

**ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING CONFIDENCE THROUGH
CLASSROOM INTERACTION ACTIVITIES IN GRADE IX**

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ABSTRACT

Speaking confidence is a crucial affective factor that influences students' ability to communicate effectively in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. However, many junior high school students remain reluctant to speak due to anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities for meaningful classroom interaction. This study aims to investigate how classroom interaction activities enhance students' speaking confidence in a Grade IX EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 10 Kupang. A qualitative descriptive research approach was employed to explore students' speaking behaviors during classroom interaction activities. The participants of this study consisted of one English teacher and Grade IX students. Data were collected through observation sheets of speaking activities and field notes. The observation focused on three indicators of speaking confidence: activeness, participation, and responsiveness. Field notes were used to document teacher–student and student–student interactions, classroom atmosphere, and changes in students' speaking behavior throughout the learning process. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and interpretation, and triangulation was applied to enhance the credibility of the findings. The findings revealed that classroom interaction activities contributed positively to students' speaking confidence. Students demonstrated increased activeness in speaking voluntarily, higher participation in group and pair discussions, and greater responsiveness to questions and feedback. The interactive classroom environment reduced students' anxiety and encouraged them to express ideas more confidently in English. This study concludes that classroom interaction activities are effective in fostering speaking confidence among Grade IX EFL students and provides pedagogical implications for English teachers to design interactive and supportive speaking activities in junior high school classrooms.

Keywords: *Speaking Confidence, Classroom Interaction, EFL Students.*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging yet essential skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Ur, 1996; Bygate, 1987). For junior high school students, particularly those in Grade IX, the ability to speak English confidently is not only an academic requirement but also a crucial life skill that supports communication, self-expression, and social interaction (Luoma, 2004; Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). Despite years of formal English instruction, many EFL learners remain reluctant to speak in the classroom. This reluctance is often not caused by a lack of linguistic knowledge alone, but by low speaking confidence, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and limited opportunities for meaningful classroom interaction (Tsui, 1996; Rekim, 2024).

In many EFL contexts, classroom practices still tend to emphasize grammar mastery and written exercises, leaving limited space for oral interaction. As a result, students become passive language learners who rarely engage in spontaneous speaking activities (Harmer, 2007). Several studies have indicated that learners who are not actively involved in classroom interaction tend to show low oral proficiency and limited confidence in using English for communication (Boufiala & Melek, 2020; Rekim, 2024). This condition is frequently observed at the secondary school level, where students are expected to express ideas, opinions, and arguments more independently, yet often lack sufficient confidence to do so (Sari, 2024).

Classroom interaction plays a central role in addressing this issue. Interaction allows learners to negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and practice language in real communicative situations (Long, 1996; Ellis, 2003). Through interaction, students are not only exposed to language input but are also encouraged to produce language output, which is essential for developing speaking ability and confidence (Swain, 1985). Teacher–student interaction and student–student interaction provide opportunities for learners to practice speaking in a supportive environment, reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to communicate (Boufiala & Melek, 2020).

Previous research has emphasized the importance of classroom interaction in improving speaking skills. Studies have shown that interactive activities such as group discussions, role plays, cooperative learning tasks, and question–answer sessions help students become more engaged and confident in speaking (Ariza Beltrán, 2022; Rekim, 2024). Interaction encourages learners to take risks, express ideas freely, and learn from peers. Moreover, positive classroom interaction fosters a sense of belonging and emotional safety, which are key factors in building speaking confidence (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021).

In addition to interaction, speaking confidence has been identified as a critical affective factor influencing oral performance. Learners with low confidence often avoid speaking, even when they possess adequate vocabulary and grammatical knowledge (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Research on EFL classrooms indicates that lack of confidence is closely linked to fear of negative evaluation, limited speaking practice, and teacher-centered instructional approaches (Tsui, 1996; Sari, 2024). When students feel judged or corrected excessively, they tend to withdraw from speaking activities. Conversely, when teachers create a supportive interactive atmosphere, students are more likely to participate actively (Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021).

Several studies have explored strategies to enhance students' speaking confidence, including the use of cooperative learning, communicative tasks, and increased speaking opportunities (Ariza Beltrán, 2022; Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). However, many of these studies focus on higher education or general speaking performance rather than specifically examining speaking confidence in lower secondary school contexts. In particular, there is limited empirical research that investigates how structured classroom interaction activities

influence Grade IX students' speaking confidence in EFL classrooms (Rekim, 2024).

Furthermore, while existing studies highlight the benefits of interaction, they often rely heavily on questionnaires or test scores, with less attention given to direct classroom observation and qualitative evidence of student engagement (Sari, 2024). This creates a gap in the literature regarding how speaking confidence is manifested through observable classroom behaviors such as participation, responsiveness, and interaction patterns during speaking activities.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by focusing on Grade IX students and examining how classroom interaction activities contribute to the enhancement of students' speaking confidence. Rather than emphasizing test results or linguistic accuracy, this study prioritizes observable indicators of confidence, including students' activeness, participation, and responsiveness during speaking activities. By using observation sheets and field notes, this research aims to provide a more contextual and practical understanding of how interaction supports speaking confidence in real classroom settings.

The main objective of this study is to investigate how classroom interaction activities enhance students' speaking confidence in Grade IX EFL classrooms. Specifically, the study aims to (1) identify students' levels of activeness, participation, and responsiveness during speaking activities, and (2) explore how teacher–student and student–student interactions influence students' confidence to speak English in class. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to EFL pedagogy by offering practical insights for teachers on how to design interactive speaking activities that foster confidence among adolescent learners.

METHOD

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 10 Kupang, involving a Grade IX EFL classroom. The participants consisted of one English teacher and Grade IX students who participated in regular speaking lessons. The focus of the study was not on measuring students' speaking achievement through test scores, but on observing how classroom interaction activities influenced students' speaking confidence during the teaching and learning process.

Data were collected using two main instruments: an observation sheet of speaking activities and field notes. The speaking activity observation sheet was designed to systematically record students' speaking behaviors based on three indicators: activeness, participation, and responsiveness. Activeness referred to students' willingness to speak voluntarily without being prompted; participation referred to students' involvement in pair or group speaking activities; and responsiveness referred to students' reactions to teachers' questions, feedback, and peer interaction. These indicators were observed consistently during each speaking lesson.

In addition, field notes were used to document detailed classroom events that could not be captured through the observation sheet alone. The field notes focused on teacher–student interaction and student–student interaction, classroom atmosphere, students' emotional expressions, patterns of interaction, and noticeable changes in students' speaking behavior throughout the lessons. This qualitative data provided contextual insights into how interaction activities influenced students' speaking confidence in authentic classroom situations.

The research procedure involved observing several speaking lessons in which the teacher implemented classroom interaction activities such as group discussions, question–answer sessions, and cooperative speaking tasks. During each lesson, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer and recorded students' speaking behaviors using the observation sheet while simultaneously taking detailed field notes.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and interpretation. Observation data were categorized according to the indicators of speaking confidence, while field notes were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to classroom interaction and students' confidence. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observation sheets and field notes.

This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive examination of how classroom interaction activities contributed to enhancing students' speaking confidence in a Grade IX EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 10 Kupang, and it provided practical pedagogical implications for English language teaching at the junior high school level.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The findings of this study were obtained through classroom observations and field notes conducted during speaking lessons in a Grade IX EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 10 Kupang. The participants of this study consisted of 30 Grade IX students and one English teacher. The main focus of the observation was to examine how classroom interaction activities influenced students' speaking confidence, as reflected through three indicators: activeness, participation, and responsiveness. The research findings are presented based on direct observations carried out over several instructional meetings.

Finding 1: Improvement of Students' Activeness in Speaking Activities

The observation results revealed an improvement in students' activeness in speaking activities after the implementation of classroom interaction activities. During the initial observation, most students tended to be passive and only spoke when they were directly called on by the teacher. Many students appeared hesitant, spoke in low voices, and avoided eye contact when asked to express their ideas in English.

However, after the teacher implemented interaction-based activities such as group discussions, open question-and-answer sessions, and pair work, students began to show positive changes. Students' activeness gradually increased, as indicated by their willingness to ask questions, respond without being appointed, and express their ideas voluntarily. Although linguistic errors were still present, students continued to attempt to communicate their ideas.

This improvement in activeness suggests that an interactive classroom atmosphere provides students with a sense of security to practice speaking. Classroom interaction helped reduce students' fear of making mistakes and increased their confidence in using English orally.

Finding 2: Improvement of Students' Participation in Group Interaction

The next finding indicates that students' participation in speaking activities increased significantly when learning was conducted through group and pair interaction. During small-group discussions, almost all students were actively involved in the conversation. Students who were usually passive in whole-class discussions appeared more confident when speaking in smaller groups.

Students' participation was observed in various forms, such as sharing opinions, responding to peers' ideas, and collaborating to complete speaking tasks. The small-group environment created a more relaxed and less threatening learning atmosphere, allowing students to participate more comfortably.

Moreover, student-student interaction encouraged more natural use of English. Students supported one another when experiencing difficulties in expressing ideas, either through repetition, simple explanations, or non-verbal cues. This finding indicates that active participation in group interaction contributes positively to the enhancement of

students' speaking confidence.

Finding 3: Students' Responsiveness to Questions and Feedback

Another indicator of speaking confidence observed in this study was students' responsiveness to questions and feedback. The findings show that students became more responsive during classroom interaction activities. They not only answered the teacher's questions but also responded to their peers' opinions and provided follow-up responses during discussions.

Students' responsiveness was reflected in their ability to respond spontaneously, even though their language structures were relatively simple. Students began to use verbal expressions such as agreeing, disagreeing, asking for clarification, and giving brief responses to their peers' ideas.

Field notes also indicated a noticeable change in classroom atmosphere, which became more lively and communicative. Students appeared more relaxed, smiled more frequently, and showed greater willingness to speak without excessive fear. These positive responses indicate an increase in students' speaking confidence as well as a reduction in speaking anxiety.

Table 1. Observation Results of Students' Speaking Activities

| No | Indicator | Observation Description | Category |
|----|----------------|---|---------------|
| 1 | Activeness | Students voluntarily answered questions and shared ideas | High |
| 2 | Participation | Most students actively joined group and pair discussions | High |
| 3 | Responsiveness | Students responded actively to teachers' and peers' questions | Moderate–High |

Table 1 presents the observation results of students' speaking activities during classroom interaction. The table shows that most students demonstrated high levels of activeness and participation in speaking activities, while their responsiveness to teachers' and peers' questions was categorized as moderate to high. These results indicate that classroom interaction activities created a supportive environment that encouraged students to speak more confidently and actively engage in oral communication.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that classroom interaction activities play an important role in enhancing the speaking confidence of Grade IX students at SMP Negeri 10 Kupang. The improvement in students' activeness, participation, and responsiveness reflects positive changes in their attitudes and behaviors toward speaking activities.

These findings are consistent with the interaction theory proposed by Long (1996), which emphasizes that interaction allows learners to negotiate meaning and receive meaningful feedback. In this study, classroom interaction provided students with opportunities to use English in real communicative contexts, thereby increasing their willingness and confidence to speak.

The improvement in students' activeness supports the findings of Hapsari and Ena (2019), who reported that interaction-based learning can increase students' courage to speak English. The students in this study gradually shifted from passive behavior to more active participation, indicating a steady development of speaking confidence.

Furthermore, the increased participation observed in group activities aligns with the findings of Triastuti (2020) and Putri and Sari (2020), which suggest that cooperative learning creates a more comfortable learning environment and encourages students to become more actively involved. Small-group interaction helped reduce students' speaking anxiety and fostered greater confidence.

The improvement in students' responsiveness also supports the findings of Handayani et al. (2020), who emphasized that two-way interaction between teachers and students

enhances students' confidence in responding and expressing ideas. In this study, students actively interacted not only with the teacher but also with their peers, demonstrating the development of interpersonal communication skills.

In addition, the findings reinforce the study by Addinna et al. (2019), which highlighted the influence of affective factors such as emotional safety and social support on speaking confidence. The interactive and non-threatening classroom atmosphere observed in this study helped students feel more comfortable and confident when speaking English.

Unlike previous studies that relied heavily on questionnaires, this study contributes new insights by examining speaking confidence through directly observable classroom behaviors. Therefore, this research extends the understanding of how speaking confidence is manifested in everyday classroom practices at the junior high school level.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of classroom interaction activities in enhancing students' speaking confidence in a Grade IX EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 10 Kupang. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research focused on observable indicators of speaking confidence, namely students' activeness, participation, and responsiveness during speaking activities. The findings demonstrate that classroom interaction activities contribute significantly to the development of students' speaking confidence in English language learning.

The results indicate that interactive speaking activities encourage students to become more active and willing to speak voluntarily in the classroom. Students who were initially hesitant to speak gradually demonstrated greater confidence by initiating responses, asking questions, and sharing ideas during classroom discussions. This improvement suggests that interaction-based activities help reduce students' fear of making mistakes and create a supportive learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves.

In addition, the study revealed that students' participation increased notably through group and pair interaction activities. Learning in smaller groups allowed students to communicate more comfortably and reduced anxiety often associated with speaking in front of the whole class. This collaborative interaction not only fostered students' confidence but also promoted peer support, enabling learners to assist one another during speaking tasks. Such an environment helped students view speaking as a communicative process rather than a performance focused on linguistic accuracy alone.

Furthermore, students' responsiveness to teachers' and peers' questions improved throughout the implementation of classroom interaction activities. Students became more engaged in conversations, provided spontaneous responses, and actively reacted to feedback. This responsiveness indicates that students developed a greater sense of confidence and willingness to communicate in English. The interactive atmosphere encouraged meaningful exchanges and strengthened students' communicative competence.

Overall, the findings suggest that classroom interaction activities play a vital role in enhancing speaking confidence among junior high school EFL students. English teachers are encouraged to integrate interactive speaking activities into their instruction to create a positive, student-centered learning environment. Future studies may extend this research by incorporating quantitative measures, involving different educational contexts, or examining the long-term effects of classroom interaction on students' speaking development.

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