel good, about themselves and want to participate in class. English speaking activities are a part of learning English and students need to feel comfortable and confident to get the most out of them.

Keywords: English speaking; Speaking activities; Students' participation; EFL learners; Self-worth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most essential skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, express opinions, and negotiate meaning in authentic social interactions. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge with cognitive, affective, and social competencies simultaneously. Consequently, successful oral communication is often regarded as an important indicator of language proficiency and communicative competence (Darmaliana et al., 2020). Nevertheless, many English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) learners continue to experience considerable difficulty in speaking despite years of formal English instruction. These difficulties are not merely associated with limited linguistic competence but are also influenced by psychological factors that shape learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in classroom communication (Ardiyansah & Auliya, 2023; Prabowo & Saptiany, 2024).

Recent studies have demonstrated that psychological aspects play an increasingly significant role in determining students' success in learning English. Besides language knowledge, learners need confidence to express their

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ideas without excessive fear of making mistakes or receiving negative evaluation from teachers and peers. Becerra-Posada et al. (2022) reported that learning environments promoting communicative interaction significantly enhanced students' self-confidence and communicative competence. Likewise, Jaya et al. (2025) found that students who developed stronger self-confidence through collaborative learning activities demonstrated better academic performance and participated more actively during classroom interaction. These findings indicate that confidence is not merely an individual characteristic but also develops through positive learning experiences and supportive classroom environments.

One psychological construct closely associated with confidence is self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to individuals' overall evaluation of their personal worth and competence, influencing how they perceive their abilities, respond to challenges, and interact with others. Students possessing positive self-esteem generally exhibit greater optimism, stronger motivation, and higher persistence when encountering academic difficulties. Conversely, students with low self-esteem frequently hesitate to express their opinions, avoid communicative situations, and become anxious when participating in speaking activities. As a result, self-esteem functions as an important affective factor that shapes learners' engagement and participation during English learning.

Within EFL classrooms, speaking activities frequently expose students to situations in which they must perform publicly before teachers and classmates. Such situations often trigger anxiety because students fear making grammatical mistakes, mispronouncing words, or receiving negative judgments from others. Ardiyansah and Auliya (2023) found that speaking anxiety

remains one of the primary obstacles preventing university students from actively participating in classroom discussions. Similarly, Prabowo and Saptiany (2024) observed that communication challenges in English learning are influenced not only by limited language proficiency but also by learners' lack of confidence when interacting with others. These findings suggest that emotional and psychological readiness substantially influences students' willingness to communicate in English.

Learning motivation further strengthens the relationship between self-esteem and speaking performance. Students who possess positive beliefs about themselves generally demonstrate greater academic motivation, invest more effort in learning tasks, and persist when encountering communication difficulties. Abdelrahman (2020) revealed that academic motivation significantly contributes to students' learning achievement and is closely associated with learners' metacognitive awareness. This finding implies that students with stronger internal motivation are more likely to regulate their learning strategies effectively and maintain confidence while completing challenging academic tasks. Therefore, developing students' self-esteem may simultaneously strengthen their motivation to participate actively in English-speaking activities.

A supportive classroom atmosphere also contributes substantially to learners' psychological development. Teachers who provide constructive feedback, encourage student participation, and create opportunities for collaborative interaction help learners develop positive perceptions of their own abilities. Becerra-Posada et al. (2022) demonstrated that project-based learning not only improved communicative competence but also strengthened students' confidence through meaningful collaborative experiences. Likewise,

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Song (2025) emphasized that student-centered instructional approaches promoting active engagement contribute positively to learners' academic achievement and classroom participation. These studies suggest that confidence develops progressively through supportive pedagogical practices rather than emerging naturally from language instruction alone.

Several empirical investigations have consistently confirmed the positive relationship between confidence and speaking performance. Jaya et al. (2025) reported that learning environments encouraging cooperation and active participation significantly enhanced students' confidence alongside their academic achievement. Similarly, Leon et al. (2024) found that speaking-oriented instructional techniques enabled learners to communicate more fluently while gradually increasing their confidence during oral interaction. Darmaliana et al. (2020) likewise argued that communicative teaching approaches create opportunities for learners to practice speaking meaningfully, thereby improving both language competence and confidence. Collectively, these findings reinforce the notion that students' psychological readiness constitutes an essential component of successful speaking instruction.

Although previous studies have extensively examined confidence, speaking anxiety, communicative competence, and classroom engagement, most investigations have primarily focused on instructional strategies designed to improve speaking performance. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to exploring students' self-esteem as an underlying psychological factor influencing their confidence, motivation, and classroom participation during English-speaking activities. Furthermore, many existing studies have employed quantitative approaches emphasizing statistical

relationships while providing limited understanding of students' personal perceptions and experiences regarding their self-esteem in speaking contexts.

Considering these gaps, the present study investigates students' self-esteem in English-speaking activities at SMA Negeri 1 Ungaran. Specifically, this study explores how students perceive their self-worth while participating in speaking activities, identifies factors influencing the development of their self-esteem, and examines how self-esteem contributes to their confidence, motivation, and classroom participation. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on affective factors in English language learning while providing practical implications for English teachers in creating supportive classroom environments that foster positive self-esteem and encourage students to participate more confidently in oral communication.

2. METHODS

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted at SMA N 1 Ungaran and involved one purposively selected tenth-grade class where English is taught as a compulsory subject. The class consisted of 35 students, all of whom completed a questionnaire to provide an initial overview of their self-esteem in English-speaking activities. The questionnaire served as a preliminary instrument to identify students' perceptions and support participant selection for the interview stage.

Based on the questionnaire results and students' classroom participation during speaking activities, five students representing high, moderate, and low levels of self-esteem were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to obtain rich information regarding students' experiences, perceptions, and feelings about self-

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esteem in English-speaking contexts while ensuring variation among participants (Rivas, 2025).

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using two instruments: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was administered to all participants to identify general patterns of students' self-esteem in English-speaking activities. The findings served as supporting data and guided the selection of interview participants.

Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted with the five selected students to explore their experiences, perceptions, and feelings

concerning self-esteem during English-speaking activities. This interview format allowed participants to express their views freely while ensuring that the discussion remained aligned with the research objectives. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate accurate interpretation and qualitative analysis (Rivas, 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained through questionnaires and interviews conducted with senior high school students as the participants. The data were collected from students at SMA N 1

Table 1. Result Test of Students' Questionnaire

No	Statement	Scores				
		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I feel more confident speaking English after successfully completing difficult speaking exercises.	0	1	10	17	1
2	I see my friends successfully speak English makes me confident that I can speak well too.	0	4	12	12	7
3	Praise from from my teacher boosted my confidence in speaking English.	0	0	7	17	11
4	I feel appreciated when my friends/teachers praise my English speaking skills in class.	0	0	11	15	9
5	I am confident in expressing my ideas in English during class discussions.	1	6	18	5	5
6	I assess my English speaking skills realistically and positively	0	1	10	18	6
7	Positive feedback from friends/teachers strengthens my sense of competence in speaking English.	0	0	5	21	9
8	I feel accepted in the English speaking group in class.	0	3	14	14	4
9	I am confident when speaking English in English class.	1	5	16	9	4
10	Support from friends reduces fear when speaking English in class.	0	2	11	16	6
11	Speaking English well makes me feel highly valued as a student	0	2	4	17	12
12	My English speaking ability matches my ideal image as a student.	0	3	13	14	5
13	My English speaking skills often exceed my own expectations.	1	4	25	5	0
14	When speaking English, I feel competent and significant in class.	1	8	17	7	2
15	I like myself when I can speak English fluently	0	0	8	14	13
16	I feel accepted when speaking English in class.	0	2	18	12	3
17	Compliments on my English speaking skills immediately boosted my confidence.	0	1	13	13	8
18	Speaking English well makes me respect myself.	0	0	5	18	12
19	My confidence in speaking English has increased since I started learning in high school.	2	5	14	9	5
20	I am competent in speaking English and am qualified to succeed in this activity.	0	7	16	10	2

Note: SD: Strongly

Disagree

D: Disagree

N: Neutral A: Agree

SA: Strongly Agree

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Ungaran to investigate students' self-esteem in speaking English and its influence on their participation in speaking activities. The questionnaire and interview were conducted in October 2025, and all participants provided detailed responses related to their experiences, feelings, and confidence when speaking English in the classroom. Several participants explained that appreciation, praise, and positive feedback from teachers and classmates increased their confidence and helped them feel more valued when speaking English. In addition, some participants stated that successful speaking experiences, such as being able to understand English material quickly or speak fluently, positively influenced their self-esteem and encouraged them to participate more actively in classroom speaking activities. These findings provide important insights into how students' self-esteem affects their confidence, motivation, and engagement in learning English speaking skills.

4.1 Students' perceptions of their self-worth when speaking English

After conducting interviews with all participants, students' perceptions of their self-worth when speaking English were influenced by various positive experiences during speaking activities in the classroom. The interview results showed that appreciation, praise, and supportive feedback from teachers and classmates played an important role in helping students feel valued and confident when speaking English. Students felt more appreciated when they were able to answer questions, participate in discussions, complete speaking assignments, or communicate fluently in English. Positive recognition from others also helped students develop a more positive perception of their speaking

abilities and encouraged them to believe that they were capable English speakers. In addition, successful learning experiences, such as understanding English material quickly or being able to explain something fluently in English, increased students' sense of competence and personal achievement. Through supportive classroom interactions and positive speaking experiences, students gradually developed stronger self-esteem and a more positive perception of their self-worth when speaking English.

Interview Results

During the interview process, participants said:

P2 : " I think my confidence is quite high. My loud voice and ability to answer a teacher's question are what increase my confidence, even though my English is still imperfect. "

Participant 2's statement shows that despite having imperfect English skills, the participant has positive self-confidence because they feel capable of speaking clearly and answering the teacher's questions during classroom activities.

The participant has a positive perception of self-worth when speaking English because they focus more on their ability to participate and communicate rather than on their weaknesses in English. This indicates that self-worth is not only influenced by language proficiency, but also by students' belief in their ability to express themselves and take part in classroom interaction. In relation to the topic of the article, this statement supports the idea that positive self-worth can encourage students to participate more actively in speaking activities, as confidence in their own abilities helps

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reduce fear of making mistakes and increases their willingness to communicate in English. Participants stated that :

P2 : " What makes me feel appreciated when speaking English is when I answer questions or assignments, or most often when I'm in a dialogue with my classmates. When the teacher asks a question, I sometimes raise my hand or am pointed at by a friend to answer the question, and I'm appreciated. This boosts my confidence. "

Participant P2's statement means that the participant feels appreciated and more confident when they actively participate in speaking activities and receive positive recognition from teachers and classmates.

P3 : " I feel appreciated when I receive praise from my teacher and friends, even though I still have some difficulties in speaking English. "

Participant P3's statement means that praise and positive support from teachers and friends make the participant feel valued and more confident despite still having difficulties in speaking English.

P5 : " The thing that can make me appreciated is when other people praise my good pronunciation. "

Participant 5's statement feels valued when others praise their good pronunciation, meaning that external praise becomes their main source of self-worth in speaking English.

Appreciation and positive feedback can strengthen students' perceptions of their self-worth when speaking English. The interview results showed that students feel more valued and confident when teachers and classmates give praise, recognition, and positive responses to

their speaking performance. Activities such as answering questions, participating in classroom dialogues, and completing speaking assignments make students feel recognized and appreciated in the learning process. Positive feedback from teachers and peers also helps students feel accepted even when they still experience difficulties in speaking English. Supportive classroom interactions reduce feelings of insecurity and motivate students to continue improving their speaking skills. In addition, compliments related to pronunciation or speaking performance make students feel proud because their efforts in learning English are acknowledged by others. These experiences help students develop stronger self-esteem and create a sense of achievement in speaking English. As a result, students become more confident, motivated, and comfortable participating in English speaking activities. Participants stated that :

P1 : " I was able to understand the material in a relatively short time, as some of the material required a longer period of time. "

participant 1' stated that being able to understand the English material in a shorter time than expected made them feel more capable and increased their confidence in their learning ability.

P4 : " When I learn something new and I can describe it in English fluently. "

The participant 4' explained that being able to explain newly learned material fluently in English makes them feel confident and satisfied with their speaking ability.

The successfully understanding and using English can strengthen students'

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perceptions of their self-worth when speaking English. These achievements create a sense of competence and personal satisfaction because students realize that they are making progress in their speaking ability. Being able to speak English fluently about something they have learned also helps students develop a more positive perception of themselves and increases their confidence in using English during classroom activities. In addition, these experiences encourage students to believe in their own abilities and motivate them to continue improving their speaking skills. Therefore, successful learning experiences and the ability to communicate effectively in English contribute positively to students' self-esteem and their perceptions of self-worth when speaking English. The participant mentioned that:

P2 :” I feel good about my English speaking skills. Why? Because it aligns with my expectations: focused and confident as a speaker. It has impacted my confidence by making me more active in class during English lessons.”

participant 2' explained that feeling satisfied with their English speaking ability because it matches their expectations has increased their confidence and encouraged them to participate more actively in English class.

Personal expectations in English speaking can positively influence students' perceptions of their self-worth. The participant felt satisfied with their English speaking ability because it matched their expectations of being focused and confident when speaking English. The participant also explained that this positive self-perception

increased their confidence and encouraged them to become more active during English lessons in class. This indicates that when students believe their speaking ability meets their personal standards or goals, they tend to develop higher self-esteem and feel more confident in participating in speaking activities. Therefore, successful speaking experiences and positive self-evaluation contribute to strengthening students' self-worth when speaking English.

In the questionnaire part, 15 participants agreed, 9 participants strongly agree and 11 participants felt neutral about stay more focused on learning English when self esteem are included and the ratio are 42% agree (15 participants), 25.7% strongly agree (9 participant), and 31.4% neutral (9 participants). This means if self esteem can be increase their speaking skill.

Another question in the questionnaire resulted 18 participants agree, 6 participant strongly agree, 6 participants neutral and 1 disagree about asses english speaking skills realistically and positively . For the ratio are 51.4% agree (18 participants), 17.1% strongly agree (6 participant) and 28% neutral (6 participants). Which mean their assesment that their self assesment allows them realistically gauge their spealing skills.

The next questionnaire shows that most participants have a positive feeling about being able to speak English fluently. Out of 35 responses, 40% (14 participants) agree and 37.1% (13 participants) strongly agree, while 22.9% (8 participants) feel neutral, and none of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. This indicates that the ability to speak English fluently increases participants' self-confidence and self-appreciation, meaning that most participants feel more

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confident and positive about themselves when they can speak English fluently.

Overall, the findings indicate that students' perceptions of their self-worth when speaking English are strongly influenced by positive speaking experiences, supportive classroom interactions, and personal achievements in learning English. The interview and questionnaire results showed that appreciation, praise, and encouragement from teachers and classmates help students feel valued, accepted, and more confident when participating in speaking activities. These findings are in line with Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory (1965), which states that self-esteem reflects individuals' overall evaluation of their self-worth and influences their behavior and social interactions. The findings also support Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Theory (1967), which emphasizes that feelings of significance and competence contribute to the development of positive self-esteem. Furthermore, the results are consistent with Sociometer Theory proposed by Leary and Baumeister (2000), which explains that self-esteem is closely related to social acceptance; therefore, positive feedback and support from teachers and peers can increase students' confidence and willingness to participate in English speaking activities.

In addition, successful experiences such as understanding English material quickly, answering questions confidently, and speaking fluently contribute to students' sense of competence and personal satisfaction. The findings also revealed that when students feel their English speaking ability matches their personal expectations. The questionnaire data further supported these findings, showing that most participants agreed that self-esteem positively affects their

focus, confidence, and self-assessment in speaking English. Therefore, positive self-worth plays an important role in helping students feel more confident, motivated, and comfortable in improving their English speaking skills and participating in speaking activities.

4.2 The influence of students' self-esteem on their participation in speaking activities

Based on the participants' answers during the interview, students' self-esteem has an important influence on their participation in speaking activities in the classroom. Students who have positive self-esteem tend to be more active, confident, and willing to participate when speaking English because they believe in their abilities and feel comfortable expressing their ideas in front of others. They are more motivated to answer questions, join discussions, and practice speaking even when they are not completely sure about their grammar or pronunciation. The interview results also show that positive responses, encouragement, and appreciation from teachers and classmates help students feel accepted and valued. Several participants explained that successfully speaking English in front of the class made them feel proud of themselves and encouraged them to continue improving their speaking skills. In contrast, students with lower self-esteem tend to feel afraid of making mistakes. They often focus more on their weaknesses and become less confident when asked to speak English in class. Therefore, self-esteem plays a significant role in influencing students' confidence, motivation, and level of participation in English speaking activities. One of the participants stated that:

P3 :” Speaking English can influence self-confidence. In my

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opinion, because English is an international language, if we can master it, we will feel more confident."

The participant explained that speaking English can increase self-confidence because English is considered an international language. The participant believes that being able to master and use English well makes someone feel more confident and proud of their abilities.

The participant explained that speaking English is closely related to students' self-confidence and participation in speaking activities because English is considered an international language that is important to master. This confidence can encourage students to participate more actively in classroom speaking activities, such as answering questions, expressing opinions, participating in discussions, and communicating with classmates or teachers in English. The participant also indicated that mastering English gives students a sense of achievement and pride, which positively affects their self-esteem. When students feel confident about their English skills, they become more willing to speak in front of others and are less afraid of making mistakes or receiving negative judgments. In addition, higher self-esteem helps students feel more comfortable and motivated to engage in learning activities that require speaking English. Therefore, the participant's response shows that positive self-esteem can strongly influence students' willingness and confidence to participate actively in English speaking activities. The participant mentioned that:

P5: "because I feel challenged to speak English well and clearly so that everyone understands what I mean."

Participant 5's explained that the challenge of speaking English well and clearly motivates them to improve their speaking ability. The participant feels encouraged to participate in speaking activities because they want others to understand their ideas and communicate clearly.

The interview findings indicate that positive self-esteem contributes to students' active participation in English-speaking activities. Participants perceived speaking English as an opportunity for self-improvement rather than as a source of fear or embarrassment. They were motivated to communicate more effectively by improving their pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. This suggests that students with higher self-esteem tend to approach speaking challenges positively, allowing them to participate more confidently and actively in classroom interaction. These findings are consistent with Becerra-Posada et al. (2022), who reported that increased self-confidence encourages learners to communicate more actively and improves their communicative competence.

The questionnaire results further support these findings. Most students agreed that successfully completing speaking tasks enhanced their confidence, while encouragement from classmates helped reduce anxiety during speaking activities. Nevertheless, many participants selected neutral responses regarding their confidence in expressing ideas, speaking performance, and feelings of acceptance in class, indicating that self-esteem remains unstable for many learners. Similar findings were reported by Ardiyansah and Auliya (2023), who found that speaking anxiety continues to limit students' classroom participation despite adequate language instruction.

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Likewise, Jaya et al. (2025) demonstrated that increased self-confidence significantly improves students' engagement and performance in language learning activities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that self-esteem plays an important role in shaping students' willingness to participate in English-speaking activities. Students with stronger self-esteem tend to be more motivated to express ideas, respond to classroom discussions, and view speaking difficulties as opportunities for improvement. In addition, positive support from teachers and classmates strengthens students' confidence and creates a more comfortable learning environment. These findings are supported by Abdelrahman (2020), who emphasizes that positive psychological factors, including confidence and motivation, contribute substantially to students' academic achievement and learning engagement. They also align with Becerra-Posada et al. (2022), whose study highlights that supportive classroom practices enhance learners' self-confidence and communicative competence. Therefore, creating a supportive and encouraging classroom atmosphere is essential for fostering students' self-esteem and increasing their participation in English-speaking activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study point to the conclusion that self-esteem occupies a central place in shaping how students experience and engage in English speaking activities. A positive sense of self-worth tends to emerge when students receive appreciation, praise, and encouragement from both teachers and peers, as well as when they manage to comprehend and apply English

successfully in spoken interaction. Such experiences, in turn, leave students feeling more confident, more capable, and more motivated to further develop their speaking skills. The study further reveals that students with a higher level of self-esteem are inclined to take a more active part in classroom speaking activities responding to questions, joining in discussions, and communicating in English. These students display a greater readiness to take risks and tend to regard speaking-related challenges as opportunities for learning and growth. By contrast, students with lower self-esteem are more prone to feelings of anxiety, a fear of committing errors, and a reluctance to take part in speaking activities. This diminished sense of self-esteem, however, can rarely be attributed to a single cause; rather, it tends to be compounded by other factors such as heightened anxiety, weak motivation, and insufficient confidence. Even so, for students who remain unsure of their speaking abilities, encouraging feedback, rewarding speaking experiences, and support from classmates can gradually strengthen their confidence and their willingness to communicate. Taken as a whole, these findings indicate that self-esteem constitutes a significant determinant of students' confidence, motivation, and participation in English speaking activities. Accordingly, cultivating a classroom environment that is both supportive and encouraging is essential in helping students build positive self-esteem and grow into more active. Future research could extend this inquiry to other educational settings or explore additional factors that shape students' participation and performance in speaking English.

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