

The Perception of English Learning at SMAN 1 Sidrap on Students' English-Speaking Confidence

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ABSTRACT

This study explored students' perceptions of English learning at SMAN 1 Sidrap and examined how those perceptions shaped their English-speaking confidence. A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Thirteen eleventh-grade students were selected through purposive sampling because they had participated in varied classroom speaking activities and represented different confidence levels. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observation, supported by a speaking-confidence scale, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The findings showed that most students perceived English as useful for further study, employment, and international communication. Discussions, presentations, role plays, speeches, drama, and group work were viewed as meaningful opportunities to practice English and strengthen confidence. Positive feedback from teachers, peer encouragement, and a non-threatening classroom atmosphere increased students' willingness to communicate and classroom participation. Nevertheless, anxiety, fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties still reduced confidence among some students. The study concludes that positive perceptions of English learning support higher speaking confidence by increasing motivation, lowering the affective filter, and strengthening students' beliefs in their own ability. Teachers should therefore design interactive, supportive, and progressively challenging speaking activities.

Keywords: Perception; English Learning; Speaking Confidence; Self-Efficacy; EFL Students

INTRODUCTION

English has an important position in global communication, higher education, technology, and professional development. In Indonesia, English is learned primarily as a foreign language, so formal classroom instruction becomes a major source of linguistic input and speaking practice. Students are expected to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but speaking often presents the greatest challenge because learners must organize ideas, select suitable vocabulary and grammar, pronounce words intelligibly, and respond spontaneously. Successful speaking therefore depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on psychological readiness. Recent local studies also indicate that technology-supported and interactive English instruction can strengthen students' engagement, motivation, and oral participation (Saleh et al., 2026; Arif et al., 2026).

Confidence is one of the affective conditions that determines whether students use the language they have learned. Students who believe that they can perform a speaking task are more willing to answer questions, participate in discussion, deliver a presentation, and continue speaking after making errors. Conversely, students who fear negative evaluation tend to remain silent even when they understand the lesson. Brown (2020) emphasizes that motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence influence language performance, while Bandura (1997) explains that beliefs about personal capability guide effort, persistence, and behavior.

Students' perceptions of classroom learning are closely connected to these affective conditions. Perception refers to the way individuals select, organize, and interpret experiences (Robbins & Judge, 2022). In an English classroom, students interpret the teacher's method, task difficulty, peer reactions, feedback, and the usefulness of the subject. When learning is viewed as enjoyable, relevant, and safe, students are more likely to engage. When it is perceived as intimidating, monotonous, or excessively difficult, learners may withdraw and avoid oral participation. At SMAN 1 Sidrap, English instruction includes discussions, presentations, question-and-answer sessions, speeches, drama, role plays, and group work. These strategies are intended to increase communicative practice. Preliminary classroom conditions, however, showed contrasting responses. Some students welcomed the activities and became increasingly confident, whereas others remained nervous, worried about incorrect grammar or pronunciation, and reluctant to speak in front of classmates. This variation suggested that students' subjective interpretation of the same learning environment deserved closer investigation. Similar classroom-based evidence from Sidrap shows that structured speaking programs and communicative learning activities can create more frequent opportunities for students to use English meaningfully (Aisa et al., 2025; Buhari et al., 2025).

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis helps explain this condition. Anxiety, low motivation, and weak confidence can raise an emotional filter that limits the processing and production of language, whereas a comfortable environment lowers

the filter and allows input to be used more effectively (Krashen, 1982; 2020). Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory further suggests that mastery experiences, observation of successful peers, verbal encouragement, and manageable emotional states shape a learner's belief that a task can be completed. Classroom perception can therefore influence confidence through both emotional and cognitive mechanisms.

Previous research has linked supportive classroom interaction, communicative activities, motivation, and positive self-perception with stronger speaking confidence. Many studies, however, have relied primarily on questionnaires and statistical relationships. Less attention has been given to students' own explanations of how particular classroom experiences influence their willingness, anxiety, and participation. Research focused specifically on SMAN 1 Sidrap is also limited. A qualitative inquiry is valuable because it reveals how learners interpret teaching practices and why some activities strengthen confidence while others remain challenging. Recent studies in Indonesian secondary-school settings have also examined speaking confidence, role play, and non-linguistic barriers, but further qualitative evidence is still needed to explain how learners interpret these experiences (Nasruddin et al., 2026; Apriyani et al., 2026). This study addressed two questions: how students perceive English learning at SMAN 1 Sidrap, and how they perceive its influence on their English-speaking confidence. Speaking confidence was examined through four indicators: self-confidence, willingness to communicate, anxiety reduction, and classroom participation. The study aimed to provide practical evidence for designing English lessons that encourage students to use the language without excessive fear of mistakes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception in English Learning

Perception is an active meaning-making process rather than a simple response to external stimuli. Learners interpret classroom events through prior experience, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and self-concept. External influences such as teacher behavior, instructional strategy, peer interaction, task design, and classroom climate interact with these internal conditions. Consequently, students in the same class may evaluate one activity differently. A presentation may be perceived as an exciting opportunity by one learner and as a threatening public performance by another. Positive perception is associated with engagement because learners regard tasks as useful and achievable. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) argue that learners' interpretations of their environment influence motivation and self-regulation. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) similarly show that learners who see themselves as capable language users are more likely to sustain effort and communicate. In speaking instruction, a supportive perception can reduce hesitation, whereas memories of embarrassment, harsh correction, or repeated failure can produce avoidance. Students' positive perceptions of digital vocabulary activities have

likewise been associated with enjoyment, active participation, and stronger learning motivation (Lestari et al., 2026; Azis et al., 2026).

Affective Filter and Self-Efficacy

The Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that emotional variables affect the extent to which language input is processed. A high filter is associated with anxiety, low motivation, and low self-confidence; a low filter is associated with openness, participation, and readiness to learn. Speaking is particularly sensitive to the affective filter because performance is immediate and visible to others. Fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation uncertainty can interrupt speech and reduce willingness to communicate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2021). This interpretation is consistent with research on foreign-language anxiety showing that emotional tension can restrict interaction and learners' readiness to communicate (Hermansyah et al., 2025). Self-efficacy is a learner's belief in the capability to organize and perform actions required to reach a goal (Bandura, 1997). Four sources are especially relevant: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional state. Successful speaking attempts provide mastery experience; seeing classmates succeed provides vicarious evidence; teacher and peer encouragement provide social persuasion; and lower anxiety supports a productive emotional state. Interactive lessons can combine all four sources and gradually strengthen confidence.

Speaking Confidence and Interactive Learning

Speaking confidence includes a learner's belief that ideas can be expressed, willingness to initiate or respond in English, ability to manage nervousness, and active participation in oral tasks. It does not imply perfect grammar or pronunciation. Rather, confidence enables learners to continue communicating despite limitations and to treat mistakes as part of learning. Nation and Newton (2020) stress that frequent meaningful use is necessary for speaking development because fluency grows through repeated opportunities to formulate and deliver messages. Classroom interventions that emphasize verbal communication and guided performance also suggest that systematic practice can improve learners' readiness to express ideas orally (Harya et al., 2025). Constructivist and sociocultural perspectives support interactive learning. Learners build knowledge through experience, collaboration, and guided participation. Discussions, group work, drama, role play, and presentations allow students to practice within meaningful social situations. Teacher scaffolding and peer cooperation can keep tasks within an achievable range, reduce isolation, and provide immediate support. When classroom interaction is respectful, these activities can improve both communicative competence and confidence.

METHOD

Design and Sample

The research used a qualitative descriptive design to understand students' experiences in their natural classroom setting. The participants were thirteen eleventh-grade students of SMAN 1 Sidrap selected purposively. Selection considered active experience in English learning and variation in speaking confidence, enabling the study to represent confident, moderately confident, and less confident learners. The purpose was not statistical generalization but a detailed description of perceptions and the meanings students assigned to their classroom experiences.

Instruments and Procedures

The researcher served as the main instrument. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore perceived usefulness of English, reactions to teaching methods, preferred and difficult activities, teacher and peer support, willingness to communicate, anxiety, and confidence. Classroom observation examined actual participation, hesitation, interaction, response to feedback, and involvement in speaking activities. A speaking-confidence scale was used as supporting information to help identify patterns, although interpretation remained qualitative. Interview questions were informed by perception theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2020) interactive model. Interview and observation data were first collected and organized. Relevant statements were condensed into categories related to perceptions of English learning, perceived benefits of interactive activities, classroom support, confidence, willingness, anxiety, and barriers. The categories were displayed in descriptive matrices and compared across informants. Conclusions were then drawn and repeatedly checked against the original data. Credibility was supported through source and technique triangulation and member checking. Detailed contextual description supported transferability, documentation of procedures supported dependability, and an evidence-based audit trail supported confirmability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perceptions of English Learning

Most participants expressed a positive perception of English learning. English was viewed as useful for future study, employment, travel, technology, and communication with people from other countries. This perceived usefulness gave students a reason to persist even when they considered the subject difficult. Students

commonly described the teacher's methods as interesting, enjoyable, or capable of attracting attention. Positive judgments were strongest when lessons provided direct practice rather than requiring students only to listen to explanations.

Interactive activities were central to the positive perceptions. Students mentioned discussions, presentations, role plays, speeches, drama, question-and-answer sessions, and group work. Preferences differed, but activities that allowed meaningful use of English were generally valued. Drama and role play were seen as enjoyable because students could perform with classmates, while discussion and group work reduced the pressure of speaking alone. Presentations provided a clearer sense of achievement, even though they were also among the activities that caused nervousness.

Table 1. Main Themes in Students' Perceptions of English Learning

Theme	Evidence from Students' Perceptions	Implication
Perceived usefulness	English supports education, careers, travel, technology, and international communication.	Increased motivation to learn and speak.
Interactive activities	Discussion, presentation, role play, drama, speech, and group work were meaningful and enjoyable.	More opportunities for practice and mastery experience.
Teacher support	Explanation, correction, encouragement, and positive feedback were appreciated.	Greater willingness to attempt speaking.
Peer climate	Supportive classmates made students feel accepted and less embarrassed.	Reduced fear of negative evaluation.
Learning difficulty	Vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and task complexity remained challenging.	Hesitation and occasional withdrawal.

Influence on English-Speaking Confidence

Students associated positive learning experiences with increased confidence. Repeated practice helped them become more accustomed to speaking before others. Small successes, such as answering a question correctly, completing a presentation, or performing a role play, created a sense that English speaking was manageable. This pattern reflects mastery experience in Self-Efficacy Theory. Students who received encouraging responses after speaking were more likely to participate again, showing the role of social persuasion.

Willingness to communicate improved when activities were structured and the classroom atmosphere felt safe. Pair and group activities were especially useful for students who were not ready to speak before the whole class. They could first rehearse with friends, observe peers, and receive informal assistance. These experiences functioned as scaffolding and vicarious learning. Students gradually moved from supported interaction to more independent performance, consistent with constructivist and sociocultural perspectives. This pattern supports recent findings that role-playing segmented scenes can create repeated, low-risk speaking opportunities and encourage fluency development (Apriyani et al., 2026).

Teacher feedback influenced how students interpreted mistakes. Supportive correction helped students see errors as a normal part of learning rather than as proof of inability. Encouragement from classmates also reduced embarrassment. When learners believed that classmates would listen respectfully, they were more prepared to speak spontaneously. The findings therefore show that confidence is relational: it develops not only inside the learner but also through interaction with teachers, peers, and task conditions. Positive classroom engagement has similarly been reported in gamified English-learning environments where encouragement, participation, and immediate feedback are emphasized (Saleh et al., 2026).

Despite these positive patterns, confidence was not uniform. Several students continued to experience anxiety when speaking in front of the class. Fear of incorrect grammar, insufficient vocabulary, and inaccurate pronunciation made them pause, forget prepared material, or avoid volunteering. These barriers raised the affective filter and limited language production. Students sometimes understood a question but did not answer because they anticipated ridicule or correction. The finding demonstrates that perceived competence and emotional safety can be as important as actual knowledge.

Table 2. Patterns of English-Speaking Confidence

Confidence Indicator	Observed/Reported Pattern	Overall Interpretation
Self-confidence	Belief that speaking tasks can be completed; stronger after successful practice.	Generally increased, but remained fragile for difficult public tasks.

Willingness to communicate	Readiness to answer, discuss, present, or initiate English use.	Higher in pairs/groups and supportive whole-class interaction.
Anxiety reduction	Ability to manage nervousness and fear of mistakes.	Improved with preparation and encouragement; still a major barrier for some.
Classroom participation	Observable involvement in oral learning activities.	More active during interactive and collaborative tasks.

The findings confirm that perception is closely linked to behavior. Students who interpreted English as useful and classroom activities as enjoyable showed greater engagement. Their positive perception increased motivation, and motivation encouraged them to accept speaking opportunities. This supports Robbins and Judge's (2022) view that interpretation guides response and Schunk and DiBenedetto's (2020) argument that perceived learning conditions influence self-regulation and achievement behavior. The results also support the Affective Filter Hypothesis. A supportive teacher, friendly peers, manageable tasks, and repeated preparation lowered anxiety and made students more receptive to language input and more willing to produce English. In contrast, fear of errors and negative judgment raised the filter. The same speaking task could therefore facilitate one student and inhibit another depending on how the task was perceived and emotionally experienced. The result is also aligned with evidence that foreign-language anxiety affects both teachers' and learners' participation in English-learning interaction (Hermansyah et al., 2025).

Self-Efficacy Theory provides a complementary explanation. Interactive activities created mastery experiences through successful performance. Students gained vicarious experience by observing peers. Teacher praise and peer encouragement served as verbal persuasion, while reduced nervousness improved emotional states. These sources strengthened beliefs about personal capability. Confidence then encouraged further participation, creating a productive cycle of practice, success, and increased self-belief. The study extends previous findings by illustrating the process from the learners' perspective. Confidence did not arise merely because communicative activities were present. Activities became effective when students understood their purpose, received sufficient preparation, experienced respectful feedback, and believed that the level of difficulty was achievable. Thus, teachers need to manage both the pedagogical design and the emotional meaning of classroom tasks.

Practical application should include gradual progression from pair rehearsal to group discussion and finally individual presentation; explicit vocabulary and pronunciation preparation; correction that focuses on improvement rather than embarrassment; and regular opportunities to reflect on progress. Teachers should recognize quieter participation as a developmental stage and provide alternative

entry points, such as short responses, prepared dialogues, or collaborative performance, before demanding extended spontaneous speech. Teachers may also combine face-to-face communicative practice with carefully selected digital tools, provided that technology remains focused on interaction, scaffolding, and confidence-building rather than passive screen use (Arif et al., 2026; Lestari et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

Students at SMAN 1 Sidrap generally perceived English learning positively. They considered English relevant to future education, careers, and international communication, and they valued interactive activities that provided direct speaking practice. Positive teacher feedback, supportive peers, and a safe classroom atmosphere strengthened self-confidence, willingness to communicate, anxiety management, and classroom participation. Nevertheless, fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulty continued to inhibit some learners. Positive perception therefore contributes to speaking confidence by increasing motivation, lowering the affective filter, and strengthening self-efficacy. English teachers are encouraged to provide scaffolded communicative activities, constructive feedback, adequate language preparation, and a respectful classroom climate. Future research may involve more schools, compare grade levels, or combine qualitative evidence with validated confidence measures and longitudinal observation.

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