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Speaking Anxiety and Practice Opportunities in Relation to Students' Self-Confidence in Public Speaking

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ABSTRACT: This study explored students' experiences of speaking anxiety and practice opportunities in relation to their self-confidence in public speaking. The research employed a qualitative design involving ten students from the English Study Program of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings revealed that speaking anxiety negatively influenced students' self-confidence through fear of making mistakes, nervousness, fear of negative judgment, and anxiety experienced before, during, and after speaking activities. On the other hand, practice opportunities positively influenced students' confidence through frequent speaking practice, classroom speaking activities, lecturer support, and peer feedback. The study concludes that speaking anxiety tends to reduce students' confidence, whereas regular practice opportunities and supportive learning environments help students develop stronger self-confidence in public speaking. These findings provide useful implications for lecturers and educational institutions in creating effective public speaking learning environments.

Keywords: *Public Speaking, Speaking Anxiety, Practice Opportunities, Self-Confidence, Qualitative Study*

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is an important communication skill required in academic and professional settings. Students are frequently involved in presentations, seminars, classroom discussions, and other speaking activities that require confidence and effective communication skills. However, many students still experience difficulties when speaking in front of an audience due to anxiety and lack of confidence.

Public speaking can be defined as the ability to deliver ideas, opinions, and information orally in front of an audience in a clear, organized, and confident manner. This skill is reflected in activities such as presentations, seminars, discussions, debates, and the delivery of reports or research results. Johnson et al. (2020) note that developing public speaking skills in higher education requires deliberate exposure to speaking situations combined with structured

feedback. For diploma students in particular, public speaking is not merely an academic requirement but also an important form of preparation for the workplace, where practical and professional communication skills are needed in situations such as project presentations, client service, and team coordination (Al Fahmi et al., 2025).

Speaking anxiety often appears through fear of making mistakes, nervousness, and fear of negative evaluation from others. These conditions may reduce students' participation and speaking performance. According to Magfira (2022), public speaking anxiety commonly affects students physically and psychologically, resulting in poor communication performance. Pedroso et al. (2023) further explain that speaking anxiety involves both emotional and physiological reactions, such as an increased heart rate and difficulty concentrating, which can reduce the effectiveness of communication. If left unmanaged, such anxiety may accumulate across the stages of a speaking task; Hong et al. (2023) suggest that breaking preparation into smaller, more manageable steps can help reduce this psychological overload and support students in coping with anxiety more effectively.

Besides anxiety, practice opportunities are considered an important factor influencing students' confidence. Regular speaking practice helps students become familiar with public speaking situations and improve their communication skills. Burhanuddin (2021) argues that speaking practice contributes significantly to students' confidence and speaking ability, particularly when direct practice is accompanied by feedback. In addition, Rosyidah (2022) found that active participation in classroom speaking activities increases students' engagement and strengthens their communication skills over time, suggesting that providing opportunities to practice is as important as reducing anxiety itself in helping students become confident speakers. Specific techniques such as the use of visual aids during presentations have also been

shown to help students organize their material and reduce anxiety while speaking (Saputra, 2021; Fauzi et al., 2025).

Beyond anxiety and practice, self-confidence itself is a construct worth defining clearly, since it is the outcome this study is ultimately concerned with. Taylor (2013) describes self-confidence as a mental quality that develops through learning, experience, and continuous self-development rather than an inborn trait. Harris (2020) adds that confident communicators are typically characterized by calm body language, clear delivery, consistent eye contact, and controlled voice tone. In the context of public speaking, higher self-confidence enables students to organize their ideas clearly and respond to unexpected situations, whereas lower self-confidence is often accompanied by hesitation, avoidance, and reduced willingness to participate in speaking activities.

Several previous studies have examined these issues, although mostly in isolation from one another. Rizanti et al. (2024) explored speaking anxiety among EFL students using a qualitative approach and found that shyness and fear of making mistakes were major psychological barriers in learning to speak a foreign language. Burhanuddin (2021) examined the role of practice opportunities among English Department students at Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya and found that regular speaking practice helped students gain experience and gradually build confidence. Rosyidah (2022) focused on students' participation in classroom speaking activities and found that active participation improved engagement and communication skills, although the relationship between participation and self-confidence was not directly examined. More recently, Taylor and Lee (2023) examined speaking anxiety and practice opportunities together in second language learning contexts, Anisa et al. (2025) found a significant relationship between foreign language anxiety and speaking confidence among university students, and Wulandari and Hasyim (2025) confirmed that self-confidence remains

a central predictor of public speaking performance among postgraduate students. Taken together, these studies indicate that speaking anxiety, practice opportunities, and self-confidence have each been examined, yet studies that explore all three together through students' own qualitative experiences, particularly among diploma-level vocational students, remain limited.

Although previous studies have investigated speaking anxiety and practice opportunities separately, research examining both factors simultaneously remains limited, especially among diploma students. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' experiences of speaking anxiety and practice opportunities in relation to their self-confidence in public speaking. The research questions are: (1) How do students experience speaking anxiety in relation to their self-confidence in public speaking situations? and (2) How do students experience practice opportunities in relation to their self-confidence in public speaking situations?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' experiences of speaking anxiety and practice opportunities in relation to their self-confidence in public speaking. The study was conducted at the English Study Program of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya over a period of three months, from February to May 2026. The participants were ten students from the English Study Program at Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya who had experience in public speaking activities such as presentations, discussions, seminars, and public speaking events. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria including prior public speaking experience, self-reported speaking anxiety, and varying levels of self-confidence and speaking practice.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The interviews used open-ended, flexible questions following the guidelines proposed by Creswell and Poth (2023), allowing participants to describe their experiences, opinions, and feelings in depth. Interviews focused on students' experiences related to speaking anxiety, practice opportunities, and self-confidence. Classroom observations were conducted with the researcher acting as a non-participant observer to identify students' behavior during speaking activities and to triangulate the interview findings. Both the points of interview questions and observations were developed based on the theory of: (1) anxiety by Magfira (2022) and Pedroso et al., (2023); (2) practice opportunity by Burhanduddin (2021) and Rosyidah (2022); (3) and self-confidence by Haryanto (2020) and were piloted to two senior lecturers to make sure the clarity and the relevance of the study object.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarizing with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report; the coding procedure followed established qualitative coding practices (Saldaña, 2021). To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher relied on interview recordings and transcripts, interview and observation journals, and participant member-checking of the interview summaries, following the trustworthiness strategies recommended for qualitative research by Creswell (2014).

FINDINGS

The data obtained from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. Eight themes emerged from the analysis, representing students' experiences of speaking anxiety and practice opportunities in relation to their self-

confidence in public speaking. In accordance with the two research questions guiding this study, the themes are organized into two groups and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

Research Question	Themes
RQ1. Students' experience of speaking anxiety in relation to self-confidence	1. Fear of Making Mistakes Reduces Students' Self-Confidence 2. Nervousness during Public Speaking Activities 3. Fear of Negative Judgment from the Audience 4. Anxiety Before, During, and After Speaking
RQ2. Students' experience of practice opportunities in relation to self-confidence	1. Frequent Speaking Practice Improves Students' Confidence 2. Classroom Speaking Activities Increase Participation and Confidence 3. Lecturer Support Helps Students Feel More Confident 4. Peer Feedback Supports Confidence Development

Students' Experience of Speaking Anxiety in Relation to Self-Confidence

Theme 1: Fear of Making Mistakes Reduces Students' Self-Confidence

The findings revealed that fear of making mistakes was one of the major factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety and reduced self-confidence during public speaking activities. Most participants reported feeling anxious about making grammatical errors, mispronouncing English words, forgetting vocabulary, or suddenly losing their ideas while presenting in front of an audience. These concerns caused students to focus more on avoiding mistakes than on communicating their ideas effectively, making them hesitant to speak and less confident during presentations. Participant 1 stated:

> "I am most afraid of making grammar mistakes, pronouncing words incorrectly, and forgetting vocabulary when speaking English in front of others. I feel like they judge me, and will laugh at my mistakes."

Similarly, Participant 3 worried that grammar mistakes would lead to lower academic grades and negative judgments from both lecturers and classmates, while Participant 5 explained that fear of making mistakes often caused the participant's voice to shake and shifted attention away from delivering the intended message toward avoiding language errors. Participant 5 also mentioned:

> "I am most afraid of making grammar mistakes, mispronouncing words, and forgetting vocabulary when speaking English in front of others. Sometimes, the fear is so strong that my voice starts to shake. I always worry that people will focus more on my silly errors than on the actual message I am trying to share."

These interview findings indicate that students associated language mistakes with embarrassment and negative evaluation rather than considering mistakes as a natural part of the learning process.

The classroom observation supported the interview findings. During classroom presentations, Participants 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 frequently paused before continuing their explanations, repeatedly looked at their presentation notes, and hesitated when answering questions from lecturers or classmates. Overall, the findings suggest that fear of making mistakes significantly reduced students' self-confidence in public speaking and that creating a supportive classroom environment where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process is essential to help students develop greater confidence.

Theme 2: Nervousness during Public Speaking Activities

Another important finding of this study is that students commonly experienced nervousness during public speaking activities. All participants reported feeling nervous when they were required to speak in front of the class, although the level of nervousness varied among individuals. Nervousness appeared not only before presentations but also while students

were delivering their speeches, affecting both their physical and psychological states. Participant 7 stated:

> "When I speak in front of an audience, I feel nervous and my hands become very cold. Sometimes I also feel my body shaking a little. This nervous feeling makes it difficult for me to speak fluently, and I often lose focus during my presentation."

Other participants (P3, 9, 10) described similar physical symptoms, including a rapid heartbeat, cold sweats, and difficulty concentrating even after preparing thoroughly. P9 said that:

> "When speaking in front of an audience, I feel panicked, nervous, and often experience cold sweats. I become very aware that many people are looking at me, which makes me feel uncomfortable and pressured. Because of this, I sometimes forget parts of my presentation or struggle to express my ideas clearly, even when I understand the topic well."

The classroom observation further strengthened these findings: several students appeared tense while waiting for their turn to speak, repeatedly adjusted their notes, took deep breaths before beginning, and avoided eye contact with the audience. Overall, nervousness was a common experience that reduced students' ability to communicate effectively and weakened their self-confidence.

Theme 3: Fear of Negative Judgment from the Audience

Another theme that emerged from the findings was students' fear of receiving negative judgment from lecturers and classmates during public speaking activities. P1, 2, 7, 9 and 10 were not only worried about making language mistakes but also concerned about how other people would evaluate their performance, believing that mistakes could lead to criticism or negative impressions from the audience. Participant 9 stated:

> "Negative reactions from the audience affect my confidence because they make me afraid of being talked about badly. When I notice people whispering, laughing, or showing negative expressions, I begin to feel uncomfortable and anxious."

P10 explained that audience evaluation became one of the greatest sources of pressure when speaking English in front of others, and that they often compared their speaking performance with classmates who were more fluent in English.

> "Yes, I worry about how the audience judges me because I want to speak well and avoid embarrassment. When I am speaking in front of the class, I often think about what my classmates and lecturer might think about my English. If I make mistakes in grammar or pronunciation, I feel afraid that they will see me as less capable. This fear sometimes makes me lose confidence and become more nervous during presentations."

The classroom observation confirmed these findings: several students appeared hesitant before answering questions and avoided making eye contact with the audience. Overall, fear of negative judgment was an important factor contributing to speaking anxiety and reduced self-confidence, as students tended to evaluate themselves based on how they believed others perceived their performance rather than on their actual speaking ability.

Theme 4: Anxiety Before, During, and After Speaking

The findings revealed that students experienced speaking anxiety throughout the entire public speaking process, including before, during, and after delivering their presentations. Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10 reported that they had already begun worrying several hours or even days before their scheduled presentations. Participant 3 stated:

> "Before speaking, I've already overthought, 'What if I say something wrong?' Even before entering the classroom, I start imagining possible mistakes that I might make during the presentation."

They also reported experiencing anxiety while delivering their presentations, including difficulty concentrating, forgetting prepared information, and losing confidence after making minor mistakes. Interestingly, they also stated that anxiety often continued even after the presentation had ended, as they repeatedly reflected on perceived mistakes and worried that lecturers or classmates would remember them. P10 mentioned that:

> "I usually feel anxious before and when I am about to speak. This often causes me to forget what I want to say. Even when I have prepared my presentation well, I still feel worried about making mistakes in front of others. When the anxiety becomes stronger, my mind sometimes goes blank, and I struggle to remember the points that I have practiced before. This makes me less confident while speaking in front of the class."

Overall, the findings indicate that speaking anxiety is a continuous experience that influences students before, during, and after public speaking activities, and that students require continuous emotional support and repeated speaking experiences to gradually reduce anxiety and strengthen their self-confidence.

Students' Experience of Practice Opportunities in Relation to Self-Confidence

Theme 1: Frequent Speaking Practice Improves Students' Confidence

The findings demonstrated that regular speaking practice played an essential role in improving students' self-confidence during public speaking activities. All participants agreed that confidence did not develop instantly but gradually increased through continuous speaking practice. Participant 1 stated:

> "I practice speaking English and presentations about three to four times a week. I usually practice by speaking in front of a mirror, watching English videos, and practicing with friends. When I practice regularly, I feel more prepared and confident during presentations."

Other participants described additional strategies, such as recording themselves to evaluate pronunciation and fluency, practicing with friends to become accustomed to spontaneous communication, and imitating native speakers' pronunciation and intonation from English-language videos. As stated by P5:

> "Watching English videos, practicing in front of a mirror, and speaking with friends help me improve my confidence. Watching videos allows me to learn new vocabulary and observe how native speakers communicate. When I practice what I learn and use English with my friends, I feel more comfortable speaking. As a result, I become less afraid of making mistakes and more confident during presentations and classroom discussions."

The observation findings supported these interview results: students who appeared to have prepared and practiced beforehand generally spoke more fluently, maintained better eye contact, and demonstrated greater confidence. Overall, frequent speaking practice contributed significantly to the development of students' self-confidence by helping them become more familiar with public speaking situations and manage their anxiety more effectively.

Theme 2: Classroom Speaking Activities Increase Participation and Confidence

The findings revealed that classroom speaking activities provided valuable opportunities for students to improve both their speaking ability and self-confidence. Participants 1, 3, 5, 8, and 10 explained that classroom presentations, discussions, seminars, debates, role plays, and moderation activities allowed them to gain authentic speaking experience in academic settings. Participant 10 stated:

> "The more frequently I participated, the more confident I felt. These experiences helped me reduce my fear of speaking and encouraged me to become more active during classroom activities."

They participants admitted that they initially felt anxious when participating in these activities, but gradually became more confident as they became more frequently involved in classroom speaking tasks. P8 reported that:

> "I have participated in class presentations, group discussions, seminars, and served as a moderator in small events. These activities gave me valuable opportunities to practice speaking English in real situations. At first, I felt anxious whenever I had to speak in front of others, but repeated participation helped me become more comfortable and confident. I also learned how to interact with audiences and maintain my composure while speaking."

The classroom observations confirmed these findings: students who actively participated in classroom discussions and presentations generally demonstrated greater confidence, maintained better eye contact, and expressed their ideas more fluently than students who rarely engaged in speaking activities.

Theme 3: Lecturer Support Helps Students Feel More Confident

Another important finding of this study is the significant role of lecturer support in developing students' self-confidence. Participants 1, 3, 5, 9, and 10 consistently stated that supportive lecturers created positive classroom environments where students felt more comfortable expressing their ideas without excessive fear of making mistakes. Participant 3 stated:

> "My lecturers often encourage me not to focus too much on my mistakes and instead concentrate on delivering my ideas clearly. Because of their support, I feel more comfortable speaking in front of the class and become less anxious during presentations."

They explained that lecturers who provided encouragement before presentations helped reduce nervousness and increased motivation to perform well, and that constructive feedback delivered respectfully enabled students to recognize their weaknesses while maintaining confidence. Furthermore, Participant 10 (P10) explained that:

> "Suggestions and feedback about pronunciation, confidence, and speaking style help me improve little by little. When lecturers provide constructive feedback, I can identify my weaknesses and work on them without feeling discouraged. I appreciate it when the feedback is delivered in a positive way because it motivates me to keep practicing. Over time, this guidance has helped me feel more confident and comfortable when speaking English in public."

The observation findings were consistent with the interview data: students appeared more willing to participate when lecturers encouraged discussion and responded positively to their answers. Overall, lecturer support contributed significantly to students' confidence development by creating psychologically safe learning environments.

Theme 4: Peer Feedback Supports Confidence Development

The final theme revealed that peer feedback also contributed positively to students' self-confidence in public speaking. Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, and 10 explained that feedback from

classmates enabled them to identify both their strengths and areas requiring improvement, which motivated them to improve their future speaking performance while reducing anxiety. Participant 2 stated:

> "The feedback my friends give me is very helpful because it helps me understand my mistakes and improve in future presentations. This support gradually increases my confidence when speaking in public."

They appreciated classmates who provided supportive comments after presentations rather than criticizing mistakes, and explained that practicing together with classmates before presentations created opportunities to exchange ideas and provide mutual encouragement. Participant 8 (P8) also stated that:

> "Feedback from my peers helps me identify my weaknesses so I can improve my speaking and presentation skills. My lecturers and classmates often provide suggestions about my pronunciation, delivery, or the way I explain my ideas. Their feedback helps me recognize areas that need improvement and gives me direction for further practice. Because of this, I feel more prepared and confident when participating in future presentations and discussions."

The classroom observations supported these findings, as students frequently exchanged suggestions, corrected each other's pronunciation, and provided encouragement before presentations. Overall, peer feedback is an important source of emotional and academic support that helps students reduce speaking anxiety and gradually develop stronger self-confidence in public speaking situations.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The present study explored students' experiences of speaking anxiety and practice opportunities in relation to their self-confidence in public speaking. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety and practice opportunities are closely interconnected in shaping students' confidence during public speaking activities. While speaking anxiety negatively influenced

students' confidence, regular practice opportunities and supportive learning environments helped students gradually develop greater self-confidence.

The first research question examined how students experienced speaking anxiety in relation to their self-confidence. The findings revealed four major forms of speaking anxiety, namely fear of making mistakes, nervousness during public speaking, fear of negative judgment from the audience, and anxiety experienced before, during, and after speaking activities. These findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a multidimensional experience affecting students cognitively, emotionally, physically, and behaviourally.

Fear of making mistakes emerged as one of the strongest factors reducing students' confidence. The participants were mainly concerned about grammatical errors, incorrect pronunciation, forgetting vocabulary, and losing their ideas while speaking. Rather than concentrating on delivering their messages, many students focused excessively on avoiding mistakes. Consequently, they became hesitant, paused frequently, and relied heavily on presentation notes. These findings are consistent with Rizanti et al. (2024), who reported that fear of making mistakes is one of the primary psychological barriers experienced by EFL learners during speaking activities. Similarly, Magfira (2022) explains that students who constantly worry about language errors tend to experience lower confidence and become reluctant to communicate in public.

Another important finding was students' nervousness before and during public speaking. The participants experienced various physical symptoms, including rapid heartbeat, cold hands, body shaking, sweating, and difficulty concentrating. These findings support Pedroso et al. (2023), who argue that speaking anxiety affects both emotional and physiological conditions, thereby reducing communication effectiveness. The observation findings also

confirmed that nervousness was clearly reflected in students' classroom behavior through limited eye contact, tense body language, hesitation, and reduced speaking fluency.

The findings further showed that students were highly influenced by fear of negative judgment from lecturers and classmates. Participants believed that mistakes would result in criticism, lower academic evaluations, or negative impressions regarding their English proficiency. These findings support the theory proposed by Pedroso et al. (2023), which emphasizes that fear of social evaluation is one of the major components of speaking anxiety.

Furthermore, anxiety was found to occur throughout the entire public speaking process. Students reported worrying before presentations, experiencing nervousness while speaking, and continuing to reflect on their mistakes after completing their presentations. This finding indicates that speaking anxiety is not limited to the presentation itself but represents a continuous psychological process. These results suggest that task management strategies, such as breaking preparation into smaller and more manageable steps, may help reduce the psychological overload associated with this continuous anxiety (Hong et al., 2023). Therefore, emotional support and continuous speaking experience are necessary to help students manage anxiety more effectively.

The second research question explored how practice opportunities influenced students' self-confidence. The findings revealed that regular speaking practice, classroom speaking activities, lecturer support, and peer feedback significantly contributed to students' confidence development. Participants consistently explained that confidence developed gradually through repeated speaking experiences rather than appearing automatically.

Frequent speaking practice enabled students to improve pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking fluency, and organization of ideas while simultaneously reducing nervousness. These

findings support Burhanuddin (2021), who argues that repeated speaking practice helps students gain practical experience, improve communication skills, and strengthen confidence through continuous learning.

The findings also emphasize the importance of classroom speaking activities as authentic opportunities for confidence development. These findings are consistent with Rosyidah (2022), who explains that active participation in speaking activities promotes greater communication skills and student engagement.

Another significant finding concerns the role of lecturer support in developing students' confidence. Supportive classroom environments enabled students to perceive mistakes as natural learning experiences rather than personal failures, suggesting that lecturers play an essential role not only as instructors but also as facilitators who create psychologically safe learning environments that encourage active participation.

Finally, peer feedback was found to strengthen students' confidence through collaborative learning experiences. Supportive peer interactions reduced students' fear of negative evaluation because they realized that their classmates experienced similar challenges during public speaking activities. Overall, the findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety and practice opportunities are closely related to students' self-confidence in public speaking, and that these findings highlight the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that encourage continuous speaking practice and reduce students' fear of making mistakes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study explored how speaking anxiety and practice opportunities influence students' self-confidence in public speaking. The findings indicate that students' confidence is shaped by

both internal and external factors: speaking anxiety creates emotional challenges that may prevent students from expressing their ideas effectively, whereas meaningful practice opportunities encourage students to become more confident through continuous speaking experiences. The study also highlights that self-confidence is not developed instantly but gradually, through repeated practice, supportive classroom environments, and positive interactions with lecturers and classmates. Therefore, helping students build confidence requires not only improving their speaking ability but also providing learning experiences that reduce anxiety and encourage active participation in public speaking activities.

Based on these findings, lecturers are encouraged to provide more opportunities for students to participate in public speaking activities and to create a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas without fear of making mistakes. Students are also encouraged to practice speaking English regularly, both inside and outside the classroom, to improve their confidence and communication skills. Furthermore, future researchers are recommended to conduct similar studies with larger numbers of participants or in different educational settings to gain a broader understanding of the relationship between speaking anxiety, practice opportunities, and self-confidence.

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