



LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most challenging language skills to acquire, and learners' self-confidence is considered one of the most influential factors shaping how well they speak a foreign language. This study examined the relationship between Junior High School learners' confidence levels and their English-speaking skills. Participants were 187 Grade 7 learners at the Malolos Marine Fishery School and Laboratory in the City of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines. Confidence was measured using Griffie's (1997) Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire, which assesses three components — ability, assurance, and willingness to engage — and English-speaking skills were measured using learners' teacher-recorded recitation grades. Using Pearson's correlation, the study found that learners reported an overall Fairly Confident level of speaking confidence (grand $M = 3.68$), with willingness to engage rated highest ($M = 3.78$) and assurance rated lowest ($M = 3.60$) among the three components. Recitation performance was predominantly in the Satisfactory-to-Outstanding range. Level of confidence was significantly, positively, and strongly correlated with English speaking skills overall ($r = .750$, $p < .001$), as were each of its three components individually: ability ($r = .645$, $p < .001$), assurance ($r = .732$, $p < .001$), and willing engagement ($r = .661$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that confidence-building strategies, particularly those that strengthen learners' sense of assurance, may meaningfully support the development of English-speaking skills among Junior High School learners.

Keywords: *Self-confidence; self-efficacy; foreign language learning; ability; assurance; willing engagement; English speaking skills*



Introduction

English has become a global lingua franca, used as an official or working language across education, business, and international communication in many countries, including the Philippines (Crystal, 1997; Choi & Lee, 2008). Within English language learning, speaking is often considered the most challenging skill for learners to develop: unlike reading and writing, it requires real-time production and exposes learners immediately to the possibility of error in front of others. Learners frequently report difficulty expressing their thoughts effectively in spoken English, and among the personality factors shaping this difficulty, self-confidence is considered one of the most influential (Gurler, 2015).

Limited classroom exposure compounds this difficulty: learners typically have restricted opportunities to use English in class and little encouragement to practice it outside of class, so unfamiliarity with the language persists even where it is formally taught (Nakhalah, 2016). Teaching methods and curricula shape learners' confidence as well — gaps in vocabulary can stall a conversation before it starts, and learners who do not see a clear purpose for learning English as a second language often lack the motivation to engage with speaking tasks (Nakhalah, 2016). Because the central goal of teaching speaking is communicative competence, teachers play a critical role in developing learners' capacity to interact effectively in the target language, including through explicit support for vocabulary growth and structured interaction (Richards, Platt, & Weber, as cited in Nunan, 1999).

Learners' self-confidence in speaking is also shaped by the people around them. As they communicate more frequently, learners gain confidence and improve their interpersonal communication skills, which helps them overcome anxiety about speaking English (Yashima, 2004). Consistent with Maslow's account of self-actualization (as cited in Zhu & Zhou, 2012), the support of parents, relatives, teachers, and friends plays an important role in helping learners build the self-assurance needed to pursue and achieve their goals — support that carries benefits well beyond the classroom, including in learners' future interactions with new people and unfamiliar situations.

Statement of the Problem

This study addressed the general question: How may Grade 7 students' confidence levels affect their English-speaking skills? Specifically, it asked: (1) How may the profile of the respondents be described in terms of age and sex? (2) How may the level of confidence of Grade 7 students be described in terms of ability, assurance, and willing engagement? (3) How may the level of speaking skills of Grade 7 students be described in terms of recitation performance? (4) Does the level of confidence have a significant relationship with the English-speaking skills of Grade 7 students?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the level of confidence and the English-speaking skill of Junior High School learners.

Related Literature

Self-confidence is widely regarded as an effective motivator and regulator of behavior (Bandura, 1986), and research across several countries has examined its role in second-language speaking. Iwamoto (2015), studying Japanese EFL learners, found that learners with higher self-confidence rated their own grammar ability more favorably than less confident learners, and that fluent speakers tended to rate their own fluency higher — suggesting foreign-language confidence itself functions as a predictor of self-assessed proficiency, even though self-assessment alone may not be a fully reliable measure of actual ability. In Taiwan, Chao (2003) found that learners with high foreign-language anxiety showed poorer emotional-intelligence regulation, while those with lower anxiety used their emotional skills more effectively — pointing to a link between anxiety management, confidence, and second-language performance. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) found that



learners' willingness to communicate was determined in part by their self-assurance, and Park and Lee (2005), studying Korean learners, similarly found that anxiety was negatively related to oral performance while confidence was positively related to it — a pattern also reported by Tanveer (2007).

Martinez and Villa (2016) identified three components useful for measuring learners' confidence: ability, assurance, and willing engagement — the same framework adopted in the present study — and emphasized that teachers can help lower learners' anxiety and encourage participation by creating supportive classroom conditions and providing constructive feedback. Consistent with this, Hashemi (2011) found that positive speaking experiences increase learners' self-assurance and willingness to participate, while Doqaruni (2015) observed that many learners want to improve their speaking skills but hesitate to express themselves for fear of being judged by peers. Sato (2003) and Ballard (as cited in Jin, 2007) similarly found that learners often avoid speaking English due to fear of making mistakes and vocabulary gaps. Burns and Joyce (as cited in Nunan, 1999), Schwartz (2005), and Thornbury (2005) each identify psychological factors — anxiety, shyness, low confidence, low motivation, and fear of mistakes — as the most common barriers to learner speech, underscoring the importance of teachers actively creating low-pressure opportunities for learners to practice speaking English.

Related Studies

Several studies have examined confidence and speaking performance directly. Riasati (2018) found that Iranian EFL learners' willingness to speak (WTS) was negatively related to language-learning anxiety and positively related to motivation and self-perceived speaking ability, and that more willing learners scored higher on a speaking test. Gurler (2015), studying 77 Turkish preparatory-level learners, found a significant correlation between self-confidence and speaking achievement ($p < .01$), with achievement differing significantly by department but not gender, and confidence differing significantly by gender but not department. Khairuddin (2017), in a study of 380 Malaysian law students, found above-average overall self-confidence, with confidence differing significantly by prior English proficiency and first language. Park and Lee (2004), studying 132 Korean college students, found that communication, criticism, and examination anxiety were central components of anxiety, while situational, communication, language-potential, and language-ability confidence were components of self-confidence, with higher anxiety predicting lower oral performance and higher confidence predicting stronger performance. A study examining self-esteem and speaking achievement using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Ryden, 1978) found a significant positive correlation between the two ($r = .635$).

Together, this literature supports self-confidence as a multidimensional construct — encompassing ability, assurance, and willingness to engage — that consistently relates to speaking performance across different learner populations, ages, and language-learning contexts, though the specific components most strongly related to performance vary across studies. This study examined the relationship among Filipino Junior High School learners, specifically, a population not directly represented in the studies reviewed above.



Methods

Research Design

This study used a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between Grade 7 learners' confidence levels and their English-speaking skills, without manipulating either variable.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were 187 Grade 7 learners at Malolos Marine Fishery School and Laboratory in the City of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines, aged 11 to 15 years, drawn from 8 Grade 7 sections. Convenience sampling was used, selecting learners who were conveniently accessible to participate in the study.

Instruments

Confidence was measured using Griffie's (1997) Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire, a 12-item, 5-point scale (1 = Not confident at all to 5 = Completely confident) assessing three components: ability (command of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), assurance (a feeling of security and comfort in speaking English), and willing engagement (readiness to speak English with native speakers). English speaking skills were measured using learners' recitation grades in English, as recorded by their teachers.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following a formal request and approval from school authorities, learners were informed of the study's objectives and significance before completing the questionnaire. Recitation grades were subsequently obtained from teachers' records.

Statistical Treatment

Frequency and percentage described the demographic profile and recitation-grade distribution. Weighted mean summarized responses to the Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire, interpreted using a 5-band scale (1.00–1.79 Not confident at all; 1.80–2.59 Slightly confident; 2.60–3.39 Somewhat confident; 3.40–4.19 Fairly confident; 4.20–5.00 Completely confident). Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between the level of confidence (overall and by component) and English-speaking skills at $\alpha = .05$.

Results

Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the age and sex distribution of the 187 respondents. Most respondents (62.57%) were 13 years old, and slightly more than half (54.55%) were female.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 187)

Variable	Category	f	%
Age	11	1	0.53
	12	46	24.59
	13	117	62.57
	14	16	8.55
	15	7	3.74
Sex	Male	85	45.45
	Female	102	54.55

Level of Confidence

Table 2 presents learners' overall confidence levels and by component (ability, assurance, and willingness to engage). Willing engagement was rated highest ($M = 3.78$) and assurance lowest ($M = 3.60$); all three components, and the overall grand mean ($M = 3.68$), fell within the Fairly Confident band.

Table 2. Level of Confidence, Overall and by Component

Component	Highest-Rated Item (M)	Lowest-Rated Item (M)	Grand M	Interpretation
Ability	Can be interviewed in English (4.01)	Can discuss with native speakers (3.47)	3.65	Fairly Confident
Assurance	Likes speaking English (3.78)	Speaking to a group / feeling relaxed (3.52)	3.60	Fairly Confident
Willing Engagement	Looks for chances to speak English (3.95)	Says something in English daily (3.56)	3.78	Fairly Confident
Overall (12 items)	—	—	3.68	Fairly Confident

Scale: 4.20–5.00 Completely Confident; 3.40–4.19 Fairly Confident; 2.60–3.39 Somewhat Confident; 1.80–2.59 Slightly Confident; 1.00–1.79 Not Confident at All.



English Speaking Skills (Recitation Performance)

Table 3 presents the distribution of learners' recitation grades. Nearly one-third of learners (32.62%) scored in the Satisfactory range (80–84), and the majority of learners scored Satisfactory or higher.

Table 3. Recitation Performance (English Speaking Skills), N = 187

Grade Range	Interpretation	f	%
90–100	Outstanding	42	22.46
85–89	Very Satisfactory	53	28.34
80–84	Satisfactory	61	32.62
75–79	Fairly Satisfactory	31	16.57

Relationship between Level of Confidence and English-Speaking Skills

Table 4 presents Pearson correlation results between English speaking skills and each component of confidence, and the overall level of confidence. All relationships were positive, strong, and statistically significant.

Table 4. Correlation between Level of Confidence and English-Speaking Skills

Confidence Component	r	p	N	Interpretation
Ability	.645	<.001	187	Significant, strong positive
Assurance	.732	<.001	187	Significant, strong positive
Willing Engagement	.661	<.001	187	Significant, strong positive
Overall Level of Confidence	.750	<.001	187	Significant, strong positive

Because the overall level of confidence was significantly related to English speaking skills ($r = .750$, $p < .001$), the null hypothesis was rejected. Assurance showed the strongest individual relationship with speaking skills ($r = .732$) among the three components, followed by willing engagement ($r = .661$) and ability ($r = .645$).



Discussion

Learners in this study reported a Fairly Confident overall level of speaking confidence, with willingness to engage and readiness to seek out opportunities to speak English — rated as their strongest component, and assurance — comfort, and security while speaking — rated as their weakest. This pattern suggests that many learners are motivated to seek out speaking opportunities but have not yet developed the underlying comfort needed to perform confidently once engaged, a distinction consistent with Martinez and Villa's (2016) observation that willingness to participate and actual comfort in speaking can develop at different rates.

Consistent with prior research linking confidence to speaking performance (Gurler, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Park & Lee, 2004, 2005), every component of confidence measured here was significantly, positively related to English speaking skills, as was confidence overall ($r = .750$). Notably, assurance showed the strongest individual relationship with recitation performance ($r = .732$) despite being the lowest-rated component — suggesting that even modest gains in learners' sense of security while speaking may be associated with meaningfully stronger classroom speaking performance. This is consistent with Hashemi's (2011) and Doqaruni's (2015) observations that positive speaking experiences and freedom from fear of judgment are central to building the kind of confidence most closely tied to performance, and with the broader literature identifying anxiety and low assurance as primary obstacles to learner speech (Sato, 2003; Schwartz, 2005; Thornbury, 2005).

These findings extend prior research — largely conducted with college-age or adult EFL learners in Turkey, Korea, Iran, and elsewhere — to a Filipino Junior High School population, and support Martinez and Villa's (2016) three-component confidence framework as applicable at this developmental stage. Recitation performance was already predominantly Satisfactory or higher across this sample, suggesting these learners' relatively strong speaking outcomes may reflect the fairly confident baseline documented here — raising the question of whether targeted assurance-building interventions could move performance further, from Satisfactory toward Very Satisfactory or Outstanding.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions

Most respondents were 13-year-old Grade 7 learners, with a slightly higher proportion of females than males. Learners reported a Fairly Confident overall level of speaking confidence, with willingness to engage as their strongest component and assurance as their weakest, indicating that many learners are motivated to seek out English-speaking opportunities but have not yet developed full comfort and security when speaking. English speaking skills, as measured by recitation grades, were predominantly Satisfactory to Outstanding. Level of confidence was significantly, strongly, and positively related to English speaking skills, both overall and across all three components (ability, assurance, and willing engagement), with assurance showing the strongest individual relationship — supporting the study's central premise that learners' self-confidence plays a meaningful role in their English-speaking performance.

Recommendations

1. Prioritize assurance-building strategies in speaking instruction — such as low-stakes speaking practice, constructive rather than corrective-only feedback, and structured peer support — given that assurance showed the strongest relationship with recitation performance despite being learners' weakest-rated component.
2. Sustain and build on learners' existing willingness to engage by continuing to create accessible, low-pressure opportunities for spontaneous English use both inside and outside the classroom.
3. Provide targeted support for the specific ability-related gap identified — discussing topics with native or fluent speakers — through structured conversation practice or exposure activities.
4. Consider replicating this study with a probability sampling method and additional grade levels, since convenience sampling limits how confidently these findings generalize to the broader Junior High School population.
5. Locate and incorporate the original Chapter V (Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations) if available, to compare against the reconstructed conclusions presented here.



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