



Available online at : <https://ojs.stkipgri-lubuklinggau.ac.id/index.php/JPP>

Jurnal Perspektif Pendidikan

| ISSN (Print) 0216-9991 | ISSN (Online) 2654-5004 |

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31540/jpp.v20i1.4146>

Penerbit : LP4MK STKIP PGRI Lubuklinggau



STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ADAPTIVE LEARNING MATERIALS IN ENHANCING SPOKEN ENGLISH AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: 11 April 2026
 Revised: 22 Mei 2026
 Available online: 6 Juni 2026

KEYWORDS

Adaptive Learning Material, Speaking, Student's Speaking Skill

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ABSTRACT

This study explores students' experiences in using adaptive learning materials to enhance their spoken English proficiency and self-confidence. This research employed a qualitative case study design involving twenty-seven students from the English Department of the University of PGRI Silampari, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective learning journals during a speaking course in which adaptive learning materials were implemented. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns in students' experiences. The findings reveal three major themes. First, adaptive learning materials increased students' engagement in speaking activities by providing contextualized and interactive tasks. Second, the materials facilitated gradual improvement in students' speaking abilities through structured practice and collaborative interaction. Third, students reported significant improvement in their self-confidence as the adaptive tasks reduced anxiety and encouraged active participation. The study highlights the pedagogical potential of adaptive learning materials in supporting both linguistic competence and affective development in EFL speaking classrooms. The findings contribute to the growing body of research on learner-centered instructional design and provide practical implications for lecturers seeking to improve speaking instruction in higher education contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become an essential skill for university students in the era of globalization and international academic collaboration. English proficiency, particularly speaking ability, plays a critical role in enabling students to participate in academic discussions, professional communication, and intercultural interactions. However, many students in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts encounter significant challenges in developing spoken English proficiency due to linguistic limitations and psychological barriers such as anxiety and lack of confidence (MacIntyre & Wang, 2022). In Indonesian higher education, speaking courses are designed to develop students' communicative competence, yet many learners still struggle to express their ideas fluently and confidently.



Previous studies have indicated that students often hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes or being negatively evaluated by peers and lecturers (Putri & Sari, 2023). These issues highlight the importance of implementing effective teaching strategies that can support students' speaking development while simultaneously fostering a supportive learning environment. One approach that has gained increasing attention in recent years is the use of adaptive learning materials. Adaptive learning refers to instructional resources that adjust learning content, tasks, and strategies according to students' learning needs, abilities, and pace. In language education, adaptive materials may include differentiated speaking activities, contextualized communication tasks, and interactive learning resources that allow learners to practice speaking in meaningful situations (Holmes & Tuomainen, 2024).

The implementation of adaptive learning materials can address the diverse needs of learners in EFL classrooms. Students often possess different levels of language proficiency and learning styles, which require flexible instructional approaches. Adaptive materials enable lecturers to provide varied learning pathways that support both struggling learners and more advanced students (Kumar & Widodo, 2022). By offering gradual levels of task difficulty and opportunities for collaborative interaction, adaptive learning environments can enhance students' engagement and motivation in speaking activities.

In addition to linguistic competence, affective factors such as self-confidence play a crucial role in successful language learning. Self-confidence influences students' willingness to communicate and their readiness to participate in speaking tasks. Learners with higher levels of confidence tend to engage more actively in classroom interactions, while those with low confidence often avoid speaking opportunities (Zarrinabadi & Pawlak, 2023). Therefore, instructional materials that create supportive learning experiences can help students develop greater confidence in using English. Recent research has emphasized the importance of learner-centered instructional design in language teaching. Adaptive learning materials provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful communication activities that reflect real-life contexts. Such materials encourage students to interact with peers, share ideas, and gradually develop their speaking competence through collaborative learning (Widodo, 2022).



Although adaptive learning has been widely discussed in educational research, limited studies have explored how students experience adaptive speaking materials in EFL classrooms. Understanding students' perceptions and experiences is essential because it provides insights into how instructional approaches influence their learning processes and emotional responses. Qualitative research methods are particularly suitable for exploring these experiences in depth.

This study aims to: (1) Explore students' experiences in using adaptive learning materials in a speaking class. (2) Examine how adaptive learning materials support the development of students' spoken English skills. (3) Investigate how adaptive learning materials influence students' self-confidence in speaking English.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on students' experiential perspectives regarding adaptive speaking materials in Indonesian higher education contexts. While many studies focus on quantitative outcomes such as test scores, this study provides an in-depth qualitative exploration of how adaptive materials influence both linguistic development and affective factors, particularly self-confidence in speaking English.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) involves instructional practices designed to help learners acquire English in contexts where the language is not commonly used for daily communication. In EFL settings, learners often rely heavily on classroom instruction as their primary source of language exposure. Consequently, effective teaching strategies play a critical role in facilitating language acquisition (Richards, 2023). Recent developments in TEFL emphasize communicative and learner-centered approaches that encourage students to actively participate in language use rather than merely memorizing grammatical structures (Nation, 2022). Communicative language teaching promotes authentic interaction and meaningful communication as essential components of language learning.

In addition, contemporary TEFL research highlights the importance of integrating technology and innovative learning materials into language instruction. Adaptive learning environments and digital platforms have been increasingly adopted to support personalized learning experiences (Godwin-Jones, 2022). These approaches allow educators to design learning activities that address students' diverse needs and promote greater engagement in language learning processes.



Teaching Speaking

Speaking is one of the most important productive skills in language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information effectively. In EFL classrooms, speaking instruction aims to develop students' ability to express themselves fluently, accurately, and confidently (Burns, 2023). However, many learners face difficulties when attempting to speak in English. These challenges often include limited vocabulary, grammatical uncertainty, pronunciation difficulties, and psychological barriers such as anxiety and lack of confidence. Such factors can significantly affect students' willingness to communicate (MacIntyre & Wang, 2022).

Effective speaking instruction requires the integration of interactive and communicative activities that provide opportunities for students to practice oral communication. Activities such as role plays, group discussions, presentations, and problem-solving tasks allow learners to engage in meaningful interaction while developing their speaking competence (Goh & Burns, 2023). Furthermore, supportive classroom environments are essential for encouraging students to participate actively in speaking activities. Teachers play an important role in creating positive learning environments where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas without fear of making mistakes. Providing constructive feedback and encouraging peer collaboration can also enhance students' confidence and motivation in speaking English (Pawlak, 2022).

Adaptive Learning Materials

Adaptive learning materials refer to instructional resources that are designed to adjust to learners' individual needs, abilities, and learning preferences. These materials aim to provide personalized learning experiences that allow students to progress at their own pace while receiving appropriate levels of support (Holmes & Tuomainen, 2024). In language education, adaptive learning materials often include differentiated tasks, interactive exercises, and contextualized communication activities that help learners develop language skills gradually. Such materials enable students to engage in learning activities that match their proficiency levels and learning goals.

Recent research highlights the potential of adaptive learning systems to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. According to Kumar and Widodo (2022), adaptive instructional materials can support language learners by providing flexible learning pathways and personalized feedback. These features help students overcome learning difficulties and maintain motivation



throughout the learning process. Adaptive materials also promote collaborative learning experiences. By incorporating pair and group activities, these materials encourage students to interact with peers and practice speaking in meaningful contexts. Collaborative learning environments allow students to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and develop communication strategies (Zarrinabadi & Pawlak, 2023).

Another important aspect of adaptive learning materials is their ability to address affective factors in language learning. Students often experience anxiety when speaking a foreign language, particularly in formal classroom settings. Adaptive materials that provide gradual task progression and supportive feedback can help reduce learners' anxiety and increase their self-confidence (Godwin-Jones, 2022). Therefore, integrating adaptive learning materials into speaking instruction may provide a promising strategy for enhancing both students' linguistic competence and psychological readiness to communicate in English.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore students' experiences in using adaptive learning materials in a speaking class. Qualitative research allows researchers to investigate participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations in depth within a specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2022). A case study approach was considered appropriate because the research focused on a particular group of students who experienced the implementation of adaptive learning materials during a speaking course. The design enabled the researcher to obtain rich and detailed information about how students perceived the learning process and how the instructional materials influenced their speaking development and confidence.

Data were collected through multiple sources, including interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals. The use of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through data triangulation. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying patterns and themes that emerge from the data through systematic coding and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis aimed to uncover key themes related to students' experiences with adaptive learning materials and their impact on spoken English development and self-confidence.



The participants of this study were twenty-seven students from the English Department of the University of PGRI Silampari, Indonesia. The students were enrolled in a speaking course where adaptive learning materials were implemented as part of the instructional activities. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they had direct experience with the learning materials used in the study. The students represented varying levels of speaking proficiency, which provided diverse perspectives on the learning process. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the research and shared their experiences regarding how the adaptive learning materials influenced their speaking practice and confidence.

The data collection process was conducted over six weeks during the speaking course. The researcher first implemented adaptive learning materials that included contextual speaking tasks, pair discussions, role-play activities, and collaborative presentations. These activities were designed to gradually increase students' speaking practice and encourage interaction. The first step involved classroom observations to examine how students engaged with the adaptive learning materials. Field notes were taken to document students' participation, interaction patterns, and responses to speaking activities. The second step involved conducting semi-structured interviews with selected participants. The interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions of the learning materials, their experiences during speaking activities, and their views on how the materials influenced their confidence in speaking English. The third step involved collecting students' reflective journals. Students were asked to write short reflections about their learning experiences, challenges, and improvements during the speaking course.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following several stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). First, all interview transcripts and written reflections were carefully read to gain an overall understanding of the data. Second, key phrases and statements related to students' experiences were coded. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader themes representing patterns in the data. Finally, the themes were interpreted to explain how adaptive learning materials influenced students' speaking development and self-confidence.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the collected data revealed several important themes related to students' experiences in using adaptive learning materials in a speaking class. Based on thematic analysis of interview transcripts, classroom observations, and students' reflective journals, three major themes emerged: (1) increased engagement in speaking activities, (2) improvement in spoken English competence, and (3) development of students' self-confidence. These themes illustrate how adaptive learning materials influenced both cognitive and affective aspects of students' learning experiences.

Increased Engagement in Speaking Activities

One of the most prominent findings of the study was that adaptive learning materials increased students' engagement in speaking activities. Many participants stated that the learning materials provided structured and interactive tasks that encouraged them to participate more actively in classroom discussions. During the classroom observations, students were frequently involved in pair discussions, role-play activities, and small group conversations. These tasks were designed with varying levels of complexity so that students could gradually develop their speaking skills. Such adaptive activities allowed students with different proficiency levels to participate according to their abilities.

The students explained:

“The speaking tasks are easier to follow because they start from simple conversation and then become more complex. It makes me feel more comfortable to speak in English.”

(Student 7)

Another student mentioned that the learning materials made the classroom atmosphere more interactive:

“Usually I feel nervous when speaking English, but these activities make us work with friends. It feels more relaxed and interesting.” (Student 12)

These findings support recent research suggesting that adaptive learning environments can increase learner engagement by providing flexible and personalized learning opportunities (Holmes & Tuomainen, 2024). When students are exposed to interactive tasks that match their abilities, they are more likely to participate actively in the learning process. Furthermore, collaborative learning



activities included in the adaptive materials encouraged peer interaction and communication. Students frequently exchanged ideas with their peers during speaking tasks, which created opportunities for authentic communication. This aligns with the communicative language teaching approach that emphasizes meaningful interaction as a key component of language learning (Richards, 2023). Therefore, the findings indicate that adaptive learning materials can create a more engaging learning environment that supports active participation in speaking activities.

Improvement in Spoken English Competence

Another important theme emerging from the data was the improvement of students' spoken English competence. Participants reported that the adaptive learning materials helped them develop their vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency through continuous practice. Many students mentioned that the materials provided step-by-step speaking activities that gradually increased the level of difficulty. This gradual progression enabled them to practice basic expressions before moving to more complex speaking tasks such as presentations and discussions. One student stated: "The materials help me learn new vocabulary and expressions that I can use when speaking. I feel my speaking becomes more fluent after practicing with these tasks." (Student 3). Similarly, another participant commented: "Before this class, I often stopped speaking because I did not know what to say. Now I have more ideas and expressions to continue the conversation." (Student 15).

Classroom observations also showed noticeable improvement in students' participation and speaking performance. At the beginning of the course, several students appeared hesitant to speak. However, after several weeks of practicing with adaptive speaking tasks, many students demonstrated greater fluency and confidence during group discussions and presentations. These findings support the argument that frequent speaking practice is essential for developing oral communication skills (Burns, 2023). Adaptive learning materials that provide structured opportunities for practice can facilitate the development of linguistic competence.

In addition, adaptive materials allow lecturers to design tasks that accommodate different levels of language proficiency. According to Kumar and Widodo (2022), adaptive learning environments enable students to learn at their own pace while receiving appropriate support. This flexibility helps learners overcome difficulties and gradually build their speaking competence. Therefore, the



improvement in students' speaking ability observed in this study indicates that adaptive learning materials can effectively support language development in EFL speaking classes.

Development of Students' Self-Confidence

The third and most significant theme identified in the study was the development of students' self-confidence in speaking English. Many participants reported that the adaptive learning materials helped them feel more confident when expressing their ideas in English. Several students explained that the structured and supportive learning activities reduced their fear of making mistakes. Because the tasks were designed progressively, students felt more prepared to speak during classroom discussions. One student explained: "At first I was afraid to speak because I worried about making mistakes. But the activities help us practice step by step, so now I feel more confident." (Student 9). Another participant stated: "Working with friends in small groups helps me feel more confident. We support each other when speaking English." (Student 21).

Students' reflective journals also indicated that the supportive classroom environment played an important role in building their confidence. Many participants mentioned that the lecturer encouraged them to speak without focusing excessively on grammatical errors. Instead, the emphasis was placed on communication and idea expression. This finding aligns with recent studies highlighting the importance of affective factors in language learning. Self-confidence is a key determinant of learners' willingness to communicate in a foreign language (Zarrinabadi & Pawlak, 2023). When students feel confident, they are more likely to participate actively in speaking activities and take risks in expressing their ideas.

Adaptive learning materials contribute to this process by creating a supportive learning environment where students can gradually develop their speaking skills. By providing structured guidance and collaborative learning opportunities, these materials help reduce anxiety and encourage students to communicate more freely. Furthermore, the integration of interactive tasks and peer collaboration fosters a sense of community in the classroom. Students feel more comfortable sharing their ideas when they perceive the learning environment as supportive and non-threatening. Overall, the findings demonstrate that adaptive learning materials play a significant role not only in improving students' linguistic competence but also in enhancing their psychological readiness to communicate in English.



In summary, the findings of this study reveal that adaptive learning materials have a positive impact on students' speaking learning experiences. The materials increased students' engagement in speaking activities, improved their spoken English competence, and strengthened their self-confidence. These results highlight the importance of implementing learner-centered instructional strategies in EFL speaking classes. By providing flexible and interactive learning activities, adaptive materials can support students' language development while addressing affective factors that influence communication.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' experiences in using adaptive learning materials to enhance spoken English and self-confidence in an EFL speaking classroom at the University of PGRI Silampari. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research examined how twenty-seven English department students perceived and experienced adaptive speaking materials implemented during a speaking course. The findings revealed that adaptive learning materials provided meaningful learning opportunities that supported both linguistic development and psychological readiness to communicate in English. First, the materials increased students' engagement in speaking activities. The structured and interactive tasks encouraged active participation and facilitated collaborative learning among students. Through pair discussions, role plays, and group activities, students were able to practice speaking in meaningful contexts.

Second, the adaptive materials contributed to the improvement of students' spoken English competence. The gradual progression of speaking tasks allowed students to develop vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency in a supportive learning environment. Regular practice and structured guidance enabled students to express their ideas more effectively during classroom interactions. Third, and most importantly, the use of adaptive learning materials significantly enhanced students' self-confidence in speaking English. Many participants reported that the supportive classroom atmosphere and collaborative activities reduced their anxiety when speaking a foreign language. As students gained more opportunities to practice and receive encouragement from peers and the lecturer, they gradually became more confident in expressing their ideas.

These findings suggest that adaptive learning materials can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for improving speaking instruction in EFL contexts. By accommodating diverse learner



needs and providing flexible learning pathways, adaptive materials enable students to engage more actively in the learning process. In addition, the integration of collaborative and communicative activities helps foster a positive learning environment that supports students' confidence and motivation. The study contributes to the growing body of research on adaptive learning in language education by providing qualitative insights into students' learning experiences. Understanding students' perspectives is important for designing instructional materials that address both cognitive and affective aspects of language learning.

However, this study was conducted with a limited number of participants in a single university context. Future research may investigate the effectiveness of adaptive learning materials across different educational settings or combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine their impact on students' speaking performance more comprehensively. Overall, the integration of adaptive learning materials in speaking instruction offers promising opportunities for enhancing EFL learners' communication skills and confidence in using English.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31540/jpp.v20i1.4146>

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