Building Confidence: Grade VII Students' Participation in School Competitions

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the self-confidence of seventh-grade students in participating in school competitions and the factors that influence it. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with interviews and observations as data collection techniques. The research subjects consisted of one seventh-grade student participating in a speech competition and one supervising teacher selected through purposive sampling. The collected data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that teacher support, peer encouragement, family motivation, and intensive practice were the main factors that help enhance student self-confidence. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors included fear of making mistakes, nervousness when performing in public, and feelings of inferiority compared to other participants. After participating in the competition, the student demonstrated increased confidence in learning activities and appeared more comfortable speaking in front of the class. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger number of participants, explore different types of competitions, and consider additional psychological aspects such as self-efficacy and performance anxiety to strengthen the generalizability and depth of the findings.

Keywords: Self-confidence, school competitions, junior high school students, qualitative

INTRODUCTION

Self-confidence is a crucial psychological aspect in the development of junior high school students. During this time, students are in early adolescence, beginning to develop their identity and explore new experiences to enhance their abilities. Self-confidence is a key factor in determining how students demonstrate their potential in the school environment. Participating in school competitions is a tangible way to develop self-confidence. Through competitions, students learn to perform in public, cope with pressure, and overcome fears or (Juniawati & Zaly, 2021) anxieties. These experiences enrich their social-emotional learning process.

Seventh-grade students in particular face unique challenges as they enter a new school environment and are still adapting. Differences in learning systems, new friends, and increased academic demands often impact their self-confidence (Melinda, 2024) . Therefore, special attention is needed to ensure students can continue to develop their self-confidence in a positive way. However, many students still feel inferior, afraid of making mistakes, and reluctant to appear in public. Such attitudes can hinder personal development and achievement, which could otherwise be optimized. Fear of failure often causes students to avoid challenging activities, including school competitions. Participation in competitions also contributes to improving academic achievement, strengthening social relationships, and increasing students' motivation to excel. Competitions provide opportunities for students to face challenges, evaluate their abilities compared to others, and develop resilience in

dealing with success or failure. Therefore, competitions act as an important medium for building positive self-concepts and preparing students to adapt to broader competitive situations in the future.

Based on this phenomenon, it is important to conduct research on the self-confidence of seventh-grade students when participating in competitions at school. By understanding the factors that influence student self-confidence, teachers and schools can provide appropriate support to enhance each student's potential. This research focuses on students participating in speech competitions, which require the courage to speak in front of an audience. Speeches require speaking skills, managing expression, and a high level of mental preparedness, making them a good indicator of student self-confidence (Alkadri et al., 2021) .

In this case, the main question to be answered is how the form of self-confidence of grade VII students in participating in competitions and what factors can support or hinder their self-confidence (Emor et al., 2025) . This question is the basis for formulating the research problem. Based on the formulation of the problem, the purpose of this study is to describe in depth the form of self-confidence behavior of grade VII students when participating in speech competitions at school and identify factors that support or hinder the development of this self-confidence.

Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study is expected to provide a realistic picture of the state of student self-confidence in the field. Researchers sought to explore the emotional experiences, support received, and challenges faced by students during the competition. The results of this study are expected to provide not only academic information but also the basis for recommendations for teachers, schools, and related parties in designing development programs that can continuously improve student self-confidence. Thus, schools can become environments that encourage students to dare to try, achieve, and develop their abilities optimally.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' self-confidence when participating in school competitions. The research focused on how students demonstrated confidence during competition preparation and performance. The participant was one seventh-grade student who took part in a speech competition, selected using purposive sampling based on direct involvement in the activity. Additional information was gathered from a supervising teacher and classmates who observed the student's performance.

Data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews. The observation sheet and interview guide were self-developed by the researcher based on indicators of self-confidence, including emotional control, communication ability, body language, and readiness to perform. Observations explored students' visible behaviors during practice and competitions, while interviews focused on internal experiences, such as anxiety, motivation, and perceived support. To ensure data credibility, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from students, teachers, and peers. The data obtained were then analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of self-confidence behavior and influencing factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Description of Student Self-Confidence Forms When Participating in Competitions

Based on the observation and interview results, students' self-confidence during participation in the speech competition appeared gradually throughout the competition process. During the preparation stage, students showed positive behavior such as practicing regularly, organizing speech scripts, and demonstrating willingness to receive corrections from the

supervising teacher. These actions reflected their belief in being able to perform well.Self-confidence was also visible when students were on stage. They were able to speak fluently, maintain eye contact with the audience, and use supporting gestures. Although some signs of nervousness appeared through body movements and facial expressions, they continued the performance until the end and did not show hesitation that significantly disrupted the delivery of their speech.

After completing their performance, students expressed satisfaction and relief for successfully presenting their speech in front of others. They stated feeling more confident in learning activities that required presenting or speaking publicly. Their enthusiasm to take part in future competitions also increased, which indicated a development in their courage and positive self-perception. (Nofembri et al., 2021)

a. Courage to appear in public
Observations showed that B. was willing to come to the front of the stage when called, stood with a relatively straight posture, and began his speech without looking down excessively. During rehearsals, B. tended to look at the small audience (classmates) although occasionally glanced at the text. In the interview, B. said: "I want to try to be brave enough to appear in front of a crowd." These statements and behaviors indicate a strong intention to face a stressful situation—an early indicator of self-confidence.

b. Vocal arrangement and expression
During the competition, B. was able to control basic intonation (rise and fall of voice) and use short pauses in appropriate places. Observations noted: Prior to performing, B. performed breathing exercises, and the instructor provided intonation corrections. This vocal control indicates technical readiness, which supports self-confidence.

c. Readiness through training
The instructor's notes and B.'s statement ("Because I've practiced so often...") indicate a consistent practice routine. This repeated practice demonstrates the process of developing competency that forms the basis of self-confidence—not just a mere motivational boost.

d. Response to social evaluation
After performing, positive feedback from peers (applause, praise) provided reinforcing feedback. B. described the experience of "many people saying it was good" as a significant moment that boosted his confidence. This suggests that social evaluation (peer validation) is a reinforcement of self-confidence.

2. Factors Supporting Self-Confidence
The findings indicate that the development of students' self-confidence in participating in the speech competition was supported by several important factors. Guidance from teachers played a significant role, especially in providing continuous motivation, constructive feedback, and structured coaching. Students expressed feeling more prepared and brave when teachers encouraged them and assisted in improving their performance during training sessions. Support from peers also became an influential aspect. Classmates who offered praise, enthusiasm, and emotional support helped reduce students' anxiety about performing in public. This positive social environment created a sense of togetherness that strengthened students' willingness to participate in challenging activities. (Afifah & Nasution, 2023)

a. Supervisor Teacher Support (instructional & emotional)
Instructional: The teacher provides technical guidance—material selection, intonation practice, gesture practice—that improves performance skills. Observation notes: Mr. W

corrects B.'s intonation twice before the performance and provides concrete directions (e.g., "Take a breath in here, then pause for a moment").

Emotional: Encouraging words ("You can do it") and practicing performing in small groups reduced anxiety. Teacher interviews confirmed this gradual strategy.

b. Peer Support

Friends provide direct support (applause, encouragement during pre-performance) which strengthens the sense of social safety. Observation: Before the performance, several friends surrounded B., giving light applause and words of encouragement; the effect was seen in reducing nervousness at the beginning of the speech.

c. Family Motivation

B. cited parents as the primary motivator for participating in competitions. Family motivation plays a role in internalizing the values of effort and courage. This statement is relevant because family support often serves as a psychological foundation for children when facing stressful situations.

d. Gradual Training and Exposure Experience

Regular practice and opportunities to perform in small groups before performing in large halls gradually accustom students to public attention. This is in line with the habituation mechanism—repetition reduces anxiety.

e. Small Success Experiences

Positive feedback (praise, non-winning results but received appreciation) is a source of self-efficacy. B. expresses pride when many people say he or she is good; this experience increases the likelihood of participating again.

3. Factors Inhibiting Self-Confidence

Despite the various supportive factors, several obstacles were found to hinder students' confidence when participating in the speech competition. Feelings of fear and anxiety emerged as the most dominant inhibiting factor. Students often worried about making mistakes, forgetting their speech, or being judged negatively by the audience, which led to nervousness before and during their performance. Negative self-perception also contributed to low confidence. Some students compared themselves to peers they considered more skilled, resulting in feelings of inferiority. These beliefs influenced their attitudes and reduced their courage to appear optimally in front of others.

The limited ability to manage pressure further increased discomfort when performing. Students who were not accustomed to speaking publicly found it difficult to maintain emotional stability, particularly when facing a large audience or strict judges. The pressure to achieve a good result strengthened their fear of failure. In addition, time constraints during practice affected their readiness. Students who had difficulty balancing academic tasks with competition preparation felt less prepared, which ultimately impacted their confidence level.

a. Performance Anxiety

Indicators: anxiety before performing, fear of forgetting lines, voice trembling during some rehearsals. Interview: "Fear of forgetting lines, especially when being watched by many people." This condition disrupts the smoothness of the performance and requires emotional management techniques.

b. Feeling of Inferiority / Social Comparison

Comparisons with more experienced or talented peers make some students hesitate to register for competitions. Teachers indicated that some students turned down offers because they felt they weren't on the same level.

c. Lack of Family Support for Some Students
Although in case B. the family was supportive, teacher interviews revealed that there were other students who received less family support (e.g. limited time for practice at home), so that intrinsic motivation was weakened.

d. Limited Competitive Experience
Students who have never performed before face difficulties adapting to a larger audience. Observations show a difference in readiness between students who have participated in competitions before and those who are performing for the first time.

4. The Impact of Competition Participation on the Development of Self-Confidence

Participation in school competitions provides a positive impact on the development of students' self-confidence. Students who were initially hesitant and afraid to appear in public gradually became more courageous after experiencing the process of preparation and performance in the speech competition. The sense of achievement they gained—whether by successfully completing the performance or receiving appreciation from others—helped strengthen their belief in their own abilities. Increased confidence was also seen in the academic setting. Students who previously avoided speaking in front of the class began to show more active participation in learning activities. They became more willing to answer questions, express opinions, and perform tasks requiring public speaking. These changes indicate that competition activities serve as a practical learning experience that helps students overcome fear and improve self-perception.

The social impact was also evident, as students felt more accepted and supported by their peers. The recognition they received from teachers and classmates encouraged them to continue improving their performance. This positive reinforcement helped internalize the belief that they were capable of achieving goals through effort and persistence.(Seveningsih, 2024)

a. Improvement in Communication Skills in the Classroom
After the competition, teachers reported increased initiative on B.'s part in asking questions and presenting in class—an indicator of skill transfer from the competition arena to everyday learning contexts.

b. Increased Motivation to Participate in Other Activities
The experience of success (receiving recognition, even if not winning) encouraged B. to participate in the next competition. This demonstrates the snowball effect: one positive experience triggers continued participation.

c. Task -Specific Self-Efficacy Enhancement
The confidence that is formed tends to be task-specific (e.g., confidence during a speech), but with practice and support can extend to other domains (e.g., lesson presentations).

d. Positive Social-Emotional Impact
Feeling proud and accepted by friends improves social self-image, reduces social anxiety, and increases students' involvement in group activities.

5. Data Triangulation and Validity of Findings

Validity of findings in this study was ensured through the process of data triangulation. Researchers compared information obtained from observations, interviews with students, supervising teachers, and peers to confirm the accuracy of the data. This cross-checking process helped strengthen the credibility of the findings by ensuring that the themes emerging about student self-confidence were supported by multiple data sources.

In addition, researchers continuously reflected on the data throughout the collection and analysis process to ensure that interpretations remained aligned with the actual conditions experienced by participants. Clear documentation of the research process was also conducted to maintain transparency and ensure that the findings could be accounted for accurately. (RAMADHANI, 2024) To increase validity, data is compared across sources:

a. Student interviews revealed subjective experiences (anxiety, support, motivation).
b. Observation records actual behavior (posture, intonation, peer responses).
c. Teacher interviews provided a coach perspective that confirmed training patterns and post-competition behavioral changes.
d. The alignment of the three sources (teacher support and its effect on B.'s behavior) adds strength to the finding that practice + social support are key to increased self-confidence.

6. Theoretical Interpretation and Practical Implications
The findings of this study reinforce the theoretical understanding that self-confidence is influenced by internal and external factors that shape students' readiness to perform and express their abilities. According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, self-confidence grows when individuals receive mastery experiences, social encouragement, and emotional regulation (Bandura, 1997). In this study, students gained mastery experiences through continuous practice before the competition, while support from teachers and peers acted as a source of verbal persuasion that boosted their confidence. Emotional challenges such as nervousness and fear of failure also align with previous research showing that anxiety can hinder adolescents' performance in public tasks and affect their belief in their ability to succeed (Yulianti et al., 2024)

   a. Theoretical Interpretation
   The findings support Bandura's notion of self-efficacy: successful experiences (mastery experiences), modeling (seeing peers succeed), verbal persuasion (teacher/peer support), and affective state management (anxiety reduction) all appear to play a role. This also aligns with Santrock's emphasis on social support in early adolescent development.
   b. Practical Implications for Schools and Guidance and Counseling Teachers
   1) Design a gradual exercise program (micro-exposure) for beginners.
   2) Strengthen the role of peers as a "support team" (peer coaching).
   3) Involve parents by socializing the benefits of the competition and how to support children.
   4) Provide anxiety management sessions (breathing techniques, mental rehearsals) during competition coaching. (Jelita & Sholehuddin, 2024)

7. Limitations of Findings
The small sample size (a case study of one student and one teacher) limits generalizability; however, the rich, contextual data provides an in-depth picture. Recommendations: Further research with a larger number of subjects and a variety of competition types (music, sports, academic) to examine differences in self-esteem patterns.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the self-confidence of seventh-grade students in participating in school competitions is reflected through their courage to perform, their preparedness gained from continuous practice, and their belief in giving their best performance. Various supporting factors were identified, including encouragement from teachers, support from peers, motivation from family, and practical experience obtained during training. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors such as fear of making mistakes, feelings of nervousness, and limited experience in public performance can still negatively impact students' confidence. Despite these challenges, participation in competitions has been shown to provide a positive contribution to the development of student self-confidence and encourage them to be more courageous and motivated in future performances.

Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants in order to obtain more diverse data regarding students' self-confidence in competitive activities. Comparative studies between different types of competitions—such as academic, sports, or arts—would also enrich understanding of how different contexts influence students' confidence levels. In addition, it is important to consider using mixed methods to combine qualitative findings with quantitative measurements, so that the results can provide stronger generalizability and broader implications for guidance and counseling practices in schools.

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