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Peer Support and Confidence in English Speaking Proficiency among EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of peer support systems on students' self-confidence and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking proficiency. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 150 English Education students from three universities in Palu, Indonesia. The questionnaire measured emotional support, feedback and correction, academic support, self-confidence, and self-perceived English-speaking skill. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and simple linear regression in Jamovi. The findings indicate that peer support has a significant positive effect on students' self-confidence ($R^2 = 0.217$, $p < .001$) and self-perceived English-speaking ability ($R^2 = 0.283$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, mediation analysis reveals that self-confidence partially mediates the relationship between peer support and speaking ability. Although the measurement model demonstrates marginal fit based on CFI and TLI values, the RMSEA value indicates an acceptable model fit. These results highlight the importance of supportive peer environments in fostering confidence and improving speaking proficiency in EFL contexts, particularly through informal peer interactions outside the classroom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking proficiency is a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly for students in English Education programs who are expected to communicate effectively and confidently in academic and professional settings [1]. EFL speaking proficiency involves not only linguistic accuracy and fluency, but also pronunciation, comprehension, and interactional skills that enable learners to convey meaning effectively in real communication [2]. However, many EFL learners experience

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difficulties in speaking English due to psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence [3]. Recent studies emphasize that psychological and affective factors, such as emotional regulation and motivation, significantly contribute to students' speaking performance in EFL contexts [4]. These challenges are often exacerbated by limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments outside the classroom, which restrict opportunities for meaningful oral practice and interaction [5].

Peer support has been recognized as an important factor in reducing speaking anxiety and increasing learners' confidence. Peer support refers to emotional, motivational, and academic assistance provided by individuals of similar status, which helps create a safe and supportive learning environment [6]. A supportive learning environment has been shown to play a crucial role in reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing learners' willingness to communicate in English [7]. Collaborative peer interactions, such as group discussions, enable learners to feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and gradually build confidence in speaking English [8]. Supportive peer interactions encourage learners to take risks in using English and to practice speaking without fear of negative evaluation [9].

From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction, where peers play a vital role in supporting learners' development within the Zone of Proximal Development [10]. From a socio-constructivist perspective, collaborative peer interaction serves as scaffolding that supports learners' development within their Zone of Proximal Development [11]. Similarly, Oxford's socio-affective strategies highlight the importance of emotional support, cooperation, and anxiety reduction in language learning [12]. In line with Oxford's socio-affective strategies, peer encouragement and emotional support help learners regulate anxiety and build confidence, creating a positive environment for EFL speaking practice [13]. These perspectives suggest that peer support can significantly influence learners' confidence and speaking performance.

Although previous studies have reported the positive effects of peer support on EFL learners' confidence and speaking ability (Romadlon [14]; Wahyuni and Costadinov [15]), most of them focus on formal classroom settings. Limited research has explored informal peer interactions outside the classroom, particularly among English Education students. Furthermore, previous studies tend to emphasize positive peer support while overlooking the potential negative effects of unsupportive peer environments. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of peer support systems on students' self-confidence and EFL speaking proficiency, and the mediating role of self-confidence in this relationship.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine the relationships between peer support systems, students' self-confidence, and EFL speaking proficiency.

Survey research allows researchers to collect numerical data to analyze relationships among variables without manipulation [16].

Population and Sample

The population and sample were English Education students from three universities who actively engaged in informal English-speaking interactions outside the classroom. A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants who met the research criteria.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items. The questionnaire measured peer support, self-confidence, and self-perceived EFL speaking proficiency. The instrument was developed based on Oxford's [12] socio-affective learning theory and on previous studies on peer support and speaking confidence [9].

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed online and offline. The collected data were analyzed using Jamovi software version 2.6 [17], which is built on the R statistical environment [18]. Descriptive statistics were used to describe participants' responses, while regression analysis examined the influence of peer support on self-confidence and speaking proficiency. Mediation analysis was conducted using the *lavaan* package to test whether self-confidence mediated the relationship between peer support and EFL speaking proficiency [19]. The structural relationships were visualized using the *semPlot* package [20].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This section presents the main findings of the study, based on questionnaire data analyzed using the Jamovi application. The analyses included descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), regression analysis, and mediation analysis.

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	Mean	SD
Peer Support	3.82	0.56
Self-Confidence	3.75	0.61
Speaking Ability	3.68	0.59

As presented in Table 1, Peer support obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.56$), followed by self-confidence ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.61$) and speaking ability ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.59$). These results suggest that most students experienced relatively positive

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peer interactions in informal English-speaking contexts, which were accompanied by a fairly strong sense of confidence and perceived speaking competence.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the construct validity of the research instruments.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Indicator	Value	Cut-off
Factor Loadings	> 0.40	≥ 0.40
CFI	0.866	≥ 0.90
TLI	0.849	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.089	≤ 0.08

To ensure the validity of the measurement model, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted as presented in Table 2. The results show that all factor loadings exceeded the minimum acceptable value of 0.40, indicating adequate convergent validity. Although the model fit indices for CFI (0.866) and TLI (0.849) did not fully meet the recommended cut-off values, they still demonstrated a marginal fit. Meanwhile, the RMSEA value of 0.089 indicated an acceptable model fit. Taken together, these findings suggest that the measurement model was sufficiently robust to proceed with further analysis.

Regression Analysis

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Peer Support on Self-Confidence

R	R ²	p-value
0.465	0.217	< .001

Regression analysis was then employed to examine the influence of peer support on students' self-confidence. The results reveal a significant positive relationship between peer support and self-confidence ($R = 0.465$, $R^2 = 0.217$, $p < .001$). This indicates that peer support accounts for 21.7% of the variance in students' self-confidence, highlighting the important role of supportive peer interactions in strengthening learners' confidence in using English.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Peer Support on Speaking Ability

R	R ²	p-value
0.532	0.283	< .001

In addition, peer support was found to have a significant positive effect on students' self-perceived English-speaking ability. The regression results show a moderate correlation ($R = 0.532$) with an explained variance of 28.3% ($R^2 = 0.283$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that students who experience higher levels of peer support tend to perceive their speaking ability more positively.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis Results

Effect	Estimate	p-value
Direct Effect	0.29	< .01
Indirect Effect	0.18	< .01
Total Effect	0.47	< .001

Furthermore, mediation analysis was conducted to examine the role of self-confidence in the relationship between peer support and speaking ability. The results demonstrate that the direct effect of peer support on speaking ability was significant (estimate = 0.29, $p < .01$). At the same time, the indirect effect through self-confidence was also significant (estimate = 0.18, $p < .01$). The total effect of peer support on speaking ability reached 0.47 ($p < .001$), indicating that self-confidence partially mediates this relationship. In other words, peer support enhances students' speaking ability both directly and indirectly by increasing their self-confidence.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that peer support has a significant positive effect on students' self-confidence in speaking English. This result supports previous research showing that encouragement, constructive feedback, and peer acceptance can reduce anxiety and increase learners' willingness to communicate in English [9]. When students feel emotionally supported by their peers, they are more likely to participate actively in speaking activities and to express their ideas without excessive fear of making mistakes. This finding is also consistent with earlier studies suggesting that both structured and informal peer-based learning environments foster students' confidence by creating a low-anxiety atmosphere that encourages active engagement [21], [22].

In addition, peer support was found to have a significant positive influence on EFL speaking proficiency. This result aligns with studies suggesting that collaborative peer interactions enhance speaking performance by providing meaningful practice opportunities [23].

The mediation analysis reveals that self-confidence significantly mediates the relationship between peer support and speaking proficiency. This finding indicates that peer support improves speaking ability indirectly by strengthening learners' confidence. Self-confidence plays a critical mediating role in language learning, as learners with higher confidence are more willing to take risks and engage in spoken interaction, even when making errors [24]. This result aligns with the findings of Wu and Kang [25], who reported that peer support indirectly enhances academic and language performance through increased self-confidence and positive self-concept. This result is also consistent with Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding through social interaction [10] and with Oxford's socio-affective strategies, which emphasize emotional support and anxiety reduction [12].

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that peer support significantly influences students' self-confidence and EFL speaking proficiency. Self-confidence serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between peer support and speaking ability, indicating that supportive peer

interactions enhance speaking skills both directly and indirectly through increased confidence. Therefore, fostering supportive peer environments is essential in reducing anxiety, strengthening self-confidence, and improving EFL speaking proficiency among English Education students.

English language educators are encouraged to promote collaborative learning and supportive peer interactions to enhance students' confidence and speaking performance. Future research may explore additional psychological variables that influence EFL speaking proficiency and examine peer support in different learning contexts.

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