

Voicing Confidence: A Narrative Inquiry into Indonesian EFL Students' Experiences with the SpeechAce Pronunciation Tool

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Abstract

This qualitative investigation examined pronunciation learning experiences among four male Indonesian EFL students who obtained high scores exceeding 7.0 using SpeechAce technology within a Pronunciation Practice 2 course at Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut. Employing narrative inquiry methodology and Labov's analytical framework, researchers systematically analyzed self-reflection documents to understand participants' developmental journeys. Results demonstrated that learners progressed through transformative phases: encountering initial pronunciation challenges, implementing personalized learning strategies, experiencing emotional validation through high performance scores, and ultimately developing enhanced speaking confidence. A significant "validation effect" emerged whereby objective machine-generated assessments functioned as psychological catalysts reconciling subjective self-perceptions with measurable performance outcomes. Participants exhibited sophisticated metacognitive abilities by utilizing detailed phoneme-level feedback and integrating multiple learning resources beyond the technological platform. Findings revealed that pronunciation improvement occurred within an "ecology of achievement" where technology dynamically interacted with instructor guidance, pedagogical frameworks, and learners' autonomous agency. This narrative study contributes qualitative insights to Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training research by illuminating meaning-making processes through which Indonesian EFL learners cultivated pronunciation accuracy and speaking self-assurance.

Keywords: Indonesian EFL Learners; Narrative Inquiry; Pronunciation Confidence; SpeechAce

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary digital innovations have substantially transformed pronunciation instruction within English as a Foreign Language contexts, fundamentally altering methodologies employed by educators and learners. Artificial intelligence-powered platforms provide individualized feedback and assessment, thereby amplifying classroom practice transformation (Afidah et al., 2025). Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training systems deliver instantaneous feedback on learners' phonetic precision, converting conventional teaching approaches into feedback-centered activities (González & Ferreiro, 2024). Scholars documented challenges confronting pronunciation acquisition in EFL environments, attributing difficulties to restricted exposure toward native-speaker models and genuine communicative contexts, consequently impeding students' capacity for achieving comprehensible pronunciation (Bashori et al., 2024). Recent meta-analyses reveal that ASR-based interventions generate medium-to-large pronunciation improvements among ESL and EFL learners (Morgana, 2024). Investigations indicate substantial enhancements in segmental characteristics, particularly vowels and consonants, when systems deliver explicit corrective feedback (Kotsokoane & Seeletse, 2025). Extended utilization of these instruments yields superior outcomes compared to brief engagement, while investigations on SpeechAce and ELSA Speak demonstrate that users attain

higher pronunciation scores than individuals relying upon traditional methodologies (Liu et al., 2025). Beyond measurable performance indicators, scholarship establishes critical connections between pronunciation practice and learners' internal psychological conditions. Scholars identify affective variables including speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, and diminished self-confidence as substantial obstacles inhibiting learners' oral participation and competency development (Idrus et al., 2025). Technology-mediated environments offer distinct advantages by establishing private, non-evaluative spaces for practice, significantly increasing learners' self-perceived communication competence while reducing communication anxiety (Remmerswaal et al., 2025).

However, a critical gap persists in current scholarship. While existing studies document the effectiveness of ASR technologies through quantitative measures and experimental designs, there remains limited understanding of how learners subjectively experience and narratively construct meaning from their pronunciation development journey. Most investigations focus on what outcomes learners achieve rather than how they interpret, emotionally process, and integrate these experiences into their evolving identities as language users. Furthermore, contextual research exploring Indonesian EFL learners' lived experiences with specific ASR platforms remains notably sparse. The psychological mechanisms through which automated feedback translates into enhanced speaking confidence the internal transformation processes, pivotal emotional moments, and meaning-making activities require deeper qualitative exploration. This study addresses this gap by employing narrative inquiry to illuminate the experiential dimensions of pronunciation learning with SpeechAce among Indonesian EFL students, thereby contributing insights into the human side of technology-mediated language development. The researchers investigated Indonesian students in a Pronunciation Practice course examining experiences with SpeechAce, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered platform delivering phonetic feedback. Previous research showed Indonesian learners confronted challenges rooted in First Language (L1) interference, particularly English vowels and consonant clusters absent from Bahasa Indonesia (Irawan, 2023). The team selected Narrative Inquiry methodology capturing students' journeys (Zhang, 2020), valuing its capacity to illuminate learner identity (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021). The study addressed understanding of ASR-based pronunciation instruction and self-confidence (Sulis, 2024). Rather than validating effectiveness, researchers illuminated the "black box" of student experience, pursuing two main research questions: (1) How did students narrate their lived experiences while using the SpeechAce pronunciation tool in developing their speaking self-confidence? (2) What pivotal moments and specific aspects of automated feedback did students identify as most influential in shaping their pronunciation confidence and self-perceived speaking competence?

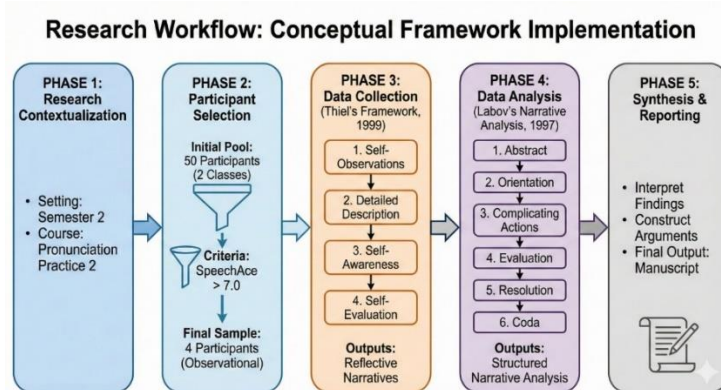


Figure 1. Narrative Inquiry Research Flows

METHOD

This investigation adopted a qualitative research approach, specifically employing narrative inquiry design to examine the pronunciation learning experiences of four male students who attained exceptional scores exceeding 7.0 on the SpeechAce platform. Qualitative methodology was selected for its capacity to capture the richness and complexity of participants' lived experiences, providing depth and nuance that quantitative approaches cannot achieve (Athapaththu, 2025). Narrative inquiry proved particularly appropriate for this study because it positions learners as active meaning-makers who construct understanding through storytelling, allowing researchers to access not merely what happened but how participants interpreted and integrated their experiences into their developing identities (Athapaththu, 2025). This methodological choice aligns with contemporary language learning scholarship emphasizing that learner success involves more than skill acquisition it encompasses identity transformation, emotional journeys, and the construction of coherent self-narratives. The research framework drew upon Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional inquiry space, which conceptualizes experience across temporal, social, and spatial dimensions (Jean, 2023; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

This framework enabled researchers to investigate how students' pronunciation development unfolded over time (temporality), how their learning occurred within relationships with technology, instructors, and peers (sociality), and how the institutional and physical context shaped their experiences (place). By examining these interconnected dimensions simultaneously, the study captured the holistic nature of technology-mediated learning rather than isolating variables artificially. The research setting was the Pronunciation Practice 2 course at Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut, where SpeechAce technology had been integrated into the curriculum. This platform delivered automated, real-time feedback addressing pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and prosodic features within self-directed learning environments (Akhter, 2025). Participant selection employed purposive sampling, targeting students who demonstrated high achievement defined as final assessment scores of 7.0 or above on the SpeechAce platform. An unexpected demographic pattern emerged whereby all four individuals meeting this performance criterion were male (Crowther & Loewen, 2025), a finding discussed later in the results section.

Table 1. The Students Identities and Scores

No	Participants (Psyedonym)	Age	Program of Study	Score (SpeechAce)
1	Zachary	19	English Education Program	7.1
2	Alf	19	English Education Program	7.3
3	Jacky	19	English Education Program	7.5
4	Chevy	19	English Education Program	7.3

The After recruiting participants, students completed self-reflection forms utilized as primary data. The team designed reflective questions framing reflection as cyclical processes of self-observation and evaluation improving understanding of effects, following Thiel's framework encompassing self-observations, detailed description, self-awareness, and self-evaluation. These prompts relied on AI-generated feedback as concrete experience paralleling reflective journals (Bartlett et al., 2022). Participants provided written self-reflection documents in Microsoft Word format, functioning as primary research instruments presenting notable methodological benefits (Zhou et al., 2025). The study utilized Narrative Analysis Theory, applying his six-stage model (abstract, orientation, complicating actions, evaluation, resolution, and coda) to analyze collected narratives systematically (Rozario et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings obtained from this narrative inquiry reveal the lived experiences of four male Indonesian EFL students who achieved exceptional pronunciation scores (above 7.0) using the SpeechAce platform in a Pronunciation Practice 2 course. The analysis employed Labov's (1997) narrative analysis framework to systematically examine the students' self-reflection narratives. Table 2 below presents the analytical framework with specific indicators used to decode the students' narratives.

Table 2. Labov's (1997) Narrative Analysis Framework Applied to Student Reflections

Labov's Stage	Narrative Elements	Key Findings from Four Male Students
Abstract	What is the story about?	Students established initial pronunciation challenges. <i>Zachary</i> experienced culture shock entering Pronunciation Practice due to unfamiliar approaches. <i>Alf</i> recognized his pronunciation ability remained inadequate at semester commencement. <i>Jacky</i> honestly acknowledged struggling with pronunciation initially. <i>Chevy</i> emphasized developing sensitivity toward his own developmental progress.
Orientation	Who, when, where, what was the initial situation?	Students contextualized their learning within Pronunciation Practice 2 course at Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut. <i>Zachary</i> characterized using SpeechAce for food conversations as merely his second authentic English interaction. <i>Alf</i> appreciated how SpeechAce enabled identifying precisely which components were incorrect intonation, stress, or consonant/vowel sounds. <i>Jacky</i> acknowledged lecturer guidance and SpeechAce tools facilitated gradual understanding of pronunciation detail importance. <i>Chevy</i> recognized SpeechAce assistance helped him monitor even minor improvements.
Complicating Actions	What happened? What sequence of events occurred?	Participants narrated specific challenges encountered during practice. <i>Zachary</i> initially felt dissatisfied with scores but learned focusing on personal progress. <i>Alf</i> frequently experienced difficulty distinguishing similar sounds like /i:/ and /ɪ/, or /θ/ and /t/. <i>Jacky</i> discovered words he presumed correct possessed incorrect stress,

		intonation, and sounded peculiar when replayed. <i>Chevy</i> found certain sounds like /θ/ and /ð/ initially challenging but became clearer following repeated feedback.
Evaluation	What is the point? Why is this worth telling?	Students developed personalized assessment approaches. <i>Zachary</i> compared practice results temporally, utilizing SpeechAce scores as primary indicators. <i>Alf</i> employed dual evaluation, incorporating both SpeechAce scores and personal indicators. <i>Jacky</i> recorded his voice nightly, comparing weekly to identify improving components. <i>Chevy</i> balanced quantitative SpeechAce feedback with personal intuition when speaking.
Resolution	What finally happened? How did it end?	Students deployed diverse strategic approaches achieving scores above 7.0. <i>Zachary</i> systematically selected topics, wrote notes, translated them, verified with Grammarly, and memorized before utilizing SpeechAce. <i>Alf</i> implemented shadowing techniques from YouTube and podcast videos, subsequently revisiting SpeechAce to monitor changes. <i>Jacky</i> emphasized consistency practicing nightly, recording, and shadowing native speakers when scores plateaued. <i>Chevy</i> evaluated progress based on incremental improvements rather than exclusively final scores.
Coda	What is the lasting lesson or meaning?	Students articulated lasting impacts on their learner identities. <i>Zachary</i> remained proud of efforts invested reaching satisfying scores. <i>Alf</i> characterized his first score above 7 as validation strengthening his resolve toward continued learning. <i>Jacky</i> described scores above 7 as tangible proof of diligent work maintaining motivation. <i>Chevy</i> recognized this achievement as symbolic evidence that appropriate approaches facilitate development.

Transformation from Fixed to Growth Mindset

All four participants narrated fundamental shifts in their beliefs concerning pronunciation acquisition. During the orientation stage, three students *Chevy*, *Jacky*, and *Alf* explicitly articulated initial beliefs positioning pronunciation ability as innate talent, regional accent limitation, or intuitive skill beyond systematic improvement. *Chevy*'s narrative powerfully captured this misconception: "*I used to think this was only about having talent or not, about regional accents, but now I know it is about process and self-awareness.*" During the complicating action stage, participants encountered concrete evidence contradicting their fixed mindset assumptions. SpeechAce delivered detailed, phoneme-level feedback rendering pronunciation errors visible and measurable, thereby transforming abstract skills into analyzable components. *Chevy* identified technical aspects learnable by individuals, including tongue position, mouth shape, breath control, and sentence rhythm. *Jacky* experienced paradigm shifts upon recognizing that pronunciation progress could be measured concretely through numerical indicators: "*pronunciation is not just about feeling; there is actually science to it.*" This transformation aligned with contemporary research on technology-enhanced learning environments delivering explicit, visual error correction, making implicit knowledge explicit, and facilitating metacognitive awareness. In the resolution stage across all narratives,

participants successfully reconstructed their learner identities from passive recipients of innate ability toward active agents of their own development.

Strategic Personalization and Self-Regulated Learning

The complicating action segments of all four narratives revealed highly individualized, deliberate learning strategies extending far beyond passive platform engagement. These high-achieving students developed sophisticated self-regulated learning approaches tailored toward their specific needs and learning styles. Zachary demonstrated exceptional metacognitive planning: he selected topics, created Indonesian-language notes, manually translated them into English, self-corrected, utilized Grammarly for verification, and memorized content to develop pronunciation, memory, and spontaneous speaking abilities simultaneously. This multi-layered approach reflected advanced self-regulation strategies identified in successful language learners. Chevy implemented shadowing techniques with carefully selected authentic materials from the YouTube channel *First We Feast*, combined with systematic SpeechAce feedback analysis and self-recording for longitudinal comparison. He revealed critical strategic pivots during learning plateaus; he shifted from score-chasing toward meaningful practice speaking with friends, self-recording, and autonomous evaluation.

Emotional Validation and Identity Reconstruction

The evaluation stage of Labov's framework revealed profound emotional significance that these students attached toward their achievement. Scores above 7.0 functioned not merely as numerical assessments but also as powerful symbols of self-transformation and validation of effort. Chevy used particularly effective evaluative language: "*I felt very proud and moved when first seeing the score above seven*"; he described it not just as a number but as a symbol of his hard work over weeks. Jacky expressed that the achievement validated all the hard work and time he had spent practicing. Simultaneously, Alf characterized his emotional response as mixed shocked, happy, and relieved and described the score as concrete proof that his efforts produced tangible results. All four narratives contained explicit references toward moments of self-doubt, frustration, and near-capitulation. Jacky admitted, "*I almost gave up during periods when practice did not improve SpeechAce results.*" Chevy questioned whether he really had no talent in pronunciation or even speaking. These moments of vulnerability proved critical to understanding the arc of the transformation narrative the achievement became meaningful precisely because students overcame internal psychological barriers.

Technology as Non-Judgmental Mediator

SpeechAce technology served as complementary mediator rather than replacement for human instruction, offering unique affordances that participants highly valued. They appreciated the private, non-threatening practice environment where they reduced speaking anxiety and increased willingness to communicate, corroborating CALL research findings. Zachary enjoyed answering questions during his English conversation without peer judgment, which facilitated risk-taking and authentic communication in this psychologically safe space. Participants consistently highlighted how the instantaneous, detailed feedback mechanism helped them identify specific problems. Chevy saw which parts were wrong in terms of intonation or stress. Simultaneously, Jacky gained technical insights, and Alf highlighted color-coded examples that made abstract pronunciation issues concrete and actionable. However, all four participants credited human pedagogical support as essential, for Jacky acknowledged that without the instructor's motivation and guidance, this technology would not work effectively. Zachary contrasted his semester-two learning experience favorably with semester one, where the lecturer rarely attended. Optimal outcomes emerged when tools like SpeechAce augmented

rather than replaced expert human facilitation within pedagogically mediated technology integration models.

The Unexpected Gender Pattern

The participant selection process revealed an intriguing contextual finding: all four male students who achieved scores above 7.0 came from a cohort of 50 students, suggesting an unexpected demographic pattern that warrants examination of potential gender differences in technology-mediated pronunciation learning. Although conventional language learning literature suggested that female learners demonstrated higher proficiency and employed broader learning strategy repertoires, research on technology use in educational contexts presented more nuanced pictures, indicating that male learners sometimes reported higher confidence and more positive attitudes toward technology-enhanced learning. These four high-achieving male students exhibited several distinguishing characteristics.

Discussion

The findings from this narrative inquiry provide rich, contextualized insights that address the research questions and contribute meaningfully toward ongoing scholarly conversations about technology-mediated pronunciation learning, learner psychology, and the design of effective CAPT interventions.

Indonesian EFL Students' Pathways to Speaking Self-Confidence: A Narrative Exploration of SpeechAce Use

Researchers employed Labov's narrative analysis framework and examined how students articulated their educational experiences as transformation journeys through distinct structural phases (Labov, 1997). Students initiated the orientation phase by establishing their learning struggles and articulated their initial doubts, then progressed through the complicating action phase by deploying strategic actions and problem-solving mechanisms addressing those challenges. They narrated significant emotional breakthroughs marking pivotal moments in the evaluation and resolution phase, describing profound shifts in their self-perception and identity that emerged from their strategic efforts. Students concluded their narratives by articulating philosophical insights in the coda phase, synthesizing their transformative journey. Students positioned SpeechAce as catalyst for self-discovery rather than simple tool (Lestari, 2025; Mardhiah et al., 2024; Martincová et al., 2021). Objective feedback from the technology heightened self-awareness and sometimes undermined confidence initially, but persistent engagement ultimately resulted in strengthened self-efficacy extending beyond pronunciation (Negrin et al., 2022).

Empowering Indonesian EFL Learners: The Role of SpeechAce's Automated Feedback in Strengthening Pronunciation Confidence

Students described how SpeechAce's phoneme-level feedback transformed their pronunciation development by enabling them to distinguish specific sound errors like /θ/ from /t/ or /i:/ from /ɪ/, converting pronunciation into discrete, improvable components (Li et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). The application's color-coded visual highlighting presented abstract phonetic concepts in concrete forms, which learners with limited metalinguistic knowledge particularly appreciated (Leis, 2025). The quantitative scoring system operated simultaneously as motivational targets, progress evidence, and symbols of transformation (Kalan & Mazharpour, 2025). Instantaneous feedback enabled learners to complete multiple iterative practice cycles, facilitating rapid skill refinement and phonological awareness development (Tebaldi & Lorenzon Portella, 2025). However, pedagogical framing, pre-existing beliefs, technology self-

efficacy, and strategic competence influenced how students interpreted automated feedback (Ngo et al., 2024; Saleh & Gilakjani, 2021; Shofi & Ainiyah, 2024)

Relationship to Previous Research

The study's findings confirmed and extended existing literature on CAPT and technology-enhanced language learning (Gruber et al., 2023), with qualitative narratives revealing how learners experienced CAPT in deeper dimensions. Four participants achieved scores above 7.0 in pronunciation assessments, demonstrating sustained improvements that aligned with meta-analytic findings on ASR-based interventions producing positive effects on ESL/EFL pronunciation skills (Hughes et al., 2019). Learners experienced complex emotional trajectories encompassing frustration, self-doubt, breakthrough moments, and pride, ultimately integrating these affective experiences into reconstructed identities as confident communicators. Although detailed error feedback from SpeechAce enhanced phonetic accuracy significantly, it temporarily heightened self-consciousness (Fu-An & Berlin, 2025). However, learners who persisted with strategic support ultimately achieved both enhanced accuracy and restored confidence, resolving the confidence-accuracy tradeoff through sustained engagement and deliberate strategy application.

Theoretical Implications

Narrative Construction of Learning

This study revealed that learners constructed learning as narratively mediated experience rather than purely cognitive process. Students actively created transformation narratives that consolidated their learning achievements, constructed coherent identities, and made sense of encountered difficulties. These narratives served critical psychological functions by allowing learners to extract transferable lessons from their experiences. The research demonstrated that narrative construction of learning fulfilled important motivational and identity-building functions that quantitative effectiveness studies frequently overlooked, thereby suggesting that narrative dimensions constitute essential components for understanding motivation, persistence, and transfer in educational contexts (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Technology as Mediating Artifact

SpeechAce functioned as cultural tool that mediated students' self-directed practice rather than directly causing pronunciation improvement. The technology made phonetic features visible toward learners, which enabled them to perceive their pronunciation patterns more clearly (Athapaththu, 2025). Students strategically appropriated the tool's affordances including objective benchmarks, iterative refinement capabilities, and psychological safety mechanisms within their pedagogically-structured activity system. The application of sociocultural learning theory illuminated how learners' dynamic interaction with technological affordances generated effectiveness, demonstrating that educational technologies mediate rather than determine learning outcomes.

Affective-Cognitive Integration

Students' cognitive skill development in pronunciation accuracy and their affective development in confidence and motivation emerged as deeply intertwined processes rather than separate phenomena. The emotional breakthroughs that learners experienced constituted essential components of the learning process itself, not merely pleasant by-products of skill improvement (Rozario et al., 2025). These emotional transformations provided the motivation that sustained students' practice efforts, validated their strategic choices, and reconstructed their self-concepts as confident language users. The research demonstrated that affective dimensions enabled learners to transfer their pronunciation skills toward new communicative contexts,

thereby establishing affect as fundamental to understanding comprehensive language learning development.

Pedagogical Implications

Instructors transformed SpeechAce into integrated learning instrument by setting learning goals, teaching strategic competencies, providing emotional support, and helping students act upon automated feedback, producing measurable pronunciation improvements (Afidah et al., 2025). They explicitly taught self-regulated learning competencies students diagnosed their own errors, selected and modified strategies appropriately, and engaged in systematic self-monitoring. Teachers created classroom cultures that framed errors as learning opportunities, celebrated incremental progress, and supported students through performance plateaus with sustained encouragement. The four focal students demonstrated distinct strategic approaches that proved effective for developing pronunciation accuracy and fluency through different cognitive and affective routes rather than single prescribed method, whereas educators must examine whether their technology integration inadvertently created inequitable pathways and actively redesigned interventions ensuring all learners accessed learning affordances equally (Gruber et al., 2023).

Methodological Contributions

The research utilized narrative inquiry to highlight how learners experienced technology-mediated education and added valuable insights beyond what quantitative studies reported about CAPT benefits for pronunciation. Narrative accounts from participants clarified their perspectives, uncovered the meaning behind their involvement, and explained connections between short-term difficulties and long-term achievements. Researchers applied Labov's (1997) six-stage framework so they captured narrative structures, themes, and evaluations across cases, while they preserved individual story coherence; this method enabled active, systematic, and participatory analysis suitable for future digital education research (Kalan & Mazharpour, 2025).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The research team identified limitations affecting this study, as they sampled only four male high-achieving students from one institution, which restricted generalizability and excluded female students and diverse learners. Researchers collected retrospective self-reported data, acknowledging that longitudinal designs gathering information throughout the learning process could provide deeper insights. The exclusive focus on high achievers revealed successful pathways but offered partial understanding, missing why other students underachieved. Future research must examine gender differences in CAPT, investigate strategic competence relationships, track confidence changes, analyze instructors' pedagogical practices, and explore how cultural diversity shaped learners' experiences in technology-enhanced environments.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study examined how four male Indonesian EFL students narrated their pronunciation transformation through SpeechAce, constructing powerful learning narratives with distinct phases aligned with Labov's structure. These learners extracted phoneme-level corrections and strategically orchestrated self-directed learning ecologies, deploying metacognitive competencies including goal-setting, self-monitoring, and adaptive strategy modification. The research acknowledged significant limitations: the team drew data from only four high-achieving male participants at a single institution, restricting generalizability to broader populations or diverse contexts. The retrospective, self-reported data collection meant

participants reconstructed rather than documented experiences in real time. Future investigations must employ mixed-methods approaches with longitudinal designs, examining gender differences in CAPT engagement and the relationship between strategic competence and tool effectiveness.

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