Exploring Students' Self-Confidence in Speaking English Through Project-Based Learning

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Abstract

The ability to communicate in English is very important in the era of globalization. However, many students face difficulties communicating in the language due to a lack of confidence. Self-confidence greatly affects students' speaking abilities. Studies show that confident students are more active and speak more often. Students lack confidence because traditional education methods are too theory-centered. Project-Based Learning (PBL) enhances students' confidence, critical thinking, and speaking skills by involving them in group projects. This research was conducted on 19 students at MA Bustanul Ulum. Through observation and interviews, it was found that PBL increases students' confidence in speaking English. Although there are challenges, such as shyness and group conflicts, these can be overcome with the help of the teacher. This research proves that PBL is effective in improving students' speaking skills.

Keywords: *Self- confidence, Speaking English, Globalization, Project-Based Learning*

Introduction

The era of free markets, or globalization, demands that everyone build reliable resources, especially those related to communication. English is very important in this situation, both for mastering communication technology and for direct interaction. English is a global communication tool, so people should use it actively, both orally and in writing (Handayani, 2016). However, many students still struggle to communicate in English, often due to a lack of self-confidence.

Many individuals feel less confident speaking English due to concerns about social judgment or criticism. Self-confidence is defined as someone who has an attitude and feeling of certainty in their abilities and is not influenced by the actions they take—doing what they love freely, having a sense of responsibility for what they do, being warm and polite when

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interacting with others, being able to accept and appreciate others, having a desire to achieve, and being able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses (Yeni, 2024).

The study conducted by researchers at the University of Kandahar also supports the previous findings. Students who have more self-confidence tend to show better engagement, enjoy their education, experience less anxiety during exams, are more motivated to pursue goals, feel more comfortable with their peers and teachers, and feel more at ease sharing their thoughts and experiences in class (Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020).

Self-confidence is an important component in students' academic achievement, their motivation to acquire self-regulation skills, and effective learning in the future (Arkes & Garske, 1982). There is a significant correlation between self-confidence and students' speaking outcomes; students with high confidence show better results than students with low confidence (Tridinanti, 2018). Confidence is very important for good communication, especially when speaking in public. Speaking in public requires fluency and confidence, which are positive attitudes that enable someone to face challenges (Indrawati, 2018). Confidence helps people speak fluently and accurately in both their native language and target language, which is an important factor in today's communication, especially in speaking (Gürler, 2015).

According to Tunnisa (2021), students' confidence in speaking during general activity conversations in front of the class demonstrates excellent communication skills and can serve as a model for English-speaking practice. This is supported by Joni et al. (2023), who found that students are able to develop their speaking skills and use a high level of confidence in their speaking performances. The personality and self-confidence of a student, on the other hand, are the foundation for achieving good grades.

One of the factors that affects students' low self-confidence is the teaching methods applied. Many schools still use conventional teaching methods that focus more on mastering theory and memorization. In conventional learning methods, students do not have the opportunity to develop their critical thinking. Teachers provide information directly through methods such as lectures and then ask students to work on problems related to the material that has been discussed by the teacher. Thus, the center of learning seems to be on the teacher (Wati, 2024).

Project-based learning is a comprehensive teaching model that allows students to actively participate in individual or team projects to improve their English skills, especially speaking skills (Wulandari, 2021). The Project-Based Learning (PBL) model gives students the opportunity to choose the projects they will work on, formulate questions, select research topics, and determine the research patterns to be implemented (Muhammad & Nurwidyayanti, 2024).

According to Tabun, Maureen, Saroinsong, and Khotimah (2024), project-based learning fosters creativity, independence, responsibility, self-confidence, and the ability to think critically and analytically in children. Project-based learning has proven effective in providing meaningful learning experiences because it allows children to discuss creative ideas and produce innovative products.

Self-confidence is a person's belief in acting swiftly, decisively, and calmly when speaking in public. Having high self-esteem is important because it gives you the confidence that you can do anything and realize your potential (Mega & Sugiarto, 2020). According to Nety and Nurhaeni (2020), self-confidence is an attitude or feeling that someone believes in their own abilities so that they are not overly anxious about their actions, can feel free to do what they like and take responsibility for their actions, feel warm and polite towards others, and

have a desire to excel and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Self-confidence is the belief that someone is capable of living their own life, considering their own choices, and making their own decisions and taking action (Mardiah, 2022).

Moreover, the level of self-confidence can affect a student's speaking performance. Confident students can achieve higher speaking skills. Based on research by Pradnya et al. (2023), self-confidence is a person's belief in their capacity and ability to achieve certain goals. Ulfah and Syahrudin (2024) define self-confidence as a person's belief in their own abilities, while Maharani and Frendika (2023) argue that self-confidence is an important part of a good life, and it is unique because having it will make you bolder in expressing your opinions and more confident in what you can do (Indriawati, 2018).

Self-Confidence in Speaking

One of the most important factors for students learning or speaking in English is confidence. Confidence refers to the ability to trust and believe in oneself when performing tasks and choosing effective strategies. Confidence includes trust in grappling with increasingly challenging English environments and belief in making decisions or opinions. Students with high levels of confidence will communicate or collaborate in any situation, both inside and outside the classroom (Syafitri, Yundayani, & Kusumajati, 2019). According to Kanza (2015), confidence is an important component in improving presentation skills. This is because with confidence, speakers can convey their ideas or opinions clearly.

Project-Based Learning

According to Wulandari (2021), project-based learning is a comprehensive teaching model that allows students to actively participate in individual or team projects to improve their English skills, especially speaking skills. According to Muhammad and Nurwidyayanti (2024), the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model gives students the opportunity to choose the projects they will work on, formulate questions, select research topics, and determine the research patterns to be implemented.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered approach that allows students to acquire information through problem-solving activities during their education (Jumaat et al., 2017). A study by Habók and Nagy (2016) found that teachers thought PBL was good for low achievers. The study found that because the assessment of PBL takes into account social skills and teamwork, not just academic performance, low achievers want to participate in PBL activities because their efforts will be reflected in their grades too.

To help students acquire knowledge, project-based learning can be combined with contemporary writing teaching techniques as well as skills (Zheng, 2017). PBL integrates knowing and doing. Students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter (Markham, 2011).

According to Tai and May (2007), project-based learning (PBL) is a learning model structured around complex projects based on challenging questions or problems, which includes giving students the opportunity to participate in activities such as design, problem-solving, decision-making, or research; providing them the chance to work relatively independently for a longer period; and producing tangible products or presentations.

Methods

Research Design

In general, research is an investigative process in data collection that is conducted systematically. There are three types of methods that can be used in research, namely qualitative methods, quantitative methods, and mixed methods. In this study, the researcher used qualitative methods to understand students' perceptions. To explore this topic, this research uses library research, which is the concept of data collection through studying theories from various literature or references (Haryono, 2023), relevant to building a deeper understanding of the application of PBL and its impact on students' confidence in speaking English. Theory is used by qualitative researchers as a scalpel to dissect problems in certain social contexts. Theory is also often referred to as the foundation or basis for studying social phenomena (Suwendra, 2018, p. 140).

Qualitative research is based on naturalistic inquiry and uses natural settings as the primary source of data. Researchers use triangulation techniques to collect data and conduct qualitative data analysis. The results emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2019). Yusanto (2020) and Kusumastuti (2019) argue that qualitative research offers various approaches to deeply understand phenomena. Yusanto (2020) emphasizes the importance of the case study approach for in-depth analysis in real contexts, and the phenomenological approach for understanding individuals' subjective experiences. Kusumastuti (2019) adds that approaches such as ethnography, hermeneutics, grounded theory, and narrative research each provide distinct lenses to examine phenomena comprehensively.

Thus, qualitative research is important for understanding organizations and practices within a discipline and contributes uniquely to designing and implementing services that practitioners can trust (Coleman, 2022). While qualitative research typically collects and analyzes data qualitatively, it can also incorporate quantitative elements by assigning numerical values to parts of the data to identify general patterns or test certain predictions (Nassaji, 2020).

Qualitative research is concerned with the trustworthiness of results and conclusions. Researchers must ensure their interpretations accurately reflect participants' perspectives by engaging in practices like member checking (Nassaji, 2020). Although qualitative research involves the values and passions of researchers, they must also be aware of how these impact their inquiry. When researchers are transparent about their engagement, it increases trust in their work (Stahl et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers often aim for conceptual contributions that encompass broader contexts rather than context-specific substantive contributions, partly due to editorial preferences (Fischer et al., 2023).

Sample and Population

This research was conducted at MA Bustanul Ulum. The researchers selected this site because one of the researchers teaches there and the teaching methods implemented align with the research topic, which focuses on project-based learning. Place is a complex concept, often defined in relation to space (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014).

The population consisted of 19 students in the XI MIPA class, comprising 9 boys and 10 girls. The sample was chosen purposively to obtain rich, context-specific insights through observation and interviews. The aim was to understand students' perceptions of project-based learning and its influence on their confidence in speaking English. In research terminology, the population is the entire subject group, while the sample is a subset of the population (Ramdhan, 2021).

Data Collection Process

Preparation is the initial stage before conducting research. The researcher begins by writing a research proposal, guided by a supervisor. The approved proposal serves as the research roadmap. At this stage, the researcher also prepares an interview sheet.

In the next stage, the researcher enters the field to observe the learning process. Afterward, in-depth interviews are conducted with the same students to understand their views and perceptions. Observations and interviews are then compared for consistency.

This study used qualitative methods, particularly observation and interviews, for data collection. An interview is a question-and-answer process between the researcher and participants. It is a key technique in qualitative research for exploring complex phenomena. Semi-structured interviews allow for open-ended responses to predetermined questions (Jamshed, 2014). In-depth interviews are more than conversations; they involve the exchange of detailed narratives and stories (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Structured interviews involve fixed questions with limited response options (Fontana & Frey, 2005), while qualitative interviews can vary in style depending on the situation and respondent (Hofisi, Hofisi, & Mago, 2014). Interviews are valuable for gathering in-depth contextual descriptions (Byrne, 2001), but they are time-consuming and depend on interviewer skill. According to Abawi (2017), structured interviews require systematically arranged questions and allow for clarifications during the process. Interviews are conversations designed to explore participants' experiences (Welman & Kruger, 2001).

Observation complements interviews by providing direct insight into the object of study. It involves watching and recording behaviors in natural settings (Jamshed, 2014). In applied linguistics, this may include classrooms or other environments where language is used (Cowie, 2009). Observations are widely used in social sciences to study people, processes, and cultures (Kawulich, 2012). Julmi (2020) distinguishes between participant and non-participant observation, where the former involves engaging in activities and the latter is more detached. Both forms enhance understanding of the research context.

To analyze the data, interview and observation results are transcribed, categorized, and triangulated to identify themes and patterns.

Data Analysis Process

In qualitative research, data analysis typically involves four steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Data collection refers to gathering information using interviews, observations, and instruments like audio recorders and field notes. Data reduction is the process of simplifying, categorizing, and focusing on relevant data by removing extraneous information. This helps researchers concentrate on core themes that align with research objectives.

Data presentation involves organizing the information into a coherent format such as transcripts or narrative summaries to facilitate understanding. Finally, conclusion drawing involves interpreting the presented data and formulating temporary conclusions. These conclusions are verified through triangulation to ensure accuracy.

Results and Discussion

The students' perceptions about the application of project-based methods to improve self-confidence in English

This section presents themes related to students' perceptions of implementing project-based methods to enhance their confidence in using English.

Theme 1: Project Method to Boost Confidence in Speaking English

This theme highlights how students perceive project-based methods as beneficial in enhancing their English skills through internal aspects such as self-confidence, motivation, and the learning process. Several sub-themes emerged:

Boosting Self-Confidence

Students emphasized that the method increased their confidence to speak English, especially in the classroom. Participant 3 stated that project-based methods enhanced confidence through the contextual use of English in speaking and presenting. Participant 6 highlighted that real practice, collaboration, and a focus on goals over mistakes made learning more enjoyable and relevant. Participant 2 added that working on projects helped deepen understanding of the material, leading to greater confidence in explaining or applying it.

A Fun Learning Process

Students described the learning process as enjoyable due to teamwork, interactivity, and creative engagement. Participant 1 stated that the method was more exciting and not boring. Participant 3 noted that the process was fun because it involved creativity and collaboration with friends. Participant 4 echoed that the approach made learning enjoyable, and Participant 6 added that it offered a practical and meaningful experience. Participant 2 also emphasized how students felt rewarded by the concrete outcomes of their efforts, such as presentations or group achievements.

Motivation to Learn

Students felt motivated to continue learning English because the method involved real-world applications and was more engaging. Participant 6 noted that project-based tasks, collaboration, and tangible outcomes increased motivation. Participant 2 mentioned the sense of achievement from completing and presenting the project, while Participant 4 observed that the method felt more real-life oriented and challenging.

Theme 2: Used to Communicating in English When Using the Project Method

This theme explores how students became more comfortable and better prepared to communicate in English through the PBL method, particularly in terms of comfort, teamwork, enjoyment, and readiness.

Comfortable and Accustomed to Communicating in English

Students reported becoming more accustomed to speaking English during and after project implementation. Participant 6 explained that practical language use (e.g., speaking and writing) and collaboration helped improve vocabulary and grammar. Participant 5 said the project method created a more relaxed environment for speaking, and Participant 4 mentioned having many opportunities to speak and interact in English.

Teamwork Boosts Confidence in Speaking English

Students believed teamwork helped reduce anxiety and increase confidence in speaking. Participant 5 stated that group work helped minimize fear of mistakes. Participant 6 added that active participation and collaboration improved practical language skills over time. Participant 4 noted that peers were also encouraged to engage, which promoted collective growth.

Learning Becomes More Enjoyable

Students expressed that PBL made lessons more enjoyable due to interactive and collaborative elements. Participant 6 highlighted how creative and practical tasks made learning more engaging. Participant 1 said it prevented boredom and encouraged English practice with peers, while Participant 3 appreciated being directly involved in learning, rather than passively listening.

This Method Helps Students Feel More Prepared to Speak in English

After completing PBL tasks, students felt more prepared to speak because they had direct speaking practice. Participant 5 said that regular practice during project work helped them feel prepared. Participant 6 noted that these opportunities improved vocabulary, fluency, and confidence, while reducing nervousness.

The obstacles students face in the application of project-based methods to improve self-confidence in English

This section discusses the challenges students encountered during the implementation of the project-based method for improving confidence in using English.

Theme 1: Difficulty in Understanding Instructions

This theme reveals how students struggled with project instructions due to language barriers, workload, and their need for support.

Difficulty Due to Not Being Fluent in English

Some students found it hard to follow instructions because of limited English proficiency. Participant 4 stated that long instructions with complex vocabulary were challenging. Participant 3 mentioned frequent disagreements caused by poor English skills.

The Project Tasks Are Too Many

Students reported feeling overwhelmed when facing a high number of interrelated project tasks with tight deadlines. Participant 5 indicated that too many tasks caused stress. Participant 6 added that overlapping tasks and short timeframes were demanding.

Support During the Implementation of the Project-Based Method

Despite the challenges, students acknowledged receiving adequate support from teachers during project implementation. Participant 6 said teachers provided clear instructions, feedback, and were responsive to questions. Participant 3 confirmed that teachers were consistently available to provide help during projects.

The project-based learning (PBL) method increases students' confidence in grade XI. This method encourages students to collaborate actively in groups, where they can support each other, share ideas, and learn from one another. Students feel more confident during this process because they are directly involved in every stage of the project. The project-based method enhances self-confidence, as it requires the use of English in context, especially when speaking

or presenting the project (Participant 3). According to Participant 6, the project-based approach boosts learners' self-confidence by engaging them in authentic practice, fostering collaboration, and emphasizing goal-oriented tasks over error correction. This method makes language learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

The presentation of project results also helps students develop public speaking skills. Through this experience, they become more courageous in expressing opinions, giving explanations, and answering questions. Appreciation from teachers and peers further reinforces their confidence. Students feel proud of their achievements and are motivated to face bigger challenges in the future.

Moreover, students learn problem-solving, time management, and independent working skills throughout the project. They become more confident in completing difficult tasks due to a growing sense of responsibility. However, challenges remain, such as a lack of initial confidence or group conflicts. These obstacles can be addressed with appropriate guidance from teachers acting as facilitators, and through the creation of a supportive learning atmosphere. Post-project reflection is also important to help students recognize what they have achieved and what needs improvement. Overall, the PBL method provides an engaging learning experience that actively involves students and helps to build their confidence in grade XI.

Students feel more confident during the PBL process because they are directly engaged in every step of the project (Thomas, 2000). Participant 5 stated that this method significantly enhances material comprehension as it involves direct, hands-on practice. In addition, presenting project results helps students develop public speaking skills. This experience encourages them to express their opinions, explain their work, and respond to questions (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Nevertheless, certain barriers exist, such as group conflicts or students lacking confidence (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Participant 3 mentioned experiencing difficulties due to frequent disagreements, often stemming from limited English proficiency. With proper guidance from teachers as facilitators and a supportive learning environment, such problems can be overcome (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Participants generally did not report difficulties in understanding project instructions, as instructions were usually clear and the steps easy to follow (Participant 6). Reflection after project completion is also essential, enabling students to evaluate their achievements and identify areas for improvement.

Overall, PBL fosters students' confidence in grade XI by offering an enjoyable and interactive learning experience (Kuhlthau, 2007). Therefore, the PBL method is considered an effective approach to improving students' self-confidence (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Conclusion

The use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) has proven effective in enhancing the self-confidence of eleventh-grade students by actively engaging them in every stage of the project. Through this method, students are encouraged to collaborate, learn independently, and participate in meaningful tasks that develop their public speaking and communication skills. These experiences not only improve students' ability to use English in context but also foster a sense of achievement and motivation.

The findings of this study suggest several important implications for educational practice. First, integrating PBL into the school curriculum can serve as a valuable strategy to boost

students' confidence and engagement in learning. Second, to ensure successful implementation, teachers need to receive adequate training and professional development in facilitating PBL and creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Lastly, PBL can contribute significantly to students' personal development by helping them become more self-assured in facing both academic and real-life challenges, while also cultivating essential soft skills such as communication, responsibility, and collaboration—skills that are critical for their future success.

Despite its strengths, this study has certain limitations. The research focused solely on eleventh-grade students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or educational levels. Additionally, the implementation of PBL may present challenges, such as initial student hesitation, language barriers, and group conflicts. These issues highlight the importance of teacher facilitation and structured reflection to ensure the method achieves its intended outcomes.

Future research could focus on enhancing and adapting PBL models to better suit students' diverse learning needs, particularly in language learning contexts. It would also be beneficial to explore the broader impacts of PBL on other key competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Moreover, studies applying PBL across different grade levels and subject areas could offer insights into the scalability and flexibility of this method in various educational settings.

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