

# Self-Talk Strategy: A Qualitative Investigation in Building English Speaking Skill

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## Abstract

This study investigates the types of self-talk and students' perceptions of the impact of using self-talk in building their English-speaking skills. By using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations with six second-semester students of the English language education program at Universitas Hamzanwadi. The findings reveal that students used two types of self-talk strategies to build their English-speaking skills, which are instructional self-talk and motivational self-talk. Students viewed self-talk as an effective strategy to support technical preparation for speaking, reduce anxiety, and increase self-confidence. The benefits of using self-talk include reduced anxiety and nervousness, increased confidence, motivation, fluency, and skills, as well as creating space for self-practice. Thus, it can be concluded that self-talk is proven to be a solution for regulating affective and cognitive aspects in order to build English speaking skills.

**Keywords:** Self-Talk Strategy; Speaking Skills; Perceptions; EFL Learners

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary age of globalization, speaking skills are very important, especially in the context of education. Speaking not only encourages students to express their ideas, thoughts, or feelings, but also a fundamental ability to build relationships with others (Ayni et al., 2025). However, despite the significance of speaking, students typically encounter two primary categories of barriers, they are linguistic and non-linguistic barriers (Anh Tram, 2020). In practice, many students encounter barriers, not only due to limited vocabulary or grammatical errors. These barriers are compounded by anxiety resulting from low affective factors such as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes (Radjuni et al., 2024). Consequently, they are reluctant to participate in practice sessions due to concerns about social stigma or discomfort when public speaking, which can generally affect the level of participation and outcomes in speaking activities (Andriani et al., 2024). Therefore, linguistic and non-linguistic barriers certainly affect the quality of spoken language production, causing individuals to appear less confident even though they actually have better abilities.

Based on preliminary observations through informal discussions with several second-semester students of the English language education program at Universitas Hamzanwadi, it was found that limited vocabulary and anxiety can be common problems for language students, especially when it comes to speaking. Many of them have quite good passive skills such as listening and reading, but have significant difficulties in expressing themselves orally due to a lack of confidence. Lack of confidence triggers anxiety, insecurity, and renders speaking activities unsatisfactory (Yunus et al., 2023). This dynamic often makes second-semester students feel less enthusiastic to participate in sentence creation and initiating conversations in the classroom. In addition, data from the EF English Proficiency Index (2024) supports these findings by providing a more comprehensive overview of the general state of English proficiency. As a

result, Indonesia ranks 80th out of 116 countries with an average score of 468, indicating that Indonesia falls into the Low Proficiency category. Furthermore, Indonesia also shows that English proficiency is below average, particularly in speaking skills, ranking 12th out of 23 countries in Asia. Geographically, Java takes the top position with an average score of 492, followed by Nusa Tenggara in second position with an average score of 474. Specifically, Mataram ranks 10th with a score of 484, lower than metropolitan cities such as Surabaya, Jakarta, Bandung, and others.

Realizing the urgency of these linguistic and non-linguistic barriers, EFL/ESL teachers and students highlight the importance of implementing and understanding various appropriate strategies to help students overcome foreign language anxiety (FLA) and assist them in mastering English fluently during the foreign language learning process (Atifnigar, 2024). One of the alternative strategies that can be used to help students overcome these barriers is self-talk. Self-talk is a cognitive activity when a person conducts a dialog within himself (Azka et al., 2023). Self-talk is also defined as a statement made by an individual to himself, either in his own mind or aloud, which are considered as a way to interpret their emotions and perspectives, manage and adjust their assessments and cognitions, and provide internal support and guidance for themselves (Humairoh et al., 2021). Thus, self-talk is an ideal strategy for individuals to train themselves to improve self-confidence or prepare their thoughts and emotions before expressing ideas, experiences, and self-reflections without worrying about being judged by others.

According to Meriahna et al. (2022) self-talk is divided into two types, which are positive self-talk and negative self-talk. In the context of speaking skills, the use of positive self-talk has a significant impact, as it can increase enthusiasm to achieving positive change by encouraging constructive action (Mulawarman et al., 2024). Moreover, positive self-talk also can increase students' self-confidence (Wulandari, 2022). On the other hand, negative self-talk can cause emotional issues, such as triggering bad moods, stress, depression, and a decline in work quality (Srianturi, 2022). Therefore, understanding the difference between positive and negative self-talk is essential to enable students to choose and manage the right self-talk strategies to achieve their goals with more confidence.

There are several relevant studies that effectively apply self-talk as a strategy to improve English speaking skills by overcoming speaking difficulties caused by lack of confidence and anxiety. The first study by Khairunnisa and Hariyono (2022) who found that there is significant progress in improving students' speaking skills after applying self-talk strategies. The second study was conducted by Alnaeem (2025). This indicated that self-talk has the potential to serve as a solution for the majority of participants who experienced high PSA and the results indicated a correlation between self-talk and anxiety reduction, especially with self-reinforcement. The third study is a thesis from Afrillah (2022) who found a substantial improvement in students' speaking skills after the implementation of self-talk strategies.

Based on the findings of previous studies, it has been confirmed that the strategy is suitable and effective for use in teaching speaking skills. However, this study certainly has similarities and differences when compared to the studies mentioned above. This study and previous studies share similarities in highlighting self-talk strategies to improve English speaking skills, targeting senior high school/vocational school students and especially at the university level. In contrast, the main difference was found in the research method. This study adopts a qualitative method focusing on the processes and experiences of students, as well as exploring the types of self-talk used when facing certain conditions. Meanwhile, previous studies used quantitative methods focusing on measuring the effectiveness of self-talk as a strategy for improving speaking skills at secondary and higher education levels. In addition, this study differs in terms of subjects and location, specifically targeting second-semester students of the English

language education program at Universitas Hamzanwadi, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province.

Rooted in the background information presented above, the researcher highlights the fact that self-talk plays an important role as a form of personal dialogue to support and facilitate students in building English speaking skills without fear of facing linguistic and non-linguistic barriers. However, despite many studies investigating the effectiveness and potential benefits of self-talk, understanding of what self-talk strategies are commonly used and how students perceive the impact of these strategies are still limited. This gap in knowledge is particularly evident in attempts to explore information about students' experiences, including their feelings and challenges, when engaging in self-talk practices. Accordingly, the researcher is interested in focusing the study on the title *Self-Talk Strategy: A Qualitative Investigation in Building English Speaking Skills* to explore further information about students' experiences in applying self-talk as a strategy in building their English-speaking skills, as well as identifying the types of strategies they use. In light of the limited scope of the study, the research questions are formulated into:

1. What self-talk strategies do students use to build their English-speaking skills?
2. How do students perceive the impact of self-talk on building English speaking skills?

## **METHOD**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, specifically focusing on a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023) qualitative research is an approach used to investigate and understand the meaning of social or personal phenomena as expressed by individuals or groups. Furthermore, qualitative descriptive is a methodological approach that aims to describe a series of events or experiences in a simple and comprehensive manner (Sandelowski, 2000, as cited in Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Therefore, this qualitative research focused on exploring the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of students related to the phenomenon being studied in a simple and comprehensive manner. In the context of this study, the phenomenon being studied is how students perceive self-talk strategies in building English speaking skills. Accordingly, this approach was ideal for exploring a deeper understanding and information about students' experiences in applying self-talk as a strategy for building English speaking skills, including the types of self-talk they used based on their perspectives.

Furthermore, this study used purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a technique for selecting samples based on specific characteristics or criteria that are relevant to the purpose of the study (Sugiyono, 2022). This technique was chosen to facilitate the selection of participants with the criteria of second-semester students of the English language education program at Universitas Hamzanwadi who actively use self-talk strategies in building English speaking skills. The researcher distributed questionnaires via Google Forms to determine the intensity of self-talk among students. Then, based on the results of the questionnaire analysis, the researcher purposively selected six students from class B who met the criteria with the highest intensity of self-talk as the main informants for the more in-depth data collection phase. This study involved three data collection techniques, they were questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observations. These techniques were used to collect primary data through several informants who meet the criteria specified in the research requirements. In this study, a Likert scale questionnaire and open-ended questions were used to obtain a preliminary overview of how self-talk strategies are used and how they impact second-semester students in the English language education program at Universitas Hamzanwadi. In addition, the questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, enabling responses to be collected quickly and data to be recorded automatically in spreadsheet format.

Furthermore, interview conducted through semi-structured interview with second-semester students of the English language education program at Universitas Hamzanwadi, specifically in Class B, which consisted of six participants who actively use self-talk to building their speaking skills. According to Sugiyono (2022) semi-structured interview is a type of interview conducted in a more relaxed manner to identify issues more transparently, where researchers are free to ask more detailed questions based on participants' answers, while still following interview guidelines. This interview technique helped the researcher obtain more detailed information and reach a common understanding of the research topic. The interviews took around 10 to 15 minutes and used the Indonesian language, considering that all participants were native Indonesian speakers. The researcher noted the important points conveyed by the informants during the interviews and also used a digital recording device to record the entire interview process without disturbing the informants. The interview results were transcribed into Microsoft Word to facilitate analysis by researchers.

Last, observations were conducted through video recordings sent by students, due to time constraints and difficulties in gathering informants. Therefore, researchers observed the types of activities that occurred in the videos, how students interacted, spoke, performed, used body language, and everything else related to these activities.

To analyze the data, this study employed the Miles and Huberman data analysis model. According to Miles and Huberman (1984, as cited in Sugiyono, 2022), the activities in qualitative data analysis involve an interactive process which takes place in a continuous and repetitive manner until the data reaches saturation point. The activities in data analysis include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, which are carried out simultaneously (Hardani et al., 2020).

1. Data Reduction

The data reduction process was carried out by selecting data relevant to the research phenomenon, which is self-talk strategy: a qualitative investigation in building English speaking skills. Then, the data obtained through questionnaires, interviews and observations were collected and selected for further analysis to achieve the research objectives.

2. Data Display

The data were presented in narrative text to facilitate researchers in describing and explaining students' experiences, types of strategies and perceptions of students regarding self-talk in building English speaking skills.

3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification

The researcher drew conclusions in a careful and systematic manner, supported by concrete data from various data collection techniques, to ensure the results are valid and reliable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### 1. Types of Self-talk Strategy

Based on a comprehensive analysis of data obtained from questionnaires, interviews, and observations, it was found that there were two types of self-talk used by students to build their English-speaking skills. These types were instructional and motivational self-talk.

- a. Instructional Self-Talk

Instructional self-talk is a positive strategy used to prepare oneself before speaking or presenting, practicing sentences, reflecting on oneself after using language, and as a focus regulator when speaking. The questionnaire results showed that the majority of informants agreed (37.50%) and strongly agreed (29.17%) with the statement items referring to self-

instruction. Then, there were also neutral answers (33.33%), especially on the aspect of focus regulation. In addition, these results were also supported by data collected from the interview process, as stated by S1:

*“I usually record myself when there is no mirror. So, I try to practice speaking, then review the video to see what is lacking in my pronunciation.”*

S5 also shared a similar statement:

*“We talk to ourselves in front of the mirror, like we are preparing how we are going to speak...”*

The statements above confirm that positive instructional self-talk is used as a technical strategy for rehearsing sentences to be delivered, reflecting on oneself after using the language, or as a space for practicing without judgment to prepare oneself before speaking or presenting in public. This finding aligns with the observations from video recordings, which showed that the majority of informants engaged in nonverbal self-talk as a form of self-regulation to organize or prepare the sentences to be delivered. This is also clearly seen when the informant looks up, down, or to the side while pausing to think about the next sentence. Furthermore, the deliberate use of hand gestures during presentations indicated the existence of instructional self-talk, which served as an internal support and self-regulation for verbal communication, such as managing the flow of explanations or emphasizing certain points during the presentation.

#### b. Positive Motivational Self Talk

Motivational self-talk is a positive strategy used to motivate oneself, reduce anxiety, and increase self-confidence before speaking in public. The questionnaire results showed that the majority of informants agreed (41.67%) and strongly agreed (25.00%) with the statement items referring to self-motivation. Furthermore, these results are supported by data collected from the interview process, in which the majority of informants stated that they often used positive motivational self-talk to provide emotional support in the form of encouraging phrases such as “I can do it” or “Come on, spirit.” As stated by S4 as follows:

*“You can do it, you must be enthusiastic, you must be able to speak in public.”*

Moreover, informants also used positive motivational self-talk in the form of positive affirmations to convince themselves before speaking or performing in public, as conveyed by S3:

*“Spirit, I can do it, do not give up because you can do it, do not doubt yourself...”*

The results of video observations supported the data by showing that the majority of informants appeared more confident during the presentation. Thus, the statements above proved that they often use self-talk in the form of positive sentences or positive affirmations as emotional support to encourage themselves to be more enthusiastic, believe in their abilities and increase self-confidence.

## 2. Students' Perceptions of Self-Talk Strategy

The results of questionnaires and interviews showed that the informants tended to have a positive attitude toward the use of self-talk in speaking activities. The informants felt that self-

talk was not only a habit of mumbling or talking to oneself, but also a very effective strategy to prepare oneself before speaking or presenting. This was supported by the statement delivered by S6:

*“In my opinion, it is really powerful and effective, because for example, if today we are learning speaking, I do self-talk so that when I come forward, I am not afraid.”*

S2 also gave the statement:

*“The impact on me has been perfect. Sometimes it helps me control and reduce my nervousness and makes me more confident. It helps me speak fluently in front of others with quite a bit of confidence.”*

On the other hand, several informants also viewed self-talk as a strategy to reinforce and calm themselves in order to focus on the positive aspects of their lives and academic situations. As stated by S3:

*“It makes me feel more comfortable, calm, focused on myself, and just more relaxed.”*

She also shared an explanation based on her personal experience, like:

*“I was very down before, but by talking to myself and encouraging myself, I felt more motivated. I became more aware of my weaknesses, and I tried to reflect on myself more, then it made me more enthusiastic about living each day, doing whatever made me hesitate, made me feel insecure and everything like that.”*

Thus, it can be understood that self-talk is not only an effective strategy for building English-speaking skills, but also impacts emotional well-being positively by providing encouragement, self-reflection, and self-confidence to deal with difficulties such as self-doubt, insecurity, or other negative thoughts more wisely.

### **3. Benefits of Self-Talk Strategy**

According to questionnaires and interviews results, it was found that informants often gained a variety of benefits when using self-talk strategies to build their English-speaking skills, such as:

#### **a. Reducing nervousness or anxiety**

Most informants stated that self-talk strategies were very helpful in controlling and overcoming negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence. As stated in the interview presented by S5:

*“I feel a lack of confidence, like I am afraid to socialize, so sometimes I do self-talk, so I do not get too anxious.”*

S1 also mentioned other benefits, such as:

*“To reduce nervousness and fear of making mistakes on the final day.”*

It can be understood that self-talk plays a role in managing emotions and thoughts, especially in social situations and when performing in public. Informants felt that self-talk can reduce the fear, nervousness and anxiety that usually arise when facing important events, such as presenting in front of the class.

b. Improving self-confidence and motivation

All informants felt that self-talk was useful for increasing self-confidence, providing encouragement, motivation, and self-reinforcement. As stated in the interview presented by S3:

*“It makes me excited to learn, to do anything, for example, when I'm feeling really down, I always say, come on, spirit, spirit, spirit, I can do it...”*

S5 also added further statements such as:

*“I often do that before presentations, even though the results are not optimal, but I feel confident in front of the audience when I speak like this during presentations.”*

According to the statements above, the use of self-talk can support learning performance, motivation, and daily activities. Therefore, whether encountering difficult situations or before a presentation, positive self-talk has been demonstrated to maintain motivation, provide constructive support, and enhance self-confidence through verbal reinforcement.

c. Improving fluency and skills

Most participants felt that the use of self-talk was very useful for improving their fluency and English-speaking skills, as expressed by S1:

*“I often use self-talk to improve my skills.”*

S2 also added a statement such as:

*“I do it more to memorize so that I can speak fluently, and imagine real situations.”*

The statements above indicated that self-talk was used as a practical strategy to improve fluency, especially in memorizing and preparing mentally for real-life situations when speaking English.

d. Self-practice

Most of the informants admitted that they used self-talk to self-practice in order to perform more fluently and confidently. This is in line with the statement made by S5:

*“We do self-talk in front of the mirror, like talking to ourselves to prepare how we will speak, so that when we speak tomorrow, for example in a presentation, we are ready and confident.”*

S3 also added the similar explanation:

*“...Practice vocabulary and daily conversation, so that you can speak fluently during presentations and when studying in class.”*

Self-practice through self-talk is very useful for preparing mentally and materially, improving fluency, and increasing self-confidence. Through self-practice, whether by repeating material, memorizing, or practicing, students can feel more prepared and enjoy when speaking in public.

#### 4. Challenges and Solutions

Based on the results of the open-ended questionnaire, it was found that some students experienced challenges when using self-talk. The most dominant challenge was the emergence of negative self-talk. Some students found it difficult to be consistent, which can cause negative thoughts to dominate. S1 also felt that self-talk was not always motivating or helpful. However, in order to overcome these challenges, students also presented solutions such as using positive affirmations, practicing gradually, maintaining consistency, and seeking social support from others as well as a positive environment.

#### Discussion

According to Theodorakis et al. (2000, as cited in Davis, 2024), self-talk can be categorized into two types based on its purpose, namely instructional self-talk and motivational self-talk. Instructional self-talk is characterized by the provision of instructions in the form of directions for performing a task, while motivational self-talk is a more prevalent form, often manifesting as internal encouragement, such as I can do this or I am ready, let's go. Accordingly, the results showed that both instructional and motivational self-talk were used by students to build their English-speaking skills. In this case, students explained that instructional self-talk serves to facilitate practice or preparation before facing challenging situations, such as presentations or speaking in public. Concurrently, motivational self-talk is employed to enhance confidence and overcome self-doubt through the utilization of motivational phrases. Thus, the results of this study reinforced the conceptual framework proposed by Theodorakis, by showing that both types of self-talk complement each other and can be used in the context of English language learning, particularly in the area of speaking skills.

On the other hand, research conducted by Meriahna et al. (2022), confirmed that self-talk gives positive effects, such as students appearing happier, more active and innovative in the speaking learning process, resulting in better speaking skills. A similar result was found in this study, in which all participants showed a positive attitude toward the use of self-talk in building English-speaking skills. Students claimed that self-talk is a highly effective strategy for supporting the development of speaking skills and self-confidence. In addition, research conducted by Dung (2023), found that positive self-talk has various benefits for the learning process, self-awareness, anxiety control, and work performance. These findings also align with the results of this study, in which students highlighted a number of benefits of applying self-talk strategies, including reduced nervousness and anxiety, increased self-confidence, motivation, fluency, and facilitated self-practice.

In terms of benefits, Sari & Zulfikasari (2025) found that self-talk strategies can reduce students' anxiety levels by helping them manage feelings of anxiety and fear of speaking in front of the class. This finding is in line with the statements confirmed by students, who stated that one of the most frequently mentioned benefits of self-talk is its ability to reduce nervousness and anxiety. Therefore, the use of positive self-talk can encourage them to have greater self-confidence, enabling them to deal with situations that cause anxiety and nervousness more appropriately.

According to the research conducted by Sahnoune (2023), Dimala et al. (2023) and Chaizuran (2023), positive self-talk exerts a beneficial effect on individuals' self-confidence and motivation to learn, while concurrently mitigating anxiety during verbal communication. The findings above are consistent with the results of this study, which showed that motivational phrases such as "I can do it" or "Come on, cheer up!" were able to provide positive encouragement during presentations, thereby increasing confidence and motivation to learn.

The research by Hermansyah (2021) and Humairoh (2022), also indicated that students who engaged in self-talk demonstrated significant enhancements in their speaking skills and self-

confidence. This is aligned with the results of this study. Students reported that by employing self-talk in a free context, without the constraints of the classroom environment or the fear of being judged by others, there was a significant improvement in their confidence and English-speaking skills. This reflected that self-talk is not only a strategy that has a positive emotional impact, but also a cognitive impact, thereby helping students to improve their English-speaking skills in a real way.

Moreover, research conducted by Huang and Liu (2023), showed that practicing self-talk in the form of imaginary dialogues in a psychologically safe and unrestricted setting can significantly improve English speaking fluency for EFL learners. This is reinforced by a student who emphasizes that self-talk can be used as a visualization tool to imagine real situations, which makes the process of memorization and learning easier and more focused, thereby helping students become more prepared and ultimately improving their speaking performance. Thus, this highlights that the implementation of self-talk strategies during the learning process can serve as a useful strategy for understanding and mastering the material, thereby improving their English-speaking skills.

Nevertheless, several previous studies also showed that self-talk indicated a number of challenges. As revealed in a study conducted by Lutfiah et al. (2025), negative thoughts tend to lower self-confidence, trigger anxiety, and even cause depression. This is similar to the reported experiences of several students who often get caught up in negative thoughts, which triggers their negative self-talk. In other words, having an overly critical mindset to oneself can actually hinder self-confidence. Furthermore, students also faced challenges in maintaining consistency in their self-talk, especially in situations where they experienced a lack of motivation or were confronted with more complex speaking tasks. As a result, self-talk is considered to not always be motivating or useful in certain situations.

To overcome these challenges, Marauleng (2025) stated that positive affirmations can be utilized to reinforce self-identity, support a growing mindset, and counteract negative thoughts. This is in line with students' responses that they attempted a variety of solutions, including the use of positive affirmations, gradual practice, consistency, and seeking social support from others or a positive environment. In this case, the presence of external validation and motivation can foster heightened motivation and optimism regarding their abilities, while concurrently mitigating negative thoughts and enhancing self-confidence. Specifically, positive affirmations and social support contributed to maximizing the effectiveness of self-talk strategies in the context of language learning.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the researcher inferred that students used two types of self-talk strategies to build their English-speaking skills, which were instructional self-talk and motivational self-talk. Instructional self-talk was used to provide instructions or guidance in self-regulation, such as practicing speaking and managing learning processes or actions to complete tasks at the greatest extent. Meanwhile, motivational self-talk was used to provide internal encouragement to increase enthusiasm and confidence as well as reduce fear of making mistakes, nervousness, and anxiety when speaking English.

Most students showed a positive attitude toward the use of self-talk in speaking learning. Self-talk was considered as an effective strategy to regulate affective and cognitive processes simultaneously, thereby supporting English speaking skills. Students also viewed self-talk as a flexible tool to support emotion management, performance improvement, motivation and self-confidence during English-speaking activities.

Moreover, this study revealed several challenges faced by students during the use of self-talk strategy. Almost all students felt that negative thoughts often haunted and dominated their

minds, thereby causing negative self-talk. In turn, students tend to experience a decline in the effectiveness of self-talk, which can worsen their psychological well-being, characterized by symptoms such as anxiety or self-doubt. At the same time, some students found it difficult to practice self-talk consistently because they felt it was hard to maintain this habit continuously. One student also emphasized that self-talk does not always motivate or help in certain situations.

To address these challenges, students admitted that the use of positive affirmations can be an appropriate solution to replace negative thoughts. Students also highlighted the need to practice self-talk gradually and consistently in order to form sustainable and impactful habits. Furthermore, beyond the implementation of numerous inner strategies, the significance of external support in optimizing self-talk is recognized by students. This external support can take the form of social support or a positive environment.

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