

Improving Speaking Confidence through Project-Based Learning in Indonesian Junior High Schools

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Abstract. *This research aims to assess how well Project-Based Learning (PBL) enhances the self-assurance of Indonesian junior high school students in their spoken English abilities. For Indonesian students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking continues to be a difficult skill to master, frequently hampered by nervousness, a small range of words, and a worry about being wrong. This research used PBL as a teaching strategy to solve these problems by encouraging energetic involvement, teamwork, and actual language usage. The research used a quasi-experimental setup with two separate classes: one experimental class using PBL and one control class using standard teaching techniques. Information was gathered through speaking tests before and after, observations in the classroom, and surveys filled out by students. The results showed that, in comparison to the control group, the PBL group's students showed a marked increase in their confidence, fluency, and desire to speak. Furthermore, the data collected revealed that students were more driven and interested when working on projects that simulated real-world situations, like group talks and video reports. According to the results, PBL improves students' language skills and encourages independence, cooperation, and a positive attitude toward learning. As a result, including PBL in English speaking lessons can be helpful in building students' self-esteem and ability to communicate effectively in the Indonesian EFL setting.*

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning, Speaking Confidence, EFL Learners, Junior High School, Indonesia*

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INTRODUCTION

Being able to speak is a crucial skill when you are trying to learn a new language; it demonstrates your capacity to share your thoughts clearly and connect with people in a real way (Andi & Arafah, 2017). When learning English as a Foreign Language, how well someone speaks is a main way to measure their language ability. But, a lot of young students in Indonesia find it hard to get good at speaking English (Kaharuddin, 2024). Students frequently have problems with the language itself, such as using correct grammar and vocabulary, and also struggle with feelings like being scared, worried, and not feeling sure of themselves (Ruslan et al., 2020). Because of this, students usually do not participate much in class discussions and are unwilling to say what they are thinking out loud.

Self-confidence is exceptionally important for how well someone uses language (Kaharuddin & Nanning, 2014). It is possible for a student to know enough words and grammar rules but still not be a good speaker because they do not believe in themselves (Arafah et al., 2021a). A common issue in numerous Indonesian classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language is that students frequently worry about getting things wrong or what their classmates will think, which makes them not want to take part in activities that involve speaking (Kaharuddin

et al., 2023). has demonstrated that not feeling confident when speaking can really hold someone back from being able to communicate verbally. For this reason, teachers must use teaching methods that foster a classroom atmosphere that is encouraging, interesting, and does not make students feel too stressed.

Traditional methods of teaching speaking, including repetitive practice, rote learning, and instructor-led inquiries, frequently do not boost students' self-assurance or captivation (Bahar, K, 2013; Kaharuddin & Ahmad, 2018). Although such methods may enhance correctness, they hardly ever nurture genuine dialogue or affective involvement. Learners commonly view speaking assignments as evaluations instead of chances for personal articulation. Therefore, there is an increasing requirement for more learner-focused strategies that highlight significant exchange, innovation, and practical interaction.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) presents a substitute that looks good when compared to standard ways of teaching languages. PBL represents a teaching method where students get involved by investigating actual problems and creating genuine projects that show what they have learned (Kaharuddin et al., 2019; Arafah et al., 2021b). With its base in theories about learning by doing and building knowledge, PBL pushes students to cooperate with each other, use smart thinking, and use their language abilities in real-life situations. As Thomas (2000) mentioned, PBL changes students from just taking in information to being people who actively take part and create understanding by performing tasks.

In English language learning settings, project-based learning has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving communication abilities by creating realistic scenarios where students can utilize the language (Arafah & Bahar, 2015; Kaharuddin et al., 2022a). Students employ English to accomplish significant objectives through assignments like interviews, video creations, and collaborative presentations. This sense of real-world relevance inherently boosts their enthusiasm and self-assurance when speaking. A study conducted by Al-Bataineh & Gallagher (2021) indicated that students learning English as a foreign language who participated in project-based learning activities showed greater levels of speaking proficiency, vocabulary recall, and engagement in class compared to students who were taught using conventional methods.

In Indonesia, the employment of Project-Based Learning is strongly linked with the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiative launched by the Education Ministry, which backs imaginative and student-focused teaching strategies (Kaharuddin, 2025a). By enabling students to delve into actual problems, share thoughts, and display creations in a public setting, PBL bolsters the aims of this initiative, which all plays a role in raising levels of assurance and communication skills. Even with its significance, though, the tangible use of PBL in English courses for junior high students stays restricted; this is usually because teachers are not used to the technique or haven't had enough instruction on how to run classes that are based on projects (Kaharuddin et al., 2020b).

Numerous regional investigations have started examining the advantages of Project-Based Learning in the Indonesian setting for teaching English as a Foreign Language. As an illustration, Rahmawati's research in 2022 showed that students who worked on project-oriented assignments showed improvement not only in their spoken English but also in their abilities to collaborate and solve problems. Likewise, Lestari and Suryani (2023) stated in their report that students gained a greater sense of self-assurance when speaking English while cooperating in groups to finish authentic projects, like designing tourism pamphlets or creating school-based podcasts. The results of these studies suggest that PBL could be a helpful method for enhancing language skills and emotional intelligence among young students (Kaharuddin et al., 2022).

However, there are some difficulties in putting PBL into practice. Educators must thoughtfully plan projects that suit the language skills of their students and offer enough support along the way (Arafah et al., 2023; Kaharuddin, 2024b). Furthermore, elements like how much time is available in class, how grades are determined, and whether students can get the materials

they need can change how well project-based teaching works. If not done correctly, PBL could easily turn into an exercise focused on what is made instead of what is learned. Thus, to make the best use of PBL in Indonesian schools, it is very important to know how it affects students' self-assurance when speaking and to figure out what things help or hurt this growth (Kaharuddin, 2025b).

This study, taking into account the set conditions, is made to see if learning through projects makes Indonesian students in their first years of high school feel surer of themselves when they speak. This work will look closely at how project-based learning affects how willing students are to talk, how sure they are in their English skills, and what they think about speaking activities. The study will also try to find out the problems that teachers and students have when they use this teaching style. Using both number-based and word-based ways of studying, the research will give a full understanding of how project-based learning helps students get better at language and grow emotionally and in their attitudes.

To sum up, helping students feel surer of themselves when speaking English means doing more than just learning grammar rules; it means setting up a classroom where talking is important, helpful, and makes them feel capable (Kaharuddin & Ismail, 2022). Learning by Doing Projects gives this kind of setting by linking schoolwork with actual situations and pushing students to say what they really think (Bahar, 2013b; Kaharuddin et al., 2024). This research hopes to show that Learning by Doing Projects is a good teaching method that not only makes students speak more confidently but also helps reach the wider aims of the Independent Learning plan in growing learners in Indonesia who are involved, inventive, and self-assured.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Speaking in EFL

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a lively option instead of the usual way of teaching, where students are the main focus of learning. With project activities, students take part in looking at actual problems, figuring out solutions, and making real things that show what they have learned (Mardiana et al., 2023). This method pushes students to be independent, work together, and think deeply, letting them learn by doing instead of just memorizing facts. When learning a language, especially English as a Foreign Language, PBL gives a true-to-life setting where students use English to ask questions and share ideas, not just to study the language itself. By mixing what they learn, how they think, and how they talk to others, PBL helps them grow in language skills and also build important skills for the future, like coming up with new ideas, solving problems, and working as a team (Bell, 2010; Kokotsaki, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016).

Futhermore, because PBL involves doing things, it really helps how students feel, which affects their language skills, like how driven they are, how sure of themselves they are, and how involved they are in learning. When students do projects that matter to them, like making videos, talking to people in their town, or making movies about their culture, they feel like they own their learning (Rofikah et al., 2022). This feeling of having a goal makes them less nervous about language and more willing to try new things when talking, which is super important for getting better at speaking smoothly. Also, PBL involves working together, which helps students learn from each other and get help from friends, making them feel less stressed and more comfortable practicing speaking. Research has found that students who do PBL are more eager to talk and feel more capable when speaking English (Chen & Yang, 2019; Sudarso et al., 2024). So, PBL not only makes language skills better but also helps students feel confident and able to communicate on their own, using English well in real situations.

Evidence from Indonesian Studies

The growing use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Indonesian schools shows a wider change in teaching methods to those focused more on students and hands-on language learning. Because English is becoming more important for talking to people around the world and getting jobs, teachers and experts in Indonesia have looked for better ways to make language use

important in class. PBL's focus on working together, being creative, and doing real tasks fits well with these aims, making it a good choice for the communication and cultural parts of learning English. Studies like those by Halim, Boys, Fahmi, Nozaki, and Wuttipong (2023) show this method not only makes students better at language but also builds key soft skills like working with others, thinking hard, and fixing problems, skills that are very important in school and work. More and more proof suggests that PBL is helping to connect what is learned in class to real-life communication, giving students more chances to use English in a way that has purpose and with confidence (Yassi, & Kaharuddin 2018).

Moreover, using computer programs with PBL methods has made it much better at helping students speak well. Studies by Nugroho & Anugerahwati (2019) show that using digital stories and making videos in PBL lets students practice, record, and think about how they speak, which helps them say words better, speak smoothly, and feel more sure of themselves. These projects that use technology not only make learning more interesting but also give clear proof of how students are getting better, pushing them to be in charge of learning the language. Plus, online places make it easier for students to work together and give feedback, which further strengthens how they talk to each other in real and interactive ways. Overall, these results highlight how PBL, especially when used with digital tools, can change old ways of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia into a learning experience that is more involved, communicative, and empowering for students.

Project Types and Their Pedagogical Affordances

Different kinds of projects give different chances to get better at talking. For example, making videos (like vlogs or reports) lets you record many times and make changes, which helps students say words better and speak more smoothly; giving talks and acting out roles let you talk with others right away and get feedback from classmates; making podcasts helps you practice talking by yourself for a long time about real subject. Studies that looked at different kinds of projects show that projects with many parts (like video, writing, and reviews from others) help the most in speaking smoothly and feeling sure of yourself, because they mix practicing, knowing people are watching, and thinking about how to make things better (Cendikia, 2025). Studies in Indonesian classrooms often use video and telling stories with computers because they are easy to get to and fun ways to learn for young students in middle school (Nugroho & Anugerahwati, 2019; Kadaruddin et al., 2020).

To make PBL work well, teachers must guide students, tests must be well-made, and it must fit with what is being taught (like Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar policy). Research about PBL in Indonesian schools shows that teachers are key in helping with tasks, creating good scoring guides, and handling how groups work together. When teachers got training to use PBL, the results were much better; but when teachers were not ready, projects were not as good and some students did not get to participate as much (Sudarso et al., 2024).

Challenges and Constraints in Indonesian Contexts

Even though Project-Based Learning has good points, using it well in English classes for non-native speakers needs careful thought and changes to fit what classrooms are really like. A common problem mentioned is not having enough time during school, so teachers find it hard to fit project work with what they must teach and how they must grade students (Kaharuddin, 2016). Also, teachers might not know enough about how to create and run project-based work, which means they might not use it properly or might go back to old ways where they lead everything. Plus, grading students in Project-Based Learning can be hard because you have to look at the finished work, how they worked, how they worked together, and how they used the language. Because grading has so many parts, teachers need to put in a lot of work and have clear rules to make sure it is fair (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Kaharuddin & Latif, 2017). If there is no clear help, Project-Based Learning might become messy or not go deep enough, which would make it less useful for improving speaking and making students feel sure of themselves.

In Indonesia, problems with facilities and how things are organized make it even harder to start using PBL. Like Halim et al. (2023) said, it's tough for teachers to do projects using different methods that need technology, like making videos or working together online, because classes are big, not everyone can use digital tools, and the internet is spotty. These issues are really clear in schools that don't have enough money or are in the countryside, where not everyone gets the same chance to learn with technology. To fix these problems, teachers should try easy answers, like using projects that don't need much tech or are done on paper, giving everyone specific jobs to make sure everyone participates fairly, and having teachers check in regularly to watch how things are going and give help (Kaharuddin, 2018). These plans can help keep the teaching quality of PBL good while making it easier to do and include everyone in different learning situations. In the end, for PBL to last in Indonesia, it needs to be designed to change easily, have support from the schools, and have teachers keep learning so they can change how they teach to fit their own classrooms.

Gaps: Speaking Confidence in Junior High & Rigorous Designs

Currently, the majority of supporting data in Indonesia originates from classroom-based studies, academic papers, and smaller investigations that are almost like experiments; extensive, well-designed studies that are almost experiments or studies that follow students over time and specifically examine speaking confidence in junior high school students are still scarce (Kaharuddin, 2019). A lot of research evaluates speaking skills (like how smoothly and correctly someone speaks) but considers confidence as a less important result or something that participants report themselves. It is obviously important to conduct studies that integrate direct assessments of speaking, tested methods for measuring confidence or the desire to speak, and observations in classrooms to fully understand how and why project-based learning increases confidence in young teenagers in different school environments in Indonesia (Halim et al., 2023).

The existing research generally suggests that PBL holds substantial potential for enhancing speaking abilities and related emotional aspects within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environments (Kaharuddin, 2018). Studies conducted in Indonesia confirm that PBL, specifically through video creation, digital narratives, and presentation-centered projects, can be effectively implemented with middle school students, though they also underline specific environmental factors that demand thoughtful planning in instructional methods and robust teacher assistance. Your investigation into the speaking confidence of junior high students, employing thorough pre- and post-assessments alongside qualitative validation techniques, successfully tackles a relevant deficiency in current studies and delivers actionable advice for expanding PBL adoption within the Merdeka Belajar education framework.

METHODS

Research Design

This research implemented a quasi-experimental approach, utilizing a pre-test and post-test setup with a control group. The methodology was chosen to investigate the influence of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on how confident students felt while speaking, all while keeping the study relevant to what happens in an actual classroom. Two existing classes were designated as the group getting the new teaching method (PBL) and the group getting the standard speaking lessons. Numerical information collected from tests given before and after the teaching period was enhanced with descriptive information gathered from questionnaires and interviews to fully understand what the students thought and went through (Abidin & Kaharuddin, 2021).

Participants

The research involved 60 students in the eighth grade (aged 13 to 14) of a private junior high school in Makassar, Indonesia. The selection of the school was intentionally made because they were implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and provided opportunities for engaging in activities that involved speaking English. Thirty students made up the experimental group (with 15 boys and 15 girls), and the control group also included thirty students (consisting of 16 boys

and 14 girls). It was determined that all participants possessed roughly equivalent English language abilities, which was verified through their scores on the midterm examination, and none of them had prior experience with project-based learning in their English courses. Students participated willingly, and permission from their parents was secured before the commencement of the study.

Instruments

Speaking Confidence Test

To gauge the level of confidence students possessed while speaking, we utilized a Speaking Confidence Rating Scale. The assessment required each student to deliver a brief presentation about a project (for example, explaining a cultural item from the area or a school activity). A Likert scale with five options was used to rate how confident the students were. This scale looked at things like being sure of yourself when speaking English, being okay with speaking to a crowd, keeping worry under control, using eye contact and body language well, and speaking smoothly and making sense even when stressed.

Questionnaire

The experimental group was given a questionnaire to fill out after the treatment, which included 10 questions answered on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Completely Disagree, to 5 = Completely Agree). The questionnaire aimed to understand how motivated and involved the students were, as well as what they thought about using Project Based Learning in their speaking classes.

Semi-Structured Interview

In order to get a more thorough understanding of the students' experiences, we randomly chose 10 students from the experimental group to participate in interviews. The interview questions centered around what they thought of Project Based Learning, what problems they encountered, and in what ways the project had an impact on their confidence.

Procedures

Pre-Test

A preliminary evaluation was administered to both participant groups before the start of the intervention. This pre-test assessed their self-assurance in speaking through a brief spoken presentation lasting two to three minutes. The grading of the students was carried out using the same assessment guidelines employed during the final post-test.

Treatment

The instructional program spanned a duration of six weeks, consisting of two sessions each week, with each session lasting 90 minutes. The project-based learning approach, which incorporated five essential phases, was used to instruct the experimental group. These phases were: (1) Planning: students were acquainted with the objectives of the projects and made selections of topics, like producing a tourism video for the school or setting up a cultural display; (2) Designing: the groups worked together to organize activities, create scripts, and delegate responsibilities; (3) Implementing: students obtained the required resources, rehearsed conversations, and either recorded or performed their projects; (4) Presenting: each group shared their completed project by giving a speech in front of fellow students and teachers; and (5) Evaluating: this included self-evaluations and peer reviews that mainly focused on their performance and their confidence while speaking. Conversely, the control group was taught with conventional teaching methods that highlighted exercises from textbooks, organized conversations, and comments from teachers, and there was no integration of projects.

Post-Test

After the treatment that lasted six weeks, both sets of students participated in the final assessment, utilizing the exact assessment criteria for speaking confidence that was employed in the initial test.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The software SPSS version 26 was employed to analyze the data obtained from both the pre-test and post-test. To clearly show the shifts in student achievement, descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation were determined. An evaluation of within-group progress was performed using a paired-sample t-test, and an independent-sample t-test was implemented to evaluate the post-test outcomes across the experimental and control groups. To ascertain if the identified differences held significance, the threshold for statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

Qualitative Data

Frequency and percentage analysis was used to summarize answers from the questionnaires, and thematic coding was applied to the interview transcripts. Heightened motivation, lessened anxiety, team-based learning, and personal expression were some of the major themes that emerged. These qualitative observations verified the quantitative results and allowed for a more thorough understanding of the students' emotional and behavioral development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall Effects of Project-Based Learning on Speaking Confidence

The quantitative findings demonstrate a substantial difference in speaking confidence gains between students exposed to Project-Based Learning (PBL) and those taught through conventional instruction. While both groups began the study with relatively comparable pre-test scores, the post-test results reveal a markedly greater improvement in the experimental group. This pattern indicates that the observed gains cannot be attributed merely to natural language development over time, but rather to the instructional intervention itself.

The experimental group exhibited a statistically significant increase in overall speaking confidence, whereas the control group showed only marginal progress. This divergence suggests that traditional speaking activities, which rely primarily on textbook drills and teacher-led questioning, may be insufficient to foster affective growth such as confidence and willingness to communicate. In contrast, PBL appears to provide learners with sustained opportunities for meaningful language use, repeated rehearsal, and social interaction, which collectively lower affective barriers to speaking. These findings resonate with communicative and task-based learning principles, which emphasize that confidence develops through use rather than passive exposure.

Differential Gains across Speaking Confidence Components

A closer examination of rubric-based indicators reveals that the most pronounced improvements occurred in fluency, eye contact, and body language. These aspects are closely associated with affective readiness rather than purely linguistic knowledge, suggesting that PBL primarily enhances students' psychological comfort and communicative presence when speaking English. The substantial gain in fluency indicates that students became less hesitant and more willing to sustain speech, likely due to repeated practice embedded within project preparation stages. Unlike isolated speaking drills, project work required students to rehearse, revise, and present ideas multiple times, allowing fluency to emerge gradually through familiarity and reduced performance pressure.

Improvements in non-verbal confidence such as eye contact and body posture further suggest that students perceived speaking tasks as communicative acts rather than evaluative events. This shift aligns with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which posits that reduced anxiety facilitates language output. Meanwhile, gains in pronunciation and vocabulary, although present, were relatively moderate. This pattern suggests that PBL's strongest contribution lies not in explicit form-focused instruction, but in creating conditions that encourage risk-taking and sustained oral engagement. Thus, PBL functions more as an affective and communicative catalyst than as a direct linguistic drill mechanism.

Learner Perceptions and Affective Shifts

Students' questionnaire responses reinforce the quantitative findings by revealing significant affective shifts toward speaking English. High agreement levels regarding enjoyment, confidence, and reduced fear of mistakes suggest that PBL transformed students' emotional orientation toward speaking tasks. Rather than perceiving speaking as a source of anxiety, students increasingly viewed it as a collaborative and meaningful activity. Peer collaboration emerged as a critical mediating factor. Students reported that working in groups helped normalize errors and reduced the fear of negative evaluation. This finding supports sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning as a socially mediated process in which peer interaction scaffolds both cognitive and affective development. The results suggest that confidence gains were not solely individual achievements but were socially constructed through shared responsibility and collective rehearsal.

Interpretive Insights from Qualitative Interviews

The interview data provide deeper explanatory insight into how and why PBL fostered speaking confidence. Rather than merely confirming positive perceptions, the qualitative analysis reveals three interrelated affective mechanisms: gradual desensitization to speaking anxiety, identity repositioning as capable English users, and increased learner autonomy. Repeated practice within a supportive group environment enabled students to move from initial nervousness to relative comfort, indicating an affective adjustment process rather than a sudden skill acquisition. Several students described becoming "used to speaking," suggesting that confidence developed through habituation and familiarity. Additionally, students began to position themselves as legitimate speakers of English, particularly when discussing real-world topics connected to their own experiences. This identity shift is crucial, as confidence is closely tied to learners' beliefs about their communicative legitimacy. Moreover, students' reflections indicate growing autonomy. By planning, rehearsing, and evaluating their own projects, learners assumed greater responsibility for their performance. This autonomy likely contributed to sustained confidence, as students perceived success as internally generated rather than teacher-dependent.

Comparative Performance between Experimental and Control Groups

The comparative analysis of post-test performance highlights consistent advantages for the PBL group across all speaking dimensions, with the largest disparities observed in confidence and fluency. The magnitude of difference suggests not only statistical significance but also pedagogical relevance. While the control group demonstrated limited improvement, their progress remained largely constrained to surface-level performance without corresponding affective growth. These findings indicate that instructional design plays a decisive role in shaping not just what students learn, but how they feel about using the language. PBL's emphasis on authenticity, collaboration, and extended engagement appears to create a learning ecology that supports both performance and confidence development simultaneously.

Classroom Observation as Behavioral Validation

Classroom observations corroborate both quantitative and qualitative findings by demonstrating clear behavioral differences between the two groups. Students in the PBL class exhibited higher initiative, sustained engagement, and stronger self-regulation, suggesting that

confidence gains translated into observable classroom behaviors. These students required less teacher prompting, actively sought peer feedback, and demonstrated ownership over their learning processes. In contrast, the control group remained largely teacher-dependent, with limited spontaneous participation. This behavioral disparity reinforces the interpretation that PBL not only improves speaking outcomes but also reshapes learner roles from passive recipients to active communicators. Such behavioral changes are critical indicators of durable confidence development.

Findings

Improvement in Speaking Confidence

Table 1 displays the outcomes from the speaking confidence assessments administered before and after the intervention to students in both the experimental group (utilizing Problem-Based Learning) and the control group (employing conventional methods). The table includes the average scores, average improvements, t-values, and significance levels that were used to assess how well each instructional method performed.

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Results of Speaking Confidence

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain	t-value	p-value	Significance
Experimental (PBL)	30	68.3	84.6	+16.3	8.72	< 0.05	Significant improvement
Control (Conventional)	30	67.8	73.1	+5.3	1.64	> 0.05	Not significant

The speaking confidence levels of the experimental group students, who received instruction using Project-Based Learning (PBL), showed a considerable increase between the initial and final assessments. The experimental group's average score rose from 68.3 in the initial test to 84.6 in the subsequent test. Conversely, the control group showed only a slight increase, going from 67.8 to 73.1. A t-test for paired samples verified that the positive change in the experimental group held statistical importance ($p < 0.05$), but the improvement seen in the control group did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$).

Enhancement in Fluency and Nonverbal Confidence

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the rubric-based evaluation of the speaking confidence demonstrated by students within the experimental group, assessed through particular indicators. The data emphasizes advancements noted in aspects like smoothness of speech, non-verbal communication, visual engagement, articulation clarity, and lexical resourcefulness, collectively indicating a general increase in speaking confidence levels subsequent to the implemented intervention.

Table 2. Rubric-Based Assessment Results of Speaking Confidence Indicators

Indicator	Maximum Score	Pre-test Mean (Experimental)	Post-test Mean (Experimental)	Mean Gain	Description of Improvement
Fluency	5	3.1	4.4	+1.3	Students spoke more smoothly and with fewer pauses.
Body Language	5	3.0	4.3	+1.3	Improved posture, gestures, and audience engagement.

Eye Contact	5	2.9	4.2	+1.3	Maintained confident and consistent audience contact.
Pronunciation	5	3.3	4.1	+0.8	Clearer articulation and better stress patterns.
Vocabulary Use	5	3.4	4.0	+0.6	Broader range of words and expressions.
Overall Mean	5	3.14	4.20	+1.06	Marked overall improvement in speaking confidence.

After reviewing the assessment scores based on the rubric, it became apparent that the most significant improvements occurred in speech smoothness, physical expression, and visual engagement with the audience. Following the training program, students in the test group delivered their presentations with noticeably better speech delivery, enhanced their overall stage presence, and displayed increased confidence when interacting visually with audience members. The mean score for speaking without hesitations increased from 3.1 to 4.4, while the mean score for connecting visually with the audience increased from 2.9 to 4.2, utilizing a scoring system that ranged from one to five.

Questionnaire Results on Student Perceptions

Table 3 presents the students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing their speaking confidence. The table summarizes the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement, along with an interpretation of the results. The data reveal overall positive attitudes toward PBL, indicating its effectiveness in increasing motivation, confidence, collaboration, and opportunities for English practice.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Improving Speaking Confidence

No.	Statement	Agree / Strongly Agree (%)	Interpretation
1	PBL made speaking lessons more interesting and enjoyable.	90%	Highly positive engagement and increased motivation.
2	I felt more confident speaking in front of others after completing my project.	88%	Strong improvement in speaking confidence.
3	Group collaboration helped me overcome my fear of making mistakes.	85%	Peer interaction reduced anxiety and built self-assurance.
4	Project activities encouraged me to practice English more frequently, both in and outside of class.	83%	Increased language use and communicative practice.

Following the treatment, students in the experimental group completed a 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire measuring their perceptions of PBL in improving speaking confidence. The results showed an overwhelmingly positive response. In total, 90% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that PBL made speaking lessons more interesting and enjoyable. Meanwhile, 88% reported feeling more confident speaking in front of others after completing their project.

Additionally, 85% stated that group collaboration helped them overcome their fear of making mistakes, and 83% indicated that the project activities motivated them to practice English more frequently, both inside and outside the classroom. These findings highlight that PBL not only developed speaking skills but also fostered motivation, teamwork, and engagement.

Insights from Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with ten randomly selected students from the experimental group provided deeper insights into their experiences as indicated the table 4 as follows.

Table 4. Summary of Interview Findings from Experimental Group Students (n = 10)

Theme	Frequency (Students)	Representative Quotes	Interpretation
Increased Confidence through Practice	9/10	"I was nervous at first, but when we made the project video together, I became more confident because we practiced many times."	Repeated practice and collaborative preparation helped reduce anxiety and build confidence in speaking.
Authentic and Meaningful Learning Experience	8/10	"The project helped me speak without fear because I could share ideas about something real, not just from the book."	Students valued real-world, meaningful topics that made speaking tasks more engaging and relevant.
Motivation and Enjoyment	10/10	"It was fun and motivating because we worked as a team and helped each other."	Learners viewed PBL as enjoyable and socially supportive, fostering positive attitudes toward speaking activities.
Improved Collaboration and Teamwork Skills	7/10	"I learned how to work with my friends and share responsibilities for the project."	Group work in PBL enhanced communication and cooperation among peers.
Reduced Fear of Mistakes	8/10	"I didn't feel scared to speak anymore because we were practicing together."	Peer support and repeated practice reduced students' fear of making errors in English.

Several students also emphasized that working in groups created a supportive learning environment where peer encouragement and shared responsibility helped reduce anxiety during oral tasks. Although a few students reported initial challenges with time management and group coordination, they noted that clearer guidance during project stages would help address these issues. Overall, the qualitative feedback supported the quantitative findings, confirming that PBL positively influenced students' affective and behavioral engagement in speaking. Students consistently described PBL as a "fun and motivating" approach that made speaking practice feel more natural. As one student explained, "I was nervous at first, but when we made the project video together, I became more confident because we practiced many times." Another shared, "The project helped me speak without fear because I could share ideas about something real, not just from the book."

Comparative Analysis Between Groups

To assess how well Project-Based Learning (PBL) improved students' speaking abilities, both the experimental and control groups were given a test after the intervention. The analysis of the outcomes focused on five important aspects of speaking: how smoothly they spoke, how clear their pronunciation was, how correct their grammar was, how diverse their word choice

was, and how self-assured they seemed. The average scores of the two groups are compared in Table 5, which shows how much better the students who were taught using PBL did.

Table 5. Comparison of Post-Test Results between Experimental and Control Groups

Indicator	Maximum Score	Experimental Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Mean Difference	Description of Improvement
Fluency	5	4.4	3.2	+1.2	More natural flow and fewer pauses.
Pronunciation	5	4.1	3.4	+0.7	Clearer articulation and intonation.
Grammar Accuracy	5	4.0	3.3	+0.7	Fewer grammatical errors during speech.
Vocabulary Range	5	4.0	3.2	+0.8	Broader word choice and expressions.
Confidence	5	4.5	3.1	+1.4	Greater self-assurance and engagement.
Overall Mean	5	4.20	3.26	+0.94	PBL group outperformed control group across all areas.

The experimental group showed better results than the control group in every area measured; speaking smoothly, clear speech, correct grammar, word choice, and feeling sure of themselves. The average difference after the lesson between the two groups was 11.5 points, with the experimental class scoring higher. The most noticeable progress was in feeling confident and speaking smoothly, which implies that PBL gave good chances to speak in a real way and share their own thoughts. To confirm the statistical importance of the enhanced performance observed within the experimental group, a t-test was performed using independent samples to assess the post-test results from both the experimental and control groups. The central question of the analysis was to determine if the Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach led to a noticeably stronger enhancement in students' self-assurance in speaking compared to conventional instructional techniques. The specifics of the t-test outcomes are thoroughly laid out in Table 6.

Table 6. Independent Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	T (58)	p-value	Significance
Post-Test Total Score	Experimental	30	84.6	5.8	4.62	< 0.05	Significant
	Control	30	73.1	6.1			

Mean Difference: 11.5 points (favoring the experimental group)

The data's statistical breakdown revealed a noteworthy variation in the final test results between the two participant groups ($t(58) = 4.62, p < 0.05$). These outcomes give credence to the idea that learning via projects greatly boosts students' self-assurance in speaking when contrasted with standard teaching methods. To demonstrate how well the teaching method worked, we looked at the average final test grades for the group trying the new method and the

group using the standard method. The comparison you can see below emphasizes how much better one group did than the other overall.

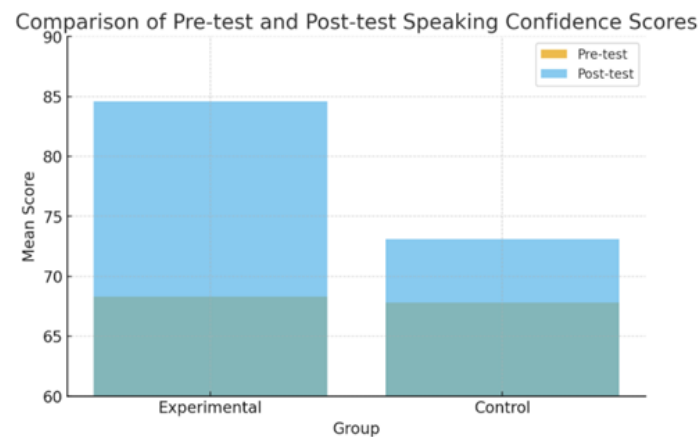


Figure 1. Post-Test Mean Comparison between Experimental and Control Groups

A bar chart would show: (1) The experimental group (mean = 84.6) scoring substantially higher than the control group (mean = 73.1); (2) Across rubric indicators, fluency and confidence demonstrate the largest performance gap. The statistical results reveal that the Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach significantly improved students' speaking performance compared to traditional instruction. The mean difference of 11.5 points and a t-value of 4.62 ($p < 0.05$) confirm that this difference was statistically significant. The largest gains in fluency and confidence indicate that PBL created an environment where students could practice speaking meaningfully, collaborate with peers, and express themselves freely. These outcomes align with findings by Bell (2010), and Hasanah & Widiati (2023), who reported that PBL enhances authentic communication, self-expression, and motivation in EFL learners. Overall, these results affirm the study's hypothesis that PBL significantly enhances speaking confidence and overall oral proficiency among Indonesian junior high school students.

Observational Findings

Classroom observations were carried out to scrutinize student actions and involvement while they learned, adding more support to the numerical results. The observation outcomes emphasize significant variations between the group using the experimental (PBL) method and the control group, especially regarding taking the first step, working together, and joining in generally. The thorough comparison is displayed in the table as follows.

Table 7. Classroom Observation Data for Experimental (PBL) and Control Groups

Observation Indicator	Experimental Group (PBL)	Control Group (Conventional)
Student initiative	87% of students-initiated tasks without teacher prompts	38% required teacher prompts to begin activities
Participation in discussions	High – 82% actively contributed to group discussions	Low-Moderate – 45% contributed minimally; participation often teacher-driven
Collaboration during preparation	Strong – students worked in teams, rehearsed presentations, and shared responsibilities	Weak – students worked individually; limited rehearsal or collaboration observed
Peer feedback	78% provided constructive peer feedback during practice sessions	29% offered feedback; often superficial or only when asked by teacher

Engagement level	Very High – students showed enthusiasm, asked questions, and displayed curiosity	Moderate – students attentive but passive; few questions asked
Self-regulation	81% demonstrated time management and task planning	42% depended on teacher reminders to stay on task
Teacher prompts needed	Minimal – only 23% of activities required teacher redirection	High – 71% of activities required prompting or guidance
Student affect/attitude	Excited and motivated, especially toward final project presentations	Neutral to slightly bored; limited visible enthusiasm

Data gathered from observations reveals that students within the project-based learning (experimental group) displayed consistently improved initiative, engagement, and collaborative efforts relative to the control group. These students took a proactive role in participating in classroom debates, practiced presentations as a group, and supplied useful feedback to each other, which demonstrated solid teamwork and communication abilities. Educators also observed the existence of reliable self-management habits, such as making plans for tasks, keeping track of time, and maintaining drive all through the stages of the project. These students showed obvious excitement and eagerness, particularly when getting ready to show off their finished projects. Conversely, the control group displayed reduced levels of engagement and seemed to work on their own more often, leaning heavily on guidance from teachers while doing speaking activities. Their involvement in conversations and peer feedback opportunities was lacking, and their general excitement regarding the lessons was clearly diminished. This difference highlights the encouraging impact of project-based learning on how involved students are behaviorally, and how independent they are in their own learning.

Summary of Findings

In summary, both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that Project-Based Learning effectively improved students' speaking confidence in Indonesian junior high school contexts. Students became more fluent, expressive, and willing to communicate in English. PBL also enhanced their motivation, teamwork, and positive attitudes toward learning. While minor challenges such as group management and time constraints were reported, the overall impact was highly beneficial (Kaharuddin, 2021a). The findings confirm that integrating PBL into EFL classrooms can foster not only linguistic competence but also affective growth, aligning with Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* vision for student-centered and innovative learning.

The present study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving the speaking confidence of Indonesian junior high school students. The findings clearly demonstrated that PBL had a significant positive impact on learners' confidence, fluency, and willingness to speak in English. Compared with the control group, the experimental group showed substantially higher post-test scores, indicating that student-centered, project-oriented tasks can foster communicative competence more effectively than traditional, textbook-based instruction. This result supports the premise that learning through projects enhances both linguistic performance and affective engagement, consistent with the principles of *Merdeka Belajar*, which emphasize active, collaborative, and meaningful learning experiences.

The improvement in speaking confidence observed in this study aligns with previous research emphasizing the value of task-based and experiential learning in EFL contexts. Studies by Thomas (2000) found that students engaged in hands-on projects displayed reduced anxiety and greater self-assurance during oral communication. Similarly, Bower et al. (2017) noted that when learners work collaboratively to produce tangible outcomes (such as presentations, videos, or performances), they develop a sense of ownership and competence that transfers to real communicative situations. The increase in students' mean post-test scores from 68.3 to 84.6 in the experimental group reflects this pattern, confirming that PBL effectively bridges the gap between practice and authentic language use.

The findings also highlight that PBL encouraged active participation and intrinsic motivation among learners. Questionnaire data revealed that over 85% of students felt more confident and enthusiastic about speaking English after completing their projects. This aligns with Matsuyama et al. (2019), who found that learner-centered methodologies empower students to take responsibility for their own learning, thereby reducing fear of failure. In this study, students described the project process as enjoyable and motivating, noting that it allowed them to express ideas freely, work collaboratively, and receive peer support. These affective benefits are essential in language learning, as confidence and motivation are strongly correlated with communicative success.

Moreover, the integration of PBL was found to enhance not only students' affective factors but also their linguistic development, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. Students in the experimental group demonstrated smoother speech, improved rhythm, and a broader range of expressions during the post-test presentations. These improvements can be attributed to the extended opportunities for authentic language practice and feedback cycles embedded in the PBL approach. Communicative practice provides "safe rehearsal spaces" where learners internalize structures and vocabulary without the high pressure of formal testing.

The qualitative findings from interviews reinforce the quantitative data by providing deeper insights into learners' experiences. Students referred to PBL as a "fun" and "creative" way to learn speaking. Many reported that repeated practice during project preparation and presentation stages helped them overcome nervousness and become more fluent. These reflections echo Maher et al. (2022), who found that project work enables students to engage emotionally and cognitively, thereby reducing speaking anxiety. Importantly, the collaborative element of PBL fostered peer interaction that served as both linguistic input and social support; two vital components for building communicative confidence (Kaharuddin, 2021b).

However, the study also identified several challenges associated with PBL implementation. Some students initially struggled with group management, time allocation, and equal participation. This finding is consistent with Scully & Kerr (2014), who cautioned that without structured teacher guidance, group projects may lead to unequal workload distribution. Moreover, while the majority of students demonstrated growth in confidence, a small number continued to exhibit speaking anxiety, suggesting that affective gains may vary based on personality and prior experience. Teachers, therefore, must balance autonomy with support, ensuring that projects remain inclusive and that students receive adequate scaffolding throughout the process.

Another critical issue relates to teacher readiness and training. Successful implementation of PBL demands that teachers shift from a directive to a facilitative role guiding inquiry, providing constructive feedback, and helping students reflect on their learning. Teachers require professional development in designing and managing projects that align with curricular goals and assessment standards. In this study, the teacher's active involvement in monitoring and mentoring students was essential in maintaining focus and quality. Without such mediation, projects risk devolving into unstructured activities with limited pedagogical value.

From a broader perspective, the findings underscore the pedagogical compatibility between PBL and Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* framework. Both prioritize creativity, collaboration, and learner independence as central competencies. The success of PBL in this context suggests that it can serve as a practical model for achieving the national goal of producing confident, communicative, and globally competent students. As Kemdikbud (2023) emphasizes, empowering students to become active participants in their learning is crucial for 21st-century skill development. By encouraging authentic communication through projects, PBL operationalizes this vision in the English language classroom.

This study acknowledges some constraints, even though it showed good results. The fact that only a small number of students from a single school took part in the research means that the results might not be applicable to everyone. Furthermore, the intervention was only six weeks

long, which might not be enough time to properly determine how well it improves speaking confidence or skill over time. Future studies ought to think about doing long-term research in several schools and locations to see how well the intervention can be sustained and expanded. It would also be helpful to investigate incorporating technology-based projects, like virtual collaborations or digital storytelling, to increase participation and availability even more.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this research clearly indicate that utilizing Project-Based Learning greatly enhances the self-assurance, drive, and skill level of Indonesian students in their early secondary education when it comes to speaking. These discoveries bolster the increasing amount of proof suggesting that PBL, when executed with suitable support and a well-organized framework, is capable of changing English as a Foreign Language classrooms into lively, communicative settings which foster linguistic competence alongside individual development. In the final analysis, PBL symbolizes not only a teaching technique but also a philosophical educational viewpoint that enables students to acquire knowledge via practical application, thought, and articulation, a methodology that strongly aligns with the fundamental concepts of impactful and caring language instruction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Project-Based Learning (PBL) effectively enhances speaking confidence among Indonesian junior high school students. Through engaging in project-based activities such as presentations, storytelling, and collaborative discussions, learners developed not only their linguistic competence but also their motivation, creativity, and willingness to communicate. Quantitative results showed significant improvement in students' speaking performance, while qualitative data revealed increased enthusiasm and reduced anxiety during oral tasks. These outcomes indicate that when students are actively involved in meaningful, goal-oriented projects, they gain a stronger sense of ownership and self-efficacy in using English. The study also aligns with the *Merdeka Belajar* framework, emphasizing autonomy, collaboration, and contextualized learning as key components of effective English instruction.

SUGGESTION

From an educational standpoint, this study highlights how crucial it is for educators to embrace supportive positions that lead students via investigation, teamwork, and thoughtful consideration, instead of depending exclusively on conventional, instructor-focused strategies. Educators need to create assignments that are culturally pertinent, suitable for the students' ages, and abundant in communicative opportunities to encourage genuine language application. Furthermore, educational institutions and individuals who establish educational guidelines need to promote the use of PBL by allocating sufficient time, instruction, and digital resources to guarantee long-term viability. Evaluations based on performance, like verbal presentations and collections of student work, are suggested to more precisely assess growth in communication abilities and self-assurance. Despite the fact that the research verifies the encouraging influence of PBL, obstacles such as time constraints and disparities in student involvement persist and ought to be handled through well-organized group interactions and encouraging commentary. To sum up, PBL provides an innovative method for instructing English language learners by nurturing self-assured, cooperative, and communicative individuals prepared to participate in actual circumstances.

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