

## EFL students' efficacy and anxiety in speaking English

**ABSTRACT** - The ability to speak English confidently remains a major challenge for many learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. While previous research has established links between speaking anxiety and self-efficacy, less attention has been given to how learners interpret their own accents and how these perceptions influence their willingness to communicate. This qualitative study explores the experiences of eight Acehnese EFL university students in relation to speaking self-efficacy, foreign language anxiety, accentedness, and intelligibility. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that participants differed considerably in how they defined successful spoken communication. Some regarded intelligibility and mutual understanding as the primary goals of speaking, whereas others associated successful communication with achieving a native-like accent. For many participants, fear of negative evaluation emerged as a significant source of anxiety, leading to avoidance of speaking opportunities and reduced confidence. The study also found that the pursuit of native-like pronunciation was often linked to broader concerns about social recognition, legitimacy, and status rather than communication alone. In addition, inconsistencies between teachers' stated emphasis on intelligibility and the continued use of native-speaker models contributed to uncertainty and heightened anxiety among learners. The findings suggest that speaking self-efficacy is shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by learners' perceptions of how their speech is evaluated by others. The study highlights the importance of creating classroom environments that value intelligibility, acknowledge linguistic diversity, and support learners in developing confidence as legitimate English users. Such approaches may help reduce anxiety and encourage more active participation in spoken communication.

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### Article History

Submitted: 24 February 2026

Accepted: 15 May 2026

Published: 31 May 2026

### Keywords

Non-native accent; Speaking self-efficacy; Foreign language anxiety; Accent perception; EFL learners

### Recommended APA Citation

Safrul, F. H., Habiburrahim, H., Orrell, J., Zainuddin, Z., Safrul, M. S. (2026). EFL students' efficacy and anxiety in speaking English. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 13(2), 677-692.

<https://doi.org/10.22373/s31k1t03>

## 1. Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly important in academic, professional, and intercultural settings. Among the four language skills, speaking is often regarded as the most visible indicator of language proficiency because it requires learners to process linguistic knowledge in real time while simultaneously managing social interaction (Akhter, 2021). For students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), however, speaking is frequently perceived as the most challenging skill to master. Limited opportunities for authentic communication, concerns about linguistic accuracy, and fear of making mistakes often reduce learners' willingness to speak and participate in classroom interactions.

Research has consistently shown that speaking difficulties are not solely linguistic in nature. Psychological factors play a crucial role in shaping learners' oral performance. Among these factors, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has received considerable attention because of its negative influence on language learning outcomes. Learners who experience high levels of speaking anxiety often avoid communicative situations, participate less actively in class, and report lower confidence in their ability to use English effectively (Fattahi & Cuocci, 2022; Song, 2024). As a result, anxiety can create a cycle in which limited speaking practice further reinforces learners' perceptions of inadequacy.

Another factor that influences learners' speaking experiences concerns how they perceive their own pronunciation. In recent years, pronunciation research has increasingly distinguished between accentedness and intelligibility. Accentedness refers to the degree to which a speaker's pronunciation differs from a particular reference norm, whereas intelligibility concerns the extent to which speech can be understood by listeners. Although these constructs are often treated as equivalent by language learners, empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Speakers may retain noticeable non-native accents while remaining fully intelligible to their interlocutors (Chau & Huensch, 2024). This distinction has encouraged scholars to question traditional assumptions that successful communication necessarily requires native-like pronunciation.

Despite these developments, many learners continue to evaluate their speaking ability through the lens of native-speaker norms. The desire to sound like a native speaker may influence how learners assess their own performance and may contribute to anxiety when they perceive a gap between their actual pronunciation and their idealized linguistic goals. Such perceptions are closely related to speaking self-efficacy, defined as learners' beliefs about their ability to perform speaking tasks successfully (Bandura, 1997). Learners with stronger self-efficacy beliefs are generally more willing to communicate, persist when facing difficulties, and interpret challenges as opportunities for growth. Conversely, learners with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid speaking situations and experience heightened anxiety.

Although the relationship between speaking self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety has been widely documented, relatively little is known about how these constructs operate within specific sociocultural contexts. In Aceh, where English is primarily learned through formal education and opportunities for authentic interaction remain limited, learners may face unique challenges in negotiating their linguistic identities and evaluating their speaking abilities. Previous studies have identified anxiety and low confidence among Acehnese learners

(Habiburrahim et al., 2020), yet the ways in which accent perception, intelligibility, and speaking self-efficacy interact in this context remain insufficiently understood.

To address this gap, the present study explores how Acehnese EFL university students perceive their own spoken English and how these perceptions shape their confidence and anxiety when communicating. By examining learners' lived experiences, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the social, emotional, and instructional factors that influence speaking self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions about pronunciation, learner identity, and communicative competence in contemporary EFL education.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) and speaking performance

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has long been recognized as one of the most influential affective variables in second and foreign language learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized FLA as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with language learning and language use. Unlike general anxiety, FLA emerges from the unique communicative demands of operating in a language that learners have not yet fully mastered. It commonly manifests through communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Among these dimensions, fear of negative evaluation has consistently been identified as a major obstacle to oral communication. Learners frequently worry about making mistakes, being judged by others, or appearing less competent than their peers. Such concerns often discourage students from participating in classroom discussions and limit opportunities for meaningful language practice. Research conducted across various EFL contexts has shown that learners with high levels of speaking anxiety tend to participate less frequently in communicative activities and report lower confidence in their speaking abilities (Okyar, 2023; Song, 2024).

The relationship between anxiety and speaking performance is particularly important because anxiety affects not only learners' emotions but also their cognitive processing. Excessive anxiety can disrupt attention, reduce working memory capacity, and interfere with language production. As a result, learners may struggle to demonstrate abilities that they otherwise possess. In contexts where opportunities for authentic English communication are limited, such as many EFL classrooms, anxiety may become a persistent barrier that prevents learners from gaining the experiences necessary to improve their oral proficiency.

Previous studies conducted in Aceh have similarly highlighted the role of anxiety in shaping students' speaking experiences. Habiburrahim et al. (2020), for example, reported that many Acehnese learners avoided speaking English because they feared making mistakes and receiving negative reactions from classmates or teachers. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety is not merely an individual psychological issue but is also influenced by the social environment in which language learning takes place.

## 2.2. *Speaking self-efficacy in EFL contexts*

While anxiety may discourage learners from engaging in communication, self-efficacy influences whether they believe they are capable of succeeding in communicative tasks. The concept of self-efficacy originates from Bandura's (1986, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory and refers to individuals' beliefs about their ability to organize and execute actions required to achieve specific goals. Rather than reflecting actual competence, self-efficacy concerns learners' perceptions of what they can accomplish under particular circumstances.

In language learning, speaking self-efficacy refers to learners' confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in the target language. Students who possess stronger self-efficacy beliefs are generally more willing to participate in speaking activities, persist when encountering difficulties, and recover more quickly from communicative setbacks. Conversely, learners with low self-efficacy often avoid speaking situations and interpret mistakes as evidence of personal inadequacy.

Bandura (1997) identifies four primary sources of self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological or affective states. Mastery experiences are generally regarded as the most influential source because successful performance strengthens learners' confidence in their abilities. Observing peers succeed in similar tasks may also increase learners' confidence through vicarious experience. Verbal encouragement from teachers and classmates can further reinforce positive beliefs, whereas anxiety and stress often undermine them.

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between self-efficacy and speaking performance. Learners who perceive themselves as capable speakers tend to achieve higher levels of oral proficiency and display greater willingness to communicate (Radjuni et al., 2024; Zhang, 2020). At the same time, numerous studies have reported a negative association between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety (Hermagustiana et al., 2021; Okyar, 2023). Learners who experience persistent anxiety frequently report lower confidence in their speaking ability, creating a cycle in which anxiety and self-doubt reinforce one another.

Although previous studies have documented these relationships, most have relied on quantitative approaches that measure the strength of correlations among variables. Consequently, less is known about how learners themselves interpret and experience the factors that shape their confidence and anxiety during spoken communication.

## 2.3. *Accent, intelligibility, and learner perceptions*

Pronunciation occupies a central position in discussions of oral communication because learners frequently associate speaking ability with how closely they can approximate native-speaker norms. However, contemporary pronunciation research has increasingly challenged this assumption by distinguishing between accentedness and intelligibility.

Accentedness refers to the extent to which a speaker's pronunciation differs from a particular linguistic norm, whereas intelligibility concerns whether listeners are able to understand the speaker's message. Although learners often assume that a strong accent inevitably reduces communicative effectiveness, empirical evidence suggests that the relationship between

accentedness and intelligibility is far more complex. Chau and Huensch's (2024) meta-analysis demonstrated that speakers may retain noticeable foreign accents while remaining highly intelligible to listeners. In other words, accented speech does not necessarily impede successful communication.

These findings have contributed to a broader shift in pronunciation pedagogy. Rather than emphasizing accent elimination, many scholars now advocate for intelligibility as the primary goal of pronunciation instruction (Hirschi & Kang, 2023; Kohn, 2022). This perspective aligns with contemporary understandings of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which recognize the global diversity of English users and challenge the assumption that native-speaker pronunciation represents the only legitimate model of successful communication.

Despite these theoretical developments, many EFL learners continue to evaluate their own speaking ability according to native-speaker standards. Learners may perceive their accents as deficiencies even when they communicate effectively. Such perceptions can have important psychological consequences because they shape how learners assess their competence and how they anticipate the reactions of others. The issue therefore extends beyond pronunciation itself and becomes closely connected to identity, confidence, and social evaluation.

From this perspective, accent is not simply a linguistic feature but also a social symbol. Learners' attitudes toward their own accents may influence whether they feel confident participating in communication or whether they fear negative judgment from others. Understanding how learners interpret their accents is therefore essential for understanding broader experiences of speaking anxiety and self-efficacy.

#### *2.4. The interplay between anxiety, self-efficacy, and accent perception*

Although foreign language anxiety, speaking self-efficacy, and pronunciation have often been studied separately, emerging research suggests that these constructs are closely interconnected. Learners do not evaluate their speaking ability solely on the basis of linguistic competence. Rather, they interpret their experiences through social and psychological lenses that influence how they perceive their own performance.

For many learners, concerns about pronunciation become a source of anxiety because pronunciation is highly visible during communication. When learners believe that their accents will attract criticism or signal linguistic inadequacy, they may become reluctant to speak even when they possess sufficient communicative competence. These experiences may weaken self-efficacy by reducing opportunities for successful communication and reinforcing negative self-perceptions.

At the same time, learners with stronger self-efficacy may be more resilient in the face of pronunciation-related challenges. They are more likely to interpret communication difficulties as normal aspects of language learning rather than as evidence of failure. Consequently, the relationship among anxiety, self-efficacy, and accent perception appears to be reciprocal and dynamic rather than linear.

Despite increasing scholarly interest in these issues, little research has explored how these relationships are experienced in specific sociocultural contexts such as Aceh. Existing studies

have documented anxiety and confidence issues among Indonesian EFL learners, yet relatively little is known about how Acehnese students themselves understand their accents, evaluate their communicative success, and negotiate the emotional challenges associated with speaking English.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of Acehnese EFL university students. Specifically, it explores how learners perceive the relationship between accent, intelligibility, speaking self-efficacy, and anxiety, and how these perceptions shape their willingness to communicate in English.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Research design*

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how Acehnese EFL university students perceive their speaking ability and experience anxiety when using English. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' perspectives, emotions, and interpretations rather than measure predetermined variables. Specifically, the research focused on how students make sense of their accents, evaluate their communicative competence, and negotiate feelings of confidence and anxiety during spoken interaction.

The study was informed by two complementary theoretical perspectives: Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997). These frameworks guided the development of the interview questions and informed the interpretation of participants' accounts. By examining learners' experiences in their own words, the study aimed to generate a contextually grounded understanding of the factors that shape speaking confidence among Acehnese EFL students.

#### *3.2. Participants*

Eight undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh participated in this study. All participants were from the 2023 cohort and identified themselves as Acehnese. Selecting students from the same academic cohort helped ensure a relatively similar educational background and level of exposure to English instruction.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling because the study sought individuals who could provide rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation. To be included, students had to meet two criteria. First, they had to be actively enrolled in the English Education program. Second, they had to report experiencing difficulties related to speaking confidence, speaking anxiety, or concerns about their English pronunciation. These criteria ensured that participants had direct experience with the issues explored in the study.

Rather than seeking statistical representation, participant selection was guided by the principle of information richness. The objective was to engage students whose experiences could illuminate the relationship between accent perception, speaking self-efficacy, and foreign language anxiety.

### 3.3. Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. This method was selected because it provided sufficient structure to address the research questions while allowing participants to elaborate on issues that were personally meaningful to them. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews also enabled the researchers to ask follow-up questions and explore unexpected themes that emerged during the conversations.

The interview protocol focused on participants' experiences of speaking English, their perceptions of their own accents, their confidence in communicating, and the factors that contributed to feelings of anxiety or comfort when speaking. Participants were also invited to reflect on classroom experiences, feedback from teachers and peers, and their personal goals regarding English pronunciation.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in a location chosen for the participant's comfort and convenience. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview to document contextual observations and preliminary reflections that could assist in data interpretation.

To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used throughout the study and all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach was selected because it offers a systematic procedure for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative data while remaining flexible enough to accommodate the exploratory nature of the study.

The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts to achieve familiarity with the dataset. During this stage, initial observations and reflections were recorded. The researchers then conducted open coding by identifying segments of text that were relevant to participants' experiences of speaking confidence, anxiety, accent perception, intelligibility, and classroom interaction.

After the initial coding process, related codes were grouped together to form broader categories. Through an iterative process of comparison and refinement, these categories were developed into themes that captured recurring patterns across participants' accounts. The themes were continuously reviewed against both the coded extracts and the complete dataset to ensure coherence and representativeness.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, coding decisions and theme development were discussed with the research supervisor throughout the analytical process. In addition, the researchers maintained reflective notes to document analytical decisions and to remain aware of potential assumptions that might influence interpretation.

The final themes were interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework and supported with direct quotations from participants. This process enabled the findings to remain closely connected to participants' lived experiences while also contributing to broader discussions of foreign language anxiety, self-efficacy, and pronunciation in EFL contexts.

#### 4. Findings

Analysis of the interview data generated three major themes related to students' experiences of speaking English: (1) differing views of successful communication, (2) anxiety and fear of evaluation, and (3) the influence of the learning environment on speaking confidence. Together, these themes illustrate how participants understood their own speaking abilities and how those understandings shaped their confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

##### 4.1. Differing views of successful communication

Participants differed in how they defined successful English speaking. For some students, successful communication meant being understood by others regardless of accent. For others, confidence was closely tied to the ability to speak with a native-like pronunciation. These differing perspectives appeared to influence how participants evaluated their own speaking performance.

##### 4.1.1. Prioritizing intelligibility

Several participants viewed intelligibility as more important than sounding like a native speaker. They considered communication successful when listeners could understand their intended meaning. NA explained "For my confidence, being understood is more important than sounding like a native speaker. As long as the listener understands what I am saying, that is enough." Similarly, AM expressed confidence in speaking English despite acknowledging the difficulty of developing a native-like accent "I am very confident in my accent. Having a proper accent is really hard, but the important thing is minimizing miscommunication."

Other participants shared similar views. AR described accent as a feature that distinguishes speakers rather than a weakness that must be corrected. Likewise, MA regarded accent as part of personal identity and emphasized effective communication over perfect pronunciation. For these participants, confidence appeared to stem from their ability to convey meaning rather than their ability to approximate native-speaker norms.

##### 4.1.2. Native-like pronunciation and social recognition

In contrast, several participants associated successful speaking with native-like pronunciation. Their accounts suggested that accent was connected not only to communication but also to perceptions of competence, credibility, and social recognition. UA explained "I think I would feel most confident if I sounded like a native speaker." When asked why, UA noted that Western accents were often perceived as more impressive and more likely to attract positive attention from others.

LM expressed a similar aspiration but described it as a source of pressure “Trying to sound like a native speaker makes me stressed and afraid of making mistakes.” For LM, confidence was frequently undermined by comparisons between her own speech and an idealized model of native pronunciation.

MN also linked native-like speech to professional expectations. As an English major, MN felt that speaking with a noticeable local accent could lead others to question their competence. Consequently, pronunciation became more than a communicative issue; it was tied to how participants believed they would be perceived by others.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that participants operated with different standards for evaluating their spoken English. While some focused primarily on intelligibility, others measured their performance against native-speaker ideals. These contrasting perspectives appeared to shape their confidence in different ways.

#### *4.2. Anxiety and fear of evaluation*

Across interviews, fear of negative evaluation emerged as one of the most common challenges affecting participants' willingness to speak English. Many participants reported worrying about how their pronunciation would be judged by classmates and lecturers.

##### *4.2.1. Avoiding speaking opportunities*

Several participants described remaining silent even when they knew the answer to a question. NA explained “Sometimes I choose not to speak because I worry whether my pronunciation is correct.” LM reported a similar experience “Even when I know the answer, I stay quiet because I am afraid people will judge my accent.” MN and HS also described avoiding classroom participation because they feared making pronunciation mistakes in front of others. These experiences indicate that concerns about evaluation often influenced participants' decisions to speak or remain silent during classroom activities.

##### *4.2.2. Physical responses to speaking anxiety*

For some participants, anxiety was accompanied by noticeable physical reactions. LM described becoming nervous when trying to produce what she considered a good accent “My heart beats faster and sometimes my voice shakes.” NA similarly reported becoming tense when speaking English in situations where she expected her pronunciation to be evaluated. These responses suggest that speaking anxiety was experienced not only cognitively but also physically, particularly when participants felt pressure to meet certain pronunciation expectations.

##### *4.2.3. Communication difficulties and feelings of embarrassment*

Several participants recalled situations in which communication difficulties affected their confidence. NA explained that having to repeat herself made her increasingly self-conscious about her speech. LM described feeling embarrassed when listeners struggled to understand her, while UA reported withdrawing from conversations after making mistakes that she perceived as

highly noticeable. For these participants, communication breakdowns were often remembered as discouraging experiences that reduced their willingness to participate in future speaking situations.

## 5. Discussion

This study explored how Acehnese EFL university students perceived their own accents and how those perceptions shaped their speaking confidence and anxiety. Three interrelated findings emerged from the data. First, participants differed in how they defined successful spoken communication. Second, fear of negative evaluation played a central role in shaping their willingness to speak. Third, classroom practices and teacher expectations influenced how students interpreted their speaking ability and pronunciation.

One of the most notable findings concerns the different standards participants used to evaluate their spoken English. Some participants viewed successful communication primarily in terms of intelligibility. For these students, speaking confidently did not require sounding like a native speaker; rather, it depended on whether listeners could understand their intended meaning. This finding is consistent with contemporary research on pronunciation and English as a Lingua Franca, which emphasizes communicative effectiveness over native-speaker norms (Kohn, 2022; Hirschi & Kang, 2023). Students who adopted this perspective generally reported greater confidence and appeared less concerned about minor pronunciation differences.

At the same time, several participants continued to associate successful speaking with native-like pronunciation. Their accounts suggest that pronunciation was not simply a linguistic concern but also a social one. Participants frequently linked native-like accents with competence, professionalism, and positive recognition from others. Similar observations have been reported in previous studies showing that learners often internalize native-speaker ideals even when they recognize that intelligibility is sufficient for communication. In the present study, this tension was particularly visible among participants who simultaneously acknowledged the importance of being understood while still aspiring to sound more native-like.

These contrasting perspectives highlight an important point: learners' confidence appears to be influenced not only by their actual speaking ability but also by the standards they use to judge their performance. Participants who evaluated themselves according to communicative effectiveness tended to report higher confidence, whereas those who compared themselves with idealized native-speaker models often expressed greater anxiety and dissatisfaction. This finding extends previous research on speaking self-efficacy by suggesting that learners' internal criteria for success may be just as important as their objective language proficiency.

Another important finding relates to the role of fear of negative evaluation. Across interviews, participants consistently described concerns about being judged by classmates and lecturers. Many reported remaining silent despite knowing the answer to classroom questions, while others described avoiding speaking opportunities altogether. These experiences align with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) conceptualization of foreign language anxiety, particularly the notion that learners may perceive speaking situations as socially threatening.

However, the present findings also suggest that anxiety was closely connected to pronunciation-related concerns. Participants rarely described being afraid of communication itself. Instead, they were more concerned about how their speech would be perceived by others. This distinction is important because it shifts attention from linguistic limitations to social perceptions of language use. For many participants, anxiety emerged when they anticipated negative judgments about their accents, mistakes, or speaking ability. Such concerns often persisted even when communication was successful.

The data also illustrate how repeated experiences of avoidance may contribute to lower speaking confidence over time. Several participants described choosing silence as a strategy to avoid embarrassment. Although this strategy may reduce immediate discomfort, it also limits opportunities for meaningful speaking practice. This finding resonates with Bandura's (1997) argument that confidence develops through successful experiences. When learners repeatedly avoid speaking situations, they may miss opportunities to build the confidence that comes from communicating successfully.

The classroom environment emerged as another influential factor in shaping students' perceptions of speaking ability. While participants generally reported that teachers encouraged clear communication, some also felt pressured by the continued use of native-speaker pronunciation models. This created uncertainty about what counted as successful speaking. On the one hand, students were told that being understood was important; on the other hand, the examples presented in class often reflected highly proficient native-speaker norms. For some learners, this apparent inconsistency contributed to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

Not all participants interpreted classroom experiences in the same way. Some viewed corrective feedback as a valuable opportunity for improvement, while others experienced feedback as discouraging, particularly when it occurred publicly. These differing responses suggest that the impact of feedback depends not only on its content but also on how it is delivered and interpreted by learners. Supportive feedback appears to strengthen confidence when it is perceived as constructive, whereas public correction may intensify anxiety for students who are already concerned about evaluation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that speaking confidence among Acehnese EFL students is shaped by a combination of linguistic, psychological, and social factors. Although pronunciation remains important, participants' experiences indicate that confidence is often influenced less by actual intelligibility than by concerns about how their speech will be evaluated by others. This observation has important implications for language teaching. Efforts to improve speaking confidence may be more effective when classrooms emphasize intelligibility, encourage risk-taking, and normalize accent diversity rather than implicitly promoting native-speaker norms as the sole indicator of successful communication.

The findings also highlight the need to view pronunciation as an issue of identity as well as communication. For many participants, accent was closely connected to how they wished to be perceived by others. Understanding this social dimension may help educators develop more supportive learning environments in which students feel comfortable using English without fearing that their accents diminish their legitimacy as speakers of the language.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored how Acehnese EFL university students perceived their accents and how those perceptions influenced their speaking self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety. The findings indicate that students differed in the standards they used to evaluate their spoken English. While some participants viewed successful communication primarily in terms of intelligibility and mutual understanding, others associated confidence with achieving a more native-like pronunciation. These differing perspectives shaped how participants assessed their own speaking ability and responded to communicative challenges.

The study also found that fear of negative evaluation played a significant role in participants' speaking experiences. Concerns about being judged by classmates and lecturers often led students to avoid speaking opportunities, even when they possessed the linguistic knowledge needed to participate. For several participants, pronunciation-related concerns were closely connected to feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. In addition, classroom practices appeared to influence students' confidence, particularly when there was a perceived mismatch between the stated goal of intelligible communication and the continued emphasis on native-speaker pronunciation models.

These findings suggest that speaking confidence is influenced not only by language proficiency but also by learners' beliefs about what constitutes successful communication and how their speech is evaluated by others. As a result, efforts to support oral communication in EFL classrooms should extend beyond pronunciation accuracy and address the psychological and social dimensions of language learning. Classroom environments that encourage participation, normalize linguistic diversity, and emphasize intelligibility may help learners develop greater confidence in using English.

This study is not without limitations. The findings are based on interviews with a relatively small group of students from a single university context and therefore cannot be generalized to all Indonesian EFL learners. In addition, the study focused on learners' self-reported experiences rather than direct observations of classroom interaction. Future research may benefit from involving participants from different educational settings, incorporating classroom observations, or adopting mixed-methods approaches to examine the relationship between accent perception, speaking self-efficacy, and foreign language anxiety more comprehensively.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to a growing body of research that highlights the importance of affective and social factors in language learning. By providing insight into the experiences of Acehnese EFL students, it demonstrates that learners' confidence in speaking English is shaped not only by what they can say, but also by how they perceive themselves as users of the language. Recognizing and supporting these perceptions may be an important step toward creating more inclusive and encouraging environments for English language learning.

## Declaration on the use of AI

The authors employed a range of AI-assisted tools, namely Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Deepseek to refine the academic tone and linguistic precision of the English text. The intellectual content of this manuscript is grounded in the authors' lived experiences as both learners and teachers of English.

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