



## **L2 SELF-CONFIDENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN VARIOUS ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES CLASSES**

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<https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v8i1.8706>

received 23 May 2024; accepted 27 September 2024

### **Abstract**

The study aims to investigate second/foreign language (L2) confidence of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners. It employed a survey method. This study involved 213 ESP learners from five different departments. Using descriptive statistics on SPSS, the study found a low-moderate level of L2 self-confidence among the participants. They reported interest in engaging in speaking activities in ESP classes. Nonetheless, they reported low L2 self-confidence regarding giving opinions and leading discussions in English and a low perception of their language competence in general. This low level of confidence could be attributed to the nature of ESP classes, which necessitate learners to study discipline-related vocabulary and language expressions, as well as several general aspects of L2 learning, such as pronunciation and grammar. Implications include encouraging ESP teachers to conduct more small-group-scale activities to boost learners' confidence, increase learner-talk, and provide a safe environment for less confident learners to engage in the activities. This study contributes to the understanding of Indonesian ESP learners' self-confidence, and this could inform future studies involving ESP learners in Indonesia. Future quantitative studies on L2 confidence could use more representative samples. It is also strategic to conduct a mixed-methods study involving ESP teachers to allow triangulation.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), second/foreign language (L2), self-confidence, survey

### **Introduction**

Second/foreign language (L2) learning is closely intertwined with a crucial element known as affective factors. These factors encompass emotions significantly impacting language acquisition (Dornyei, 2005). These factors would determine the eventual L2 achievement, varying among learners. The variety in L2 achievements among learners is primarily because language learning is inherently personal, making emotional aspects integral to the process (Lee & Lee, 2020). One of these affective factors is learners' self-confidence. Norman and Hyland (2004) stated that learners with higher L2 self-confidence would feel well-to-do, impacting their



involvement in the classroom. Conversely, if students experience a lack of L2 self-confidence, they will tend to be silent and withdraw from activities in the classroom (Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020).

L2 self-confidence is “the overall belief in being able to communicate in the L2 in an adaptive and efficient manner” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 551). As such, a confident learner is a learner who believes in their language abilities and is willing to speak without anxiety. In Iran, Ghonsooly et al. (2012) found that self-confidence contributed to willingness to communicate in language class. In line with that, a study involving Saudi Arabian undergraduate learners by Al-Hebaish (2012) reported that L2 self-confidence was positively and significantly associated with academic achievement in language classes. A relatively recent study in Afghanistan by Akbari and Sahibzada (2020) involved 1275 undergraduate learners. It was found that learners' L2 self-confidence influenced their learning in areas such as participation, level of interest in lessons, and seeking goals. These findings of the studies suggested that L2 self-confidence and L2 learning are intrinsically connected.

Furthermore, self-confidence is situational (Norman & Hyland, 2004). It means it is unstable and fluctuates, increasing and decreasing depending on the situation. A wide array of factors can influence L2 self-confidence either positively or negatively. A review study by Pasarlay (2018) found that across different studies, learners' anxiety and motivation and teachers' attitudes influenced learners' L2 self-confidence. The lower the learners' anxiety level, the higher their motivation to learn, and the more accommodating teachers were to individual learners, the higher learners' L2 self-confidence tended to be. A small-scale quantitative study involving English department students by Tridinanti (2018) also revealed that students with L2 self-confidence tended to have higher L2 achievement. Several studies also reported the connection between L2 self-confidence and enthusiasm (Nur, 2019; Yusriyah et al., 2021). Those who were confident likely exhibited enthusiasm to be engaged in L2 classes. In Bangladesh, a study by Alam et al. (2021) found that, besides learners' motivation as an internal factor, external factors such as social and environmental also played a part in influencing L2 self-confidence. Earlier, a study in Bangladesh by Jamila (2014) involving 83 L2 learners in Bangladesh suggested teachers' roles in improving learners' confidence through providing supportive environments to develop self-esteem and confidence where learners have opportunities to use L2 at ease.

Studies also identified several characteristics of learners possessing a high level of L2 self-confidence. A qualitative study in Indonesia by Nety et al. (2020) found that learners with L2 self-confidence were more courageous in engaging in risk-taking behaviours in a language class. Such learners were also reported to be more willing to speak in English class (Arung et al., 2019). They have a realistic picture of themselves and their talents, which motivates them to persevere in their endeavours (Suryadi, 2018). Learners with a high L2 confidence level believe in themselves and their language abilities and dare to take risks when using the language. That is why such learners tend to speak more and eventually attain more language classes (Listyani & Tananuraksakul, 2019).

Studies on L2 self-confidence seem to thrive in Indonesia, as seen from available studies in different segmentations of participants. Pebriyana (2017) conducted a small-scaled quantitative study involving 28 Indonesian junior high

school learners. The study reported that L2 self-confidence was negatively associated with anxiety and positively associated with speaking ability. In a senior high school context, Allo and Priawan (2019) involved 139 learners participants. In the study, the participants reported a moderate level of L2 self-confidence. In line with that, a study involving 69 junior high school learners by Febriyani et al. (2020) also reported moderate L2 self-confidence among learners. Furthermore, a large-scale quantitative study by Hamzah et al. (2020) involved 688 senior high school learners and found that their L2 self-confidence was generally moderate. The study further reported that personalised learning was attributed to higher L2 self-confidence. Involving vocational in-service teachers, an earlier study by Aritonang (2014) found that the teacher participants' confidence increased as they obtained positive responses from their students. As suggested by a study involving 156 learners from an English department by Fadilah (2018), the increase in L2 self-confidence would, in turn, lead to more willingness to communicate in L2, resulting in more active participation in L2 classes. These fairly extensive studies on L2 self-confidence may indicate many authors' acknowledgment of the role of L2 self-confidence in L2 learning.

### ***The present study***

The present study intends to answer this research question: "What is Indonesian students' level of L2 self-confidence in English for Specific Purposes classes?" This study was conducted based on several rationales. In the Indonesian context, home to one of the largest numbers of English learners in the world, studies specifically investigating L2 self-confidence have involved junior and senior high school students (Allo & Priawan, 2019; Febriyani et al., 2020; Hamzah et al., 2020; Muin & Aswati, 2019; Pebriyana, 2017), English department students (Fadilah, 2018; Tridinanti, 2018), and in-service teachers (Aritonang, 2014). For this reason, it is crucial to conduct a study investigating the L2 self-confidence of participants from a different background. In this case, involving English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students can be worthwhile, considering that ESP classes generally require learners not only to master the linguistic aspects but also the content-specific aspects in L2 based on the students' respective disciplines. In such a situation, ESP students' L2 self-confidence may play a critical factor in their L2 learning. For this reason, conducting a study on L2 self-confidence with ESP students as the participants is deemed strategic

## **Method**

### ***Research design***

The present study used a survey method to collect the data. For this purpose, the researcher distributed a paper-based questionnaire. Several rationales informed the selection of a quantitative method. First, the method matched the study's objective of portraying learners' L2 self-confidence. Second, the target participants, ESP learners, were relatively under-represented in the Indonesian context. Hence, it was deemed important to conduct a survey to find data that could map the phenomenon in general (Creswell, 2022). The findings could be a base on which further studies involving the under-research ESP learners on L2 confidence could be conducted.

### *Instrument*

The instrument used in this study to collect the data from the participants was paper-based questionnaires in Indonesian. Each questionnaire set consisted of an informed consent form, demographic questionnaire, and Likert-scale questionnaire on L2 self-confidence. The questionnaire on L2 self-confidence consisted of 11 items. Items 1 to 7 were adapted from the work of Gabejan and Medalia (2021), whilst items 8 up to 11 were adapted from the work of Abdullah et al. (2021). In each of the statements, five possible responses were available: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. The original questionnaires were translated into Indonesian to ensure that respondents understood the content and could answer the questionnaire according to their true circumstances without any possible language barrier. Before being distributed, the translated Indonesian version was back-translated into English to ensure no change in meaning during the translation process.

### *Participants*

The present study's participants were 213 students taking English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes in their respective departments at a major private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They were aged 18-26 with an intermediate level of English. These ESP students had passed three General English levels and were taking ESP classes in their respective departments. Of these participants, 116 (54.50%) were females, and 97 (45.50%) were males, suggesting a fairly balanced gender comparison. These participants were from five different ESP classes based on their departments. The details of the number of participants and departments are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Participants' Departments

No	Departments	Number of Students	Percentage
1.	Architecture	44	21%
2.	Accounting	44	21%
3.	Theology	44	21%
4.	Management	67	31%
5.	Information System	14	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>213</b>	<b>100</b>

### *Ethical considerations*

This study applied three ethical considerations: autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence. First, autonomy is a person's freedom to decide whether to participate (Gray, 2022). The implementation of autonomy in this study was through the researchers providing a consent form where the target participants could decide whether to participate after being informed of the purposes of this study (Geier et al., 2021). Second, non-maleficence is an attempt by researchers to avoid possible harm to participants (Israel & Hay, 2006). In this study, non-maleficence was conducted by maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities. Also, the participants only needed around five minutes to complete the questionnaire. Finally, beneficence is the principle that the study should benefit its participants (Thomas, 2013). Small gifts were provided for all the participating

students. Before the study, gatekeeper consent (Ramathan et al., 2016) was obtained from the heads of the departments managing each of the ESP classes and the respective ESP class teachers, allowing the researchers to distribute the questionnaires during class hours.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

The data collection was conducted from 6 February 2023 to 23 February 2023 by distributing paper-based questionnaires directly to the participants during ESP class sessions with prior permission from the heads of the departments and respective ESP class teachers. The researchers distributed the questionnaire and orally introduced themselves, the purposes of the study, and the expectations towards the target participants. The obtained questionnaire data were recorded into SPSS 25. The responses to Likert scale questionnaire items on L2 self-confidence were recorded as follows: "strongly agree" as 5 points, "agree" as 4 points, "neither agree nor disagree" as 3 points, "disagree" as 2 points, and "strongly disagree" as one point.

Before the questionnaire data were analysed to answer the research question of this study, the data were tested for validity using Pearson's correlation and internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients. Using Pearson's correlation, the researchers correlated all eleven items of L2 self-confidence with the overall construct of L2 self-confidence. The data revealed that all of them positively and significantly correlated with the overall construct,  $p < .05$ . These items also produced values in the range of .52 up to .73, higher than the critical value at .13 ( $N = 213$ ,  $df = 211$ ), indicating validity. The Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients were .86 and .86, respectively, indicating reliability. After the validity and reliability tests were conducted, the data were analysed to answer the research question. Descriptive statistics were employed to find the participants' level of L2 self-confidence. Data are presented in percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The present study intends to find Indonesian ESP student participants' level of L2 confidence by employing a survey method using paper-based questionnaires. Using descriptive statistics, the researchers found the participants' overall level of L2 self-confidence. From 12 items, each of the scorings ranged from 1-5; the possible range of the participants' L2 self-confidence was between 11 and 55. In this study, the composite mean score of the participants' responses was 31.30 ( $SD = 7.39$ ), indicating an average mean score of 2.84 (from 1 to 5). It suggested that the participants' L2 self-confidence was low to moderate. This finding was slightly similar to the findings of at least two previous studies involving Indonesian junior high school students (Allo & Priawan, 2019; Febriyani et al., 2020). These studies also found a moderate level of L2 self-confidence among their participants, though, in the study by Febriyani et al. (2020), the confidence level was from moderate to high. In the present study, the ESP classes that the participants took may also play a part in influencing why their confidence level was rather low. In the ESP classes, the participants may not only need to learn the linguistics aspects such as grammar but they were also required to master vocabulary specific to their disciplines. For example, whilst these students may be able to explain discipline-related content in

their first language, doing so in L2, as often required in ESP classes, was probably at another level, thus their slightly lower level of L2 self-confidence. For more detailed responses on each questionnaire item, the data can be observed in Table 2.

Table 2. The Participants' L2 Self-Confidence

No	Question	Mean	SD	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I like to speak English in English classes.	3.09	1.13	13 (5.60%)	99 (46.50%)	1 (0.50%)	96 (45.10%)	4 (1.80%)
2	I can discuss using English with native English speakers.	2.67	1.04	4 (1.90%)	70 (32.90%)	0 (0%)	129 (60.60%)	10 (4.70%)
3	I can speak English easily.	2.47	0.96	1 (0.50%)	55 (25.80%)	0 (0%)	144 (67.60%)	13 (6.10%)
4	I look forward to the opportunity to speak in English.	3.45	1.13	25 (11.70%)	121 (56.80%)	2 (1.00%)	59 (27.70%)	6 (2.80%)
5	I feel relaxed when speaking English.	2.62	1.06	7 (3.30%)	61 (28.60%)	0 (0%)	133 (62.40%)	12 (5.60%)
6	I really like to give opinions using English.	2.54	1.06	6 (2.80%)	57 (26.80%)	3 (1.40%)	133 (62.40%)	14 (6.60%)
7	I feel my English will continue to get better.	3.97	0.82	44 (20.70%)	144 (67.60%)	0 (0%)	25 (11.70%)	0 (0%)
8	I feel confident speaking English in front of so many people.	2.40	1.01	3 (1.40%)	50 (23.50%)	0 (0%)	137 (64.30%)	23 (10.80%)
9	I feel confident speaking English even though my English may be bad.	3.39	1.13	28 (13.10%)	108 (50.70%)	1 (0.50%)	74 (34.70%)	2 (1.00%)

10	I have always felt capable of being someone who leads discussions in English.	2.19	0.92	4 (1.90%)	30 (14.10%)	0 (0%)	147 (69.00%)	32 (15.00%)
11	I feel confident when it comes to doing English presentations individually.	2.51	1.13	8 (3.80%)	57 (26.80%)	2 (1.00%)	119 (55.90%)	27 (12.60%)

\* Percentages may not add up to 100 because they are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Items 1, 4, and 6 concern the participants' interest and enthusiasm for learning English. Item 1 produced a mean score of 3.09. 112 participants (52.10%) reported that they liked to speak English in English classes. Item 4 obtained a mean score of 3.45. 146 participants (68.50%) agreed that they looked forward to the opportunity to speak in English. Then, item 6 produced a mean score of 2.54. 63 participants (29.60%) really liked to give opinions using English. As suggested in the results on items 1 and 4, the participants seemed to be highly interested in English-speaking activities. However, as suggested in the results on item 6, most of them did not like to give opinions using English. This apprehension in giving opinions in English may be attributed to the perceived difficulty in developing arguments in L2 compared to other speaking activities that do not necessitate learners to build arguments. Discipline-related content in ESP classes may also play a part. Other than having to possess sufficient mastery of grammar, the participants likely needed sufficient content-specific vocabulary to build arguments related to their disciplines in L2. However, as seen in the results on items 1 and 4, the participants reported their enthusiasm for speaking activities in general. Many factors may influence this enthusiasm, such as instructional materials, teachers' performance, peers' attitudes, and the classroom environment (Nur, 2019). Teachers could further leverage this enthusiasm to facilitate more discipline-related speaking activities, allowing learners to become familiar with vocabulary and language expressions commonly used in their respective disciplines.

Items 2 and 3 concern the participants' confidence in their communication competence. Item 2 produced a mean score of 2.67. 74 participants (34.80%) agreed they could do a discussion in English with native English speakers. Item 3 produced a mean score of 2.47. 56 participants (26.30%) reported that they could speak English easily. Based on the mean scores, it can be said that the participants had a rather low confidence in their communication competence. As mentioned by Nety et al. (2020), confident learners dare to act. In this case, conversation or discussion with native speakers can be seen as one of the manifestations of this courage. It may seem easier when learners learn English and practice it with their countrymates. However, when they have to talk directly to native English speakers, it may pose a challenge (Vyomakesisri, 2017). To talk with native speakers, learners likely need more courage and language mastery. In the case of the present study, the

participants were not confident in their communication competence. Their rather low confidence in their communication competence may be triggered by anxiety, fear of making mistakes, shyness, or lack of discipline-related vocabulary. In the Indonesian context, where the use of English is typically constrained within classroom contexts, learners may have little opportunity to practice the language extensively. They may be afraid of 'incorrect' pronunciation when speaking. The participants' worry may give some kind of support to the fact that the majority of the participants in this study did not seem to feel confident communicating with native speakers. In this case, teachers can emphasise intelligibility, allowing learners to bring their linguistic and cultural backgrounds into L2 learning and practice, rather than emphasising native-speaker standards in ESP classes, in line with the global reality of English mentioned by Rose et al. (2020) in *Global Englishes* views.

Items 5, 8, 10, and 11 concern the participants' feelings toward their English-speaking skills. Item 5 produced a mean score of 2.62. 68 participants (31.90%) agreed they felt relaxed when speaking English. 53 participants (24.90%) agreed with the statement in item 8, indicating their confidence in speaking English in front of so many people. The item produced a mean score of 2.40. Item 10 produced a mean score of 2.19. Only 34 participants (16.00%) agreed that they always felt capable of leading discussions in English. Item 11 produced a mean score of 2.51, with 65 participants (30.60%) agreeing that they felt confident doing English presentations individually. Overall, the range of the mean scores of these four items was 2.19 – 2.62, considered low level. It means that the participants' feelings toward their English-speaking skills were generally more negative than positive. In this case, the participants of the present study may feel unready to speak in front of many people, lead discussions, and do presentations individually. Observed more carefully, the percentage of those who reported their confidence in delivering individual presentations, as seen in item 11, was higher than those who reported their confidence in leading discussions, as seen in item 10. This could be attributed to the impromptu aspects of discussions requiring spontaneous language production. In comparison, presentations in L2 classes are typically delivered with slides as the guidelines, learners can memorise their presentation to a certain extent, and the communication is largely one-way. Related to this, a qualitative study involving 23 Indonesian senior high school learners by Elmiati et al. (2022) indicated that learners' negative emotions in English class negatively influenced their process of acquiring and processing information, which later negatively impacted their L2 confidence. In the case of the present study, most learner participants may feel shy and unready to do language production spontaneously without sufficient preparation. This was also in line with the findings of several previous studies on willingness to communicate and anxiety, suggesting sufficient preparation and less audience as contributing factors to lowering their anxiety (Mak, 2011) and promoting more willingness to speak in L2 (Fernando & Subekti, 2023; Subekti, 2019).

Items number 7 and 9 concern the participants' confidence despite their limitations in their English competence. Item 7, 'I feel my English will continue to get better,' produced the highest mean score of all, at 3.97. As many as 188 participants (88.30%) agreed with the statement. Item 9 produced a mean score of 3.39, the third highest. 136 participants (63.80%) agreed that they felt confident



speaking English even though their English may not be so good. The mean scores of these two items suggested a moderate-high confidence level despite possible language competence limitations. Regarding this, one of the findings of a study by Pasarlay (2018) in Afghanistan suggested that learners' mindsets contributed to their confidence. Positive attitudes towards learning positively impacted confidence. The findings on the two items also suggested learners' optimism toward their L2 learning prospects. The prospect of English usage in the participants' future may have affected the findings on the moderate-high level of confidence in these two items. For example, the participants likely need English mastery as one of the requirements for certain jobs and to pursue international careers. This optimism could be channeled by giving ESP learners as many opportunities as possible to use L2 in situations they will likely encounter in their professional lives.

The present study has several implications for L2 instructions, especially ESP instructions. Generally, the participants' L2 self-confidence was low-moderate. Teachers can make several efforts to address this issue. For example, ESP class activities can be done primarily in small groups instead of on a whole-class scale. Activities in a small group allow less confident learners to speak up more as they merely need to do so in front of a much smaller audience. Small group activities can also optimise learner-talk, meaning class activities should facilitate individual learners to simultaneously produce language. This way, within the class session, all learners have opportunities to practice their L2, allowing the process of trial and error for each learner. Furthermore, ESP class learners learn L2 in the framework of their disciplines, which could pose a challenge for some learners, for example, due to more complex vocabulary and language expressions. For this reason, ESP instruction should be designed to facilitate relevance and nurture learners' positive perceptions of their competence. Each time the materials progress, the right amount of challenge may be the key to maintaining learners' confidence and interest in the lesson and their L2 learning.

## **Conclusion**

In the conclusion, key findings need to be highlighted. Using a survey to collect data, the researchers found that the learner participants had a low-moderate level of L2 self-confidence, with an average mean score of 2.84 in the range of 1 to 5. Participants seemed to be interested in speaking activities in English classes but reported low confidence, particularly in giving opinions and leading discussions using English. Their feelings on their language competence were generally negative as well. Nonetheless, the participants reported a moderately high confidence level in progressing despite their language limitations.

The present study contributes to understanding ESP learners' L2 self-confidence in the Indonesian context. Considering the scarcity of such studies involving these participants, this study could be a stepping stone to conducting further studies with more diverse methods on L2 self-confidence involving ESP learners. Furthermore, certain speaking activities, such as giving opinions and leading discussions in English, were found to be activities the participants were not confident in doing. This finding could inform ESP teachers to expose learners to more such activities to familiarise them with the activities, sharpen their skills, and broaden the ESP-related vocabulary in the process.

This present study has several limitations. First, this study only used a survey, so the data solely depended on the participants' self-reports. Second, even though involving ESP learners from different departments, this study was conducted at a university only. Hence, it is unpersuasive to claim that the findings can be generalised to a wider ESP context at Indonesian universities.

Informed by the findings and the limitations, several recommendations for future studies on L2 self-confidence in ESP contexts can be outlined. Quantitative studies involving ESP learners in Indonesia should have a more representative sample, considering the vast area and cultural diversity across its regions. For example, such studies can aim to involve learners from all major islands in the country. That is to increase the likelihood of generalisation. Researchers may also conduct explanatory sequential mixed-methods studies employing a survey followed by interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' L2 confidence. Such studies can delve into the possible explanations of the participants' responses to the survey. Furthermore, it is also strategic to involve ESP teachers in a study investigating the types of activities in ESP classes concerning boosting learners' L2 self-confidence.

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