

ENHANCING SELF-CONFIDENCE IN SPEAKING ENGLISH THROUGH GROUPWORK

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	15/12/2025	This paper investigated factors affecting students' self-confidence in speaking English and how group work enhanced it. The study employed action research and used three research instruments: a closed-ended questionnaire, observation, and student feedback. The questionnaire was administered to 50 students to identify factors influencing their self-confidence in speaking English as a foreign language. Based on the questionnaire's statistical data, the researcher subsequently designed group-work activities to develop students' self-confidence. Meanwhile, the researcher used cameras to record videos with the support of a co-worker. The findings revealed several factors that negatively affected students' self-confidence in English as a foreign language, including fear of making mistakes, teachers' negative feedback, lack of preparation, limited English competence, and issues related to group size. Furthermore, the study confirmed that group work can enhance students' English competence, which in turn plays a critical role in fostering their self-confidence. The study suggests that teachers and educators consider using more group-work activities to boost students' self-confidence in English speaking.
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NÂNG CAO SỰ TỰ TIN KHI NÓI TIẾNG ANH THÔNG QUA HOẠT ĐỘNG NHÓM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	15/12/2025	Bài báo này nghiên cứu các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến sự tự tin của sinh viên khi nói tiếng Anh và làm việc nhóm cải thiện sự tự tin như thế nào. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu hành động với ba công cụ thu thập dữ liệu: bảng hỏi, quan sát và phản hồi của sinh viên. Bảng hỏi dạng đóng được phát trực tiếp cho 50 sinh viên nhằm xác định các yếu tố tác động đến sự tự tin của họ trong kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ. Dựa trên dữ liệu thống kê từ bảng hỏi, nhà nghiên cứu sau đó thiết kế các hoạt động làm việc nhóm để phát triển sự tự tin của sinh viên. Đồng thời, nhà nghiên cứu sử dụng máy quay để ghi lại video, với sự hỗ trợ của một đồng nghiệp. Kết quả cho thấy một số yếu tố ảnh hưởng tiêu cực đến sự tự tin của người học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ, bao gồm: nỗi sợ mắc lỗi, phản hồi tiêu cực từ giáo viên, thiếu sự chuẩn bị, năng lực tiếng Anh hạn chế, và các vấn đề liên quan đến quy mô nhóm. Hơn nữa, nghiên cứu khẳng định rằng làm việc nhóm có thể nâng cao năng lực tiếng Anh của sinh viên, từ đó đóng vai trò then chốt trong việc bồi dưỡng sự tự tin của họ. Nghiên cứu đề xuất giáo viên và các nhà giáo dục nên cân nhắc sử dụng nhiều hoạt động làm việc nhóm hơn để tăng cường sự tự tin của sinh viên khi nói tiếng Anh.
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1. Introduction

English has become an increasingly prominent medium of communication, owing to its ongoing global diffusion and its integration across contemporary academic and professional disciplines. In Vietnam, proficiency in English is widely regarded as essential for study and employment in diverse sectors, including tourism, education, technology, business, and the sciences [1]. However, the expanding role of English in the context of globalization and industrialization has also created substantial challenges for many learners, particularly students striving to meet rising linguistic and professional expectations [2]. Therefore, the ability to communicate in oral form must be considered at the heart of employment opportunities and career development for graduates. The research findings concerning the current situation of English learning and teaching in Vietnam have revealed that, despite recent efforts to shift away from teacher-centered approaches toward student-centered approaches in order to equip students with more skills and interaction, lecture-based teaching remains the most common teaching method in Vietnamese education institutions [3]. Moreover, Nguyen [4] stated that student-centered learning has not yet become the focal point in the learning process, when students are learning in a passive manner, as a result of the focus on grammar translation in a Vietnamese teaching-learning context. Fortunately, educators are aware of the importance of improving student-centered English communication, which has led to their attendance at numerous conferences in recent years for the purpose of problem-solving. These conclusive discussions gathered from these educational settings provide ample opportunities to improve English skills [4]. As stated by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2009 (as cited in [3]), teachers are urged to search out efficient teaching approaches and procedures that are meaningful and practical in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Vietnam in an attempt to optimize learning and teaching efficiency as well as implement more student-centered approaches. In the flow of innovation and progress in teaching, teachers have realized that group work is also a tactic for helping students become learner-centered in the classroom [5]. Students can improve their communication skills by working in groups and collaborating to achieve greater achievements in English speaking. Furthermore, students are given the opportunity to deliberate and develop more highly-organized ideas before presenting them to the entire class [2]. In alignment with the emphasis on student-centered, cooperative learning has been affirmed one of these kinds to help students gain the practical learning, efficient communication in understanding knowledge as well as promote students' positive attitude to their learning [6]. Foreign language learners, according to Brown [7], students cannot speak the language or express themselves freely and eloquently unless they have some level of self-confidence. Speaking English by using the group work technique has a positive effect on the academic achievement of students in terms of developing self-confidence and cooperation among learners [8]. Group work also fosters a classroom environment that encourages student participation and activities while reducing anxiety and boosting self-confidence [7].

1.1. Self-confidence

According to Clément and Kruidenier [9], "self-confidence has two components: anxiety as an affective component and self-evaluation of proficiency as a cognitive component" (p. 24). It is understandable that anxiety and proficiency are the two core components to decide a level of self-confidence development. Likewise, Clement et al. [10, p. 422] suggested that the self-confidence could only be developed through low anxious affect and high self-perceptions of L2 competence.

Brown [11] said that foreign language learners could not speak the language or express themselves freely and fluently without some degree of self-confidence. Macintyre et al. [12] stated that the ability of communication was closely related to self-confidence which was proposed in the model of willingness to communicate in a foreign language (as cited in [11]). Self-confidence helps learners to generate speaking performance better and they believe in

themselves, which lead them forward to better communication. Clement et al. [10, p. 422] stressed the significance of self-confidence in attitude and effort expanded toward L2 learning. The attitude is also displayed in the manner of actively working with, supporting and learning from peers and teacher.

Self-confidence shapes learners' attitudes toward learning and increases their willingness to participate in classroom activities. Confident learners are more likely to ask questions, respond to peers and teachers, and seek clarification in order to deepen their understanding of lesson content. When they encounter academic difficulties, they also tend to communicate these challenges more openly and request support, which helps sustain engagement and progress.

1.2. Group work

Brown [11] defined "group work as one of two constructs of collaborative learning having a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language" (p. 177). Working in group, the individuals benefit from working and learning to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes [13].

Group work is closely associated to interactive language development. It plays a role as a scaffold for developing interactive language [11], enable students to discover new ideas and concepts with peers and teachers [14]. Additionally, small-group participation may also enhance output and correction opportunities when there is active student involvement [15]. Group work may promote learner autonomy. Group work provides students with greater freedom to have comments and feedback on their sharing without excessive teacher control [16], reduce learner's dependence on teachers when there is an increase of peer interaction [15], create effective interaction when they intentionally communicate [17]. Furthermore, Frey et al. [18, p. 3] shed a light on its motivational value in which face-to-face interaction can create excitement, curiosity about what they intend to know and share with their peers. Besides, group work may shape learner's attitude toward speaking. Group work is able to encourage positive views toward speaking [11], in which it is expected to equally contribute to promote learning and task completion.

Group work may create a good condition for students to be more encourage to talk, think, and share their thoughts and concepts with their peers and teachers.

1.3. Research questions

The present study aims to investigate the factors influencing EFL students' self-confidence in speaking English in classroom settings, as well as to examine how group work promotes their self-confidence. With the objectives stated above, the research questions were formulated as follow:

1. *What factors affect EFL student's self-confidence in speaking English?*
2. *How can group work enhance EFL students' self-confidence?*

2. Methods

2.1. Research site and participants

The PMP English center was selected as a research site for this current study. Established 4 years ago, it has expanded its scale dramatically in Ho Chi Minh city with four branches in Ho Chi Minh and one in Quang Ngai province, Vietnam. Each branch aimed at a different target of learners who are looking for their own appropriate English programs.

As the questionnaire was used, the main participants of the study were fifty learners who were at an intermediate level in the center. The researcher classified them into three groups of students proficiency in classroom: High proficiency (1), Intermediate (2) and Low proficiency (3). To enhance concision, the three groups were abbreviated as **H** (high proficiency), **I** (intermediate), and **L** (low proficiency). The grouping helped the researcher to distinguish and effectively observe how their language competence affected their self-confidence in speaking English.

Table 1 shows the information of the interviewees. A total of 12 participants were interviewed, comprising 2 students of high proficiency (H), 6 students at intermediate level (I), and 4 students of low proficiency (L).

Table 1. Interview participants

Student levels and abbreviation	Coded name	No. of interviewees
High proficiency- H	H1, H2	2
Intermediate - I	I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6	6
Low proficiency - L	L1, L2, L3, L4	4

Table 2 presents the interviewees' scores in the preceding course, which were used to determine their proficiency levels.

Table 2. Interviewees' score of the preceding course

Coded name	H1	H2	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	L1	L2	L3	L4
Speaking score	8.3	8.1	7.1	7.0	6.9	6.9	6.9	6.9	6.6	6.5	6.5	6.5
Written score	9	8.5	8	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7	7	7	7

2.2. Research instruments

2.2.1. Preliminary questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two sections comprising a total of 18 closed-ended items, designed to identify factors influencing students' self-confidence in speaking English (RQ1). Specifically, the instrument was adapted from the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scale developed by McCroskey and McCroskey [19] and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) proposed by Horwitz et al. [20]. A five-point Likert scale was employed: for the first nine items, response options ranged from *never* (1) to *always* (5), whereas for the remaining nine items, options ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

2.2.2. Student's feedback

The student feedback form comprised five questions designed to explore learners' affective responses and self-evaluations. Specifically, it examined the extent to which students found the activity engaging or boring, the level of anxiety or concern they experienced when working with friends in pairs or small groups, and their perceived ability to use English for speaking.

2.2.3. Classroom observation checklist

The instrument comprised three sections: student interaction, student engagement, and the classroom environment. The first section examined the extent to which group work facilitated interaction among learners. The second section described students' engagement in speaking activities with a partner, a group of peers, and the teacher. The final section explored how group work contributed to a supportive and comfortable classroom climate, which is considered beneficial for enhancing students' self-confidence in speaking English.

2.3. Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure began with a pilot session in class Inter 12 (12 students) on February 7th, 2024, followed by the administration of a preliminary questionnaire over four consecutive days (Feb 10th, 13th, 2024) to several intermediate classes (Inter 12, Inter 14, Inter 10, and Inter 11), with 12–13 students each and overseen by different teachers. After this initial phase, the main classroom data were collected through two instructional cycles in Inter 12: Cycle 1 included three lessons in April (Apr 10th, 17th, and 24th) using Jigsaw and Think–Pair–Share activities, and Cycle 2 concluded with a final lesson on May 2nd, 2024 using Think-pair-share and Interview activity.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. RQ 1. What factors affect EFL student's self-confidence in speaking English?

Table 3 (Q1, Q2) identified two primary factors influencing students' self-confidence in English: apprehension about making mistakes and concern about teachers' negative feedback. Overall, students reported experiencing anxiety about making mistakes more frequently than negative feedback from teachers. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported often feeling apprehensive about making mistakes, while 8% indicated that they always experienced such apprehension. Smaller proportions reported feeling this way sometimes (20%), seldom (16%), or never (8%). In comparison, responses to Q2 suggest a comparatively lower level of concern regarding teachers' negative feedback: the modal responses were *often* (28%) and *always* (28%), followed by *sometimes* (20%), *seldom* (16%), and *never* (8%). These findings indicate that apprehension about making mistakes and concern about teachers' negative feedback exert a relatively similar influence on students' self-confidence in English communication.

Table 3. Student's frequency on factors affecting student's self-confidence (%)

Q. items	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Q1: Apprehension of making mistakes	8	16	20	48	8
Q2: Teacher's negative feedback	8	16	20	28	28
Q3: I am worried when I have to speaking without any preparation	14	20	28	32	6
Q4: When I speak, I usually forget what I know	12	18	22	44	4

Table 3 also presents the results for Q3 and Q4. Q3 indicates that many students feel anxious when speaking without preparation: 32% reported experiencing this often and 28% sometimes, while smaller proportions selected never (14%) and always (6%). Q4 suggests an even stronger tendency for students to experience a loss of ideas while speaking, with 44% reporting this often, compared with 22% sometimes and 18% seldom. Overall, students were more likely to report frequently having no ideas while speaking than worrying about speaking without preparation.

Table 4. Student's perceptions on language competence and group sizes (%)

Q. items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q5: I have strong English vocabulary	0	12	44	44	0
Q6: I have a good understanding of English grammar	0	20	28	48	4
Q7: I am good at English pronunciation	4	12	48	32	4
Q8: I can speak English with a small group	16	12	16	36	20
Q9: I can speak English with a big group	16	8	16	52	8

Table 4 presents students' perceptions of their English language competence and their ability to communicate in different group sizes. Overall, the results suggest that many students have limited confidence in their English abilities. For vocabulary (Q5), the largest proportions of respondents were neutral (44%) or disagreed (44%) that they have strong English vocabulary. Similarly, regarding grammar (Q6), nearly half of the students (48%) disagreed that they have a good understanding of English grammar, while only 20% agreed. In terms of pronunciation (Q7), most respondents were neutral (48%), indicating uncertainty about their ability. Concerning communication in groups, students appeared less confident speaking in larger groups: while some students agreed that they could talk in a small group of classmates (Q8), a majority (52%) disagreed that they could speak in a big group (Q9). These findings suggest that students generally perceive their English competence as moderate or limited, particularly when communicating in larger group settings.

3.2. RQ2: How does group work enhance EFL students' self-confidence?

3.2.1. Focus on improvement of vocabulary

In Activity 1, H1, H2 and I2 successfully used the vocabulary from the input stage to help L2, L4 and L6 understand the text. Although L students initially found it hard to use the words in

speaking, they improved in the second round: L2 and L4 spoke more, with louder voice and more active participation, and L1 presented his part on stage confidently. Students' comments reflected this progress: *"Although I did not know some new words at first, I better understood and used them in my speaking with the meaning supplied by the teacher and the repetition of interaction with my peers"* (L1)

Activity 3 provided phrases and short paragraphs on "asking and giving advice." After pair discussion, students grasped and correctly used the vocabulary and phrases. I1 and I2 checked meanings in a dictionary beforehand and then "could talk quite smoothly and use correct phrases to give advice." I3 and I4 successfully performed a role-play using appropriate phrases. Students recognized their own progress: *"When I did not understand some words' meaning, I asked for help from my partner, they were willing to assist me a lot."* (I3/A3)

In Activity 4, on the topic of relationships, students used phrases, collocations and WH questions and Yes-No questions. L3 and L4 actively worked to complete their list of questions. *"I liked this activity because I could understand the task and vocabulary to apply in speaking... and then applied these phrases in short responses which did not trouble me."* (L3)

3.2.2. Focus on grammar knowledge

Grammar improvement was more visible in Activities 2, 3 and 4, where specific points were targeted. In Activity 2, students were required to use the second conditional to answer "What would you do if you did not go to college?". Some I students initially used simple future forms such as "if I win the lottery, I will go to travel," while H1, H2 and I2 already used correct structures. After the researcher stopped the class to clarify the tense and with the peer support, most students could use the second conditional appropriately. *"At first, I incorrectly used the second conditional to speak, but with the teacher's feedback and corrections with the discussion with my friends, it turned out to be better in use."* (I2)

In Activity 3, students practiced fixed phrases for asking and giving advice such as "If I were you/Why don't you...". The exchange of ideas plus good preparation helped them use these expressions and other grammar points (tenses, WH-questions and Yes-No questions) in speaking, though some teacher correction was still needed. *"With the assistance of friends and the repetition of the sharing cycle with friends, I was able to apply the phrases of the lesson to my speaking."* (L3)

Activity 4 focused mainly on applying collocations in speaking, but still required correct grammatical structures. Students reported that grammar was largely "already available" in full statements and that peer correction during interaction helped them speak more accurately.

3.2.3. Creating comfort in the classroom

Observation and students' feedback confirmed that interaction helped create a relaxed and lively classroom atmosphere. Movement, laughter and negotiation of answers were common in all activities. The first activity already generated noise from calls like "who is in charge of the team's communication," and the following activities further built a comfortable environment that reduced tension and anxiety, making students feel calmer and more secure when speaking English. These comments were coded and grouped if they expressed the same or somewhat same ideas. *"I loved this activity because I could communicate with my other friends to improve my speech. When communicating and discussing with friends, I think listening could be improved as well"* (I3) or *"I really liked this activity because I had a chance to speak and improve my speech speed gradually"* (L4).

These comments and visible observations concluded that the think-pair-share was able to boost the students' self-confidence in terms of generating more interaction and comfort creation to reduce anxiety about speaking English, although it still had some issues with the ability to use vocabulary and generate more ideas, which were modified to be better applied in the next cycle.

3.3. Discussion

3.3.1. Factors that affect students' self-confidence in speaking English

First, consistent with the results of previous research, language anxiety is correlated negatively with competence in L2 and self-confidence in language acquisition [12]. Students who were probably anxious about making mistakes and receiving negative feedback from the teacher, were found to be less confident than others. In other words, at the heart of confidence-provoking work, students' anxiety must be eliminated or intensively reduced. Second, many students seem to learn better if they are asked to think about the language they are coming into contact with. It was confirmed that allowing students to think about language and sentences facilitates them to use their considerable intellect [16]. Providing students with preparatory time encourages them to make good decisions about the words and grammar they select to speak to show their greater understanding about the lesson in a passive manner.

Big group activities can be time-consuming to initiate and conclude, and may lead to classroom disorder [21]. This supports the present study on the aspect of assigning appropriate numbers of students in group, since disorder in large groups may be originated from unclear distribution and domination by a few members.

3.3.2. Group work boosts self-confidence

Group work also fosters a classroom environment that encourages student participation and activities while reducing anxiety and boosting self-confidence [22], [23]. It was relevant to the current study, which found that a comfortable classroom environment encourages students to participate fully and reduces their fear of interaction.

Working in groups and taking advantage of interaction has been shown to have a positive impact on a student's academic progress and to foster self-confidence and cooperation among learners [8]. The data gathered from this study demonstrated the importance of cultivating language use of vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and pronunciation through interaction in group work.

4. Conclusion and implication

It is confirmed that self-confidence in speaking has increased as a result of eliminating anxiety and reinforcing the capacity for interaction in learning involvement. Shyness in speech and powerless engagement have both been used to demonstrate a slew of issues caused by a lack of self-confidence. Rather, without self-confidence in the speaking process, students struggle to blossom in their critical thinking and understanding of the lesson's objectives. As a matter of fact, educators and teachers are responsible for figuring out appropriate approaches to provoke students' self-confidence in learning English in general and speaking in particular. One of the most productive strategies to be vigorously considered in terms of enhancing self-confidence must be group work-based activities due to their evident advantages. When applied in an educational setting, this technique can motivate teachers and students to make noticeable progress in their speaking abilities.

First, it is advisable that teachers be well prepared for the implementation of group work in their teaching. They should be aware of their roles at each stage of group work. They no longer serve as the main knowledge delivery, but they contribute to a less controlled, active role in teaching instead. Student-centered learning must come first, aiming to generate the best interaction and achieve lesson objectives. They must create as many opportunities for students' interactions as possible in order to help them become more self-confident in their speech. Second, teachers should work to boost students' self-confidence in speaking by reducing anxiety and expanding their knowledge and skills. It is supposed that the teacher has to strictly track the students' learning progress and record minor changes to timely support them. Teachers should pay special attention to less competent students or newcomers who find working in a group

difficult or uncomfortable, and provide them with additional encouragement and motivation to help them overcome the issues. Third, a teacher should have a good rapport to create a comfortable classroom in which they can easily inquire or ask questions. Students will not be discouraged or shy to speak and communicate with their peers or teacher in such an environment.

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