

How Speaking Confidence Correlates with Gender and English Proficiency in EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the connection between EFL students' speaking confidence, gender, and English competency. A speaking test and an English speaking confidence questionnaire were completed by 68 students (27 men and 41 females). Speaking confidence ($p = 0.328$) and gender ($p = 0.379$) had non-significant p-values, and regression analysis revealed that they only explained 2.6% of the variance in English proficiency ($R^2 = 0.026$). Speaking confidence ($t = 0.079$, $p = 0.937$) and English proficiency ($t = -0.877$, $p = 0.384$) did not significantly differ between genders, according to t-tests. These results imply that other variables might have a greater impact on English proficiency. This study is important because it highlights the limited impact of gender and speaking confidence on EFL proficiency, prompting exploration of alternative factors and potentially more effective pedagogical approaches to enhance language acquisition.

Keywords: *English Speaking, Gender, proficiency*

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas confidence in speaking and gender are considered as influential factors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning for several reasons. High self-confidence can improve students' speaking ability, motivation, and engagement in language learning activities, leading to increased proficiency, especially in spoken English (Tahir & Karompot, 2020). Conversely, a lack of self-confidence can hinder active participation in the classroom (Nety & Nurhaeni, 2020). In addition, gender also plays an important role as it can affect one's speaking competence, with women tending to have better skills in language. The perspective known as "difference feminism" was particularly influential in the research of this period, leading to binary accounts of linguistic gender that highlighted differences between women's and men's speech (Hall et al, 2021). Gender differences can also affect speaking anxiety, because what we think is men with low levels of speaking anxiety but apparently according to Okyar (2023), male students tend to have higher levels of anxiety than female students. many students still find public speaking uncomfortable (Parcha, 2024). However, secondary schools should use a variety of accessible technological tools to help students become more proficient in English in order to effectively deal with academic and career barriers in today's age of information and globalization (Quispe et al., 2024).

The explanation is that confidence in speaking the target language is one of the key factors that influences communication efficacy, along with vocabulary and grammar mastery. Chulee et al. (2023) verified this, stating that the primary source of people's difficulties with English fluency is speaking skill issues. The primary objective of language acquisition, according to Kumar et al. (2022), is to be able to speak confidently and successfully in the target language. It is still up for debate how gender affects the connection

between English proficiency and self-confidence. This is one area where men and women frequently differ from one another (Erdiana et al., 2019). According to Agustrianti et al. (2016), gender has an impact on language acquisition as well. The relationship between speaking confidence and English ability is unclear, despite some research pointing to a connection between English speaking confidence and fluency in the language. Similarly, Yolanda (2019) discovered that factors including pupils' gender had no discernible impact on their level of English proficiency. On the other hand, some contend that speaking confidence and English proficiency are related (Dana & Aminatun 2022; Liu, 2020). greater English proficiency was linked to greater GPA in all categories, including gender, according to Rudd & Honkiss (2020).

This continuing discussion offers a chance for additional study to close the knowledge gap. Thus, this study intends to examine, while accounting for gender variations, the relationship between EFL students' English proficiency and their confidence in speaking the language. This study will look at how gender disparities impact the relationship between EFL students' English ability and their confidence level when speaking the language. This study also looks at other variables that might mitigate or change the association between EFL students' English ability, gender, and English confidence. Since Moazen et al. (2016) contend that teaching communication strategies is essential, it is hoped that this research will deepen our understanding of these relationships and provide insightful information that will help develop more effective English language learning curricula and strategies among EFL students. It is anticipated that this study will give scholars, policymakers, and educational practitioners fresh perspectives on how to raise the standard of English language instruction globally.

Literature Review

The elements influencing students' confidence and English proficiency in an EFL context have become the subject of more and more research. In terms of reading comprehension and general English ability, female students at EFL universities typically fared better than their male counterparts, according to important findings by Rianto (2021). The results of the study demonstrated pronounced gender disparities in reading tactics, with women using more successful metacognitive techniques and performing better in online reading and English language skills.

Self-confidence has also emerged as a critical factor affecting English fluency. Nadiah et al. (2019) found that students with high self-confidence tend to speak more quickly and fluently in public, while those with lower self-confidence struggle with speaking speed. This aligns with Curle et al. (2024) & Cadiz-Gabeza (2021), who identified a lack of experience and practice as major contributors to students' speaking confidence issues. Furthermore, Su (2021) reported that many students perceive their English proficiency and speaking confidence as low, experiencing significant anxiety when required to speak English. Interventions aimed at increasing speaking confidence have shown promise. This is particularly relevant in light of findings from Mahdi (2024), which suggest that while confidence positively influences English language abilities, no significant gender differences were observed in this regard. Similarly, Hoesny et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy is a predictor of speaking proficiency, although it does not correlate with gender differences in speaking ability. Moreover, the flipped classroom model has been shown to enhance students' confidence, particularly among female learners, as noted by Namaziandost & Çakmak (2020). This model encourages active participation and can mitigate feelings of anxiety, which Tan & Xie (2020) found to be prevalent among students, regardless of their achievement levels in English fluency.

This study aims to explore the relationship between English confidence and proficiency among EFL students, examining whether students with higher confidence levels tend to achieve better proficiency. Furthermore, it investigates whether female EFL students outperform their male counterparts in terms of both English-speaking confidence and overall English proficiency. By addressing these questions, this research seeks to provide insights

into the role of confidence and gender differences in language learning, contributing to a deeper understanding of factors influencing EFL students' success.

METHOD

This study used a correlational approach to determine the relationships between variables. The research was conducted at a high school in Palangka Raya, chosen for its representative population of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in grades 10 and 11. In this study, the researcher used 68 students as the sample, determined through calculations using GPower, which provided effect size calculators and graphical options. GPower supported both distribution-based and design-based input modes and included a calculator for various analyses (Faul et al., 2007). The sample consisted of 68 students (41 female and 27 male) ranging in age from 15 to 17 years old[3]. These students were in grades 10 and 11 at a high Islamic boarding school in Kalimantan. Most of them had started learning English in junior high school, focusing on basic vocabulary and grammar. The school teaches English through a national curriculum-based approach, integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, with an emphasis on mastering speaking skills for everyday use. Learning activities include group discussions, presentations, and speaking exercises to build confidence and increase vocabulary.

Data was collected using two primary instruments: 1. English Speaking Confidence Questionnaire: A printed questionnaire, adapted from Chulee et al. (2023) and provided in Indonesian for clarity, was used to measure students' self-reported confidence levels in speaking English. 2. Speaking Proficiency Assessment: Students' speaking proficiency was evaluated using a standardized rubric, adapted from Saeed et al. (2019). This assessment involved three tasks: writing an opinion based on a prompt, discussing hobbies in class, and participating in a group discussion. Raters with expertise in English language assessment evaluated student performance based on appropriateness, communicative skills, fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Each criterion was rated on a scale of 0-5, with appropriateness and communicative abilities receiving more weight. Final scores were classified into four performance bands: Novice (0-25), Intermediate (26-50), Advanced (51-75), and Superior (76-100). Data analysis was performed using multiple regression and T-tests in JASP (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program) (Goss-Sampson, 2019). The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between English speaking confidence, gender differences, and English speaking proficiency among EFL students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results on how EFL secondary school students' English competence, gender, and confidence in speaking the language relate to one other.

The linear regression analysis revealed that both the baseline model (M_0) and the model including predictors (Gender and English Speaking Confidence) (M_1) showed limited explanatory power for English proficiency. M_0 , which only included the intercept, had an R^2 of 0.000, indicating no variance explanation, and an RMSE of 15.473, reflecting high prediction error. M_1 , with Gender and English Speaking Confidence as predictors, explained only 2.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.026$), with an RMSE of 15.503, showing minimal improvement in prediction accuracy. The Durbin-Watson statistics for both models were close to 2, indicating no significant autocorrelation, with p-values of 0.201 for M_0 and 0.285 for M_1 . The ANOVA for M_1 showed an F-statistic of 0.871 and a p-value of 0.423, suggesting that the predictors did not significantly contribute to explaining the variation in English proficiency. Furthermore, the coefficients for both Gender ($p = 0.379$) and English Speaking Confidence ($p = 0.328$) were not significant, further confirming that neither of these variables had a meaningful effect on English proficiency. Thus, the results indicate that neither Gender nor English Speaking Confidence significantly impact English proficiency.

Table 1. Multiple Regression

Model	Variabel	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	T-value	P-value
M ₀	Intercept	48.956	1.876		26.091	< .001
M ₁	Intercept	36.898	9.329		3.955	< .001
	Gender	3.357	3.786	0.109	0.887	0.379
	confidence	0.068	0.069	0.121	0.986	0.328

The findings of the differences between male and female students in English speaking confidence and fluency are as follows.

The results from the Independent Samples T-Test show that there are no significant differences in English speaking confidence and English proficiency between the two gender groups in this study. For English speaking confidence, the t-test value is 0.079 with df = 66 and a p-value of 0.937. Since the p-value is much greater than 0.05, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in the English speaking confidence between the two gender groups. The mean scores for male students (100.667) and female students (100.132) are very similar, with relatively small standard deviations (22.038 for males and 31.413 for females). This suggests that gender does not have an impact on students' confidence in speaking English. For English proficiency, the t-test value is -0.877 with df = 66 and a p-value of 0.384. Again, since the p-value is greater than 0.05, there is no significant difference in English proficiency between the two gender groups. The mean scores for male students (47.100) and female students (50.421) are also very close, and the standard deviations are similar (15.687 for males and 15.351 for females). This indicates that gender does not significantly affect the students' proficiency in English.

Table 2 Independent Samples T-Test

Variabel	Group	N	Mean	Sd	t-value	p-value
Confidence	Male	27	100.667	22.038	0.079	0.937
	Female	41	100.132	31.413		
English proficiency	Male	27	47.100	15.687	-0.877	0.384
	Female	41	50.421	15.351		

Discussion

It is crucial to place greater emphasis on the development of students' primary speaking skills (Kooi Lian et al., 2021). This is the reason why the researcher conducted this study. The results of the regression analysis show that both the baseline model (M₀) and the model with predictors (Gender and English Speaking Confidence) (M₁) have very limited explanatory power for English proficiency. Model M₀ explains 0% of the variance, while model M₁ explains only 2.6% of the variance, indicating that these two factors have little effect on students' English proficiency. Moreover, the ANOVA results and p-values for both predictors (Gender and English Speaking Confidence) were not significant, suggesting that these factors did not make a meaningful contribution to the variation in students' English proficiency. These findings suggest that neither English speaking confidence nor gender significantly affect students' English proficiency.

These results are consistent with previous studies, which state that the influence of confidence on language ability is not always significant (Phisutthangkoon, 2024), although according to Chou (2024), knowledge of lexical and grammatical components should be mastered first to build communication confidence and enhance language fluency. While confidence plays a role in motivating students to speak, its effect on language proficiency is not always significant. Similarly, although some studies have shown gender differences in language ability, this study did not find any significant differences. This may be due to the small sample size or other contextual factors not yet explored. These findings highlight the importance of a more comprehensive approach to improving English proficiency,

considering other factors such as language exposure, learning strategies, and motivation. Therefore, English language teaching approaches should focus more on factors like adapting teaching methods and creating a supportive learning environment, rather than focusing on gender differences, as suggested by Syamsudin et al. (2024), who noted that effective learning strategies can enhance students' self-confidence in speaking English. Meanwhile, although confidence is important for reducing anxiety when speaking, other factors in language learning also need to be considered. Further research is needed to explore other factors that may have a more significant impact on improving English proficiency.

In this era, the development of English language skills is highly needed (Pei & Pamintuan, 2024). It is crucial to place greater emphasis on the development of students' primary speaking skills (Kooi Lian et al., 2021), which is why the researcher conducted this study. The results of the regression analysis show that both the baseline model (M_0) and the model with predictors (Gender and Speaking Confidence) (M_1) have very limited explanatory power on English proficiency. Model M_0 explains 0% of the variance, while model M_1 explains only 2.6%, indicating that these two factors do not significantly influence students' English proficiency. Furthermore, the ANOVA test results and p-values for both predictors (Gender and Speaking Confidence) were also not significant, indicating that these factors did not contribute meaningfully to the variation in students' English proficiency. These findings suggest that both speaking confidence and gender do not have a significant impact on students' English proficiency.

This result is consistent with previous research that stated the impact on language proficiency is not always significant (Phisutthangkoon, 2024; Yolanda, 2019). Although speaking confidence plays a role in motivating students to speak, its effect on language proficiency is not always significant. Similarly, while some studies have shown gender differences in language proficiency, such as the findings by Arrighi and Hausmann (2022), who found that in mental rotation tasks, boys were more confident ($g = 0.30$) and more accurate ($g = 0.52$) than girls, despite having similar cognitive abilities, and Rivers et al. (2021), who showed that women tended to experience higher spatial anxiety and had 7% lower self-confidence. Also, Tasneem and Panwar (2019) found that male undergraduate students had a mean academic self-confidence score of 49.91 (S.D. = 10.58), while female participants had a slightly higher mean of 50.69 (S.D. = 11.19). In emotion recognition from voice, Sinvani et al. (2024) reported that although there were no significant differences in accuracy based on the listener's gender, women as encoders were more accurate in expressing emotions through their voices than men. Another study by Dailey and Bergelson (2023) showed that while there was no significant difference in the number of words used between boys and girls, girls tended to produce more unique words as they grew older, with the effect becoming more pronounced over time (Cohen's $d = 0.67$). However, this study did not find a significant gender difference. This may be due to the small sample size or other contextual factors that have not been further examined.

These findings highlight the importance of a more comprehensive approach to improving English proficiency, considering other factors such as language exposure, learning strategies, and motivation. Therefore, English language learning approaches should focus more on other factors, such as adapting teaching methods and creating a supportive learning environment, rather than focusing solely on gender differences, as found in previous studies by Syamsudin et al. (2024), which states that effective learning strategies can enhance students' self-confidence in speaking English. This is also in line with the findings of Un-Udom et al. (2024), who reported that the development of teaching materials significantly improved the participants' English proficiency. While speaking confidence is important for reducing anxiety when speaking, other factors in language learning also need attention. Further research is needed to explore other factors that may have a greater influence on improving English proficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

Speaking confidence and gender only explained 2.6% of the variation in English competence, according to this study, which examined the link between these factors and English proficiency among EFL students. According to the t-test results, speaking confidence ($p = 0.937$) and proficiency ($p = 0.384$) did not significantly differ between male and female students, suggesting that gender has no bearing on these variables. Speaking with confidence decreased anxiety, but it had no discernible impact on overall competency. This study suggests that factors such as , motivation, learning techniques, and language exposure are more important in the process of learning English. It is necessary to adopt a more thorough teaching strategy that emphasizes technique customization and the development of a positive learning atmosphere. Additional investigation is required to more thoroughly examine additional elements that may impact language learning.

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