

Exploring Fourth-Grade Students' Self-Confidence: A Qualitative Analysis of Barriers and Supportive Factors in Indonesian Primary Education

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Abstract

This study explores the self-confidence of fourth-grade students through the lens of problem identification in a primary school learning environment. Conducted using a qualitative descriptive method over a 4-week period, the research took place at SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen, located in Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The purpose of the study was to analyze the factors that affect students' self-confidence and to identify potential strategies to improve it within classroom settings. Using semi-structured interviews with 10 students, 3 teachers, and 2 school staff, as well as classroom observations and document analysis, the study gathered multi-perspective insights into the emotional and behavioral patterns observed in daily learning activities. The findings revealed four main themes influencing students' self-confidence: fear of making mistakes, teacher-student interaction, peer influence, and the presence of a supportive learning environment. Students who experienced emotional security, constructive feedback, and empathetic relationships with both teachers and peers demonstrated higher levels of self-confidence. In contrast, those exposed to criticism, neglect, or social pressure exhibited avoidance behavior and reluctance to engage. The study also confirmed that mentoring-based learning approaches and inclusive classroom cultures are effective in enhancing students' confidence and readiness to participate. This research highlights the importance of addressing emotional and social dynamics in elementary education. Self-confidence is not only a psychological trait but a socially constructed behavior influenced by relationships and environmental factors. Educators are encouraged to integrate emotional support strategies, peer mentoring systems, and family engagement to create a responsive and empowering learning experience. Ultimately, fostering self-confidence requires coordinated efforts between teachers, peers, and parents to build positive educational ecosystems that promote risk-taking, resilience, and academic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Student confidence is one of the important psychological aspects that has a significant effect on the success of learning in elementary school. Self-confidence is closely related to an individual's belief in his or her ability to organize and carry out the actions necessary to achieve a specific goal. In the context of learning, students with low levels of confidence tend to have difficulty understanding the material and completing tasks optimally (Saragih & Manurung, 2023). This is in line with the findings of Danuarta (2024) which shows that low confidence can trigger fear of failure and decreased motivation to learn. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the factors that affect student confidence is essential to support an effective learning process. In addition, confidence plays a role in preparing learning readiness which affects students' academic outcomes (Latif et al., 2023). This condition requires appropriate interventions to increase student confidence through a structured and supportive learning approach. Thus, an in-depth analysis of students' confidence through the identification of the problems they are experiencing can be the first step in designing the right learning strategy.

According to research conducted by Hendratno et al. (2021), internal factors such as self-confidence and perception of abilities contribute greatly to the learning process and academic achievement of students. In the elementary school environment, the relationship between teachers and students also plays an external factor that affects student confidence. Teachers who are able to create a positive and supportive learning environment can significantly increase students' motivation and confidence. A study by Rahmawati (2025) confirms that positive interactions between teachers and students have an impact on improving academic performance and students' positive attitudes towards learning. In addition, a conducive learning environment is able to reduce students' anxiety and uncertainty in following the learning process. Therefore, efforts to increase student confidence must involve improving the quality of social relationships in the classroom as well as strengthening emotional support from teachers and peers. This holistic approach is important to encourage the optimal and sustainable development of students' potential.

Lack of confidence in students not only impacts academic performance, but also has implications for their psychological well-being. A number of studies have shown that students with low confidence are prone to experiencing stress, anxiety, and a significant decrease in learning motivation (Hidayat et al., 2025). This can cause students to avoid challenges and not actively participate in the learning process, thus hindering the development of their skills and knowledge. In the context of learning in primary school, it is important to identify the underlying problems of low self-confidence so that the interventions provided can be more targeted (Aini et al., 2021). The mentoring-based learning approach is one of the effective solutions that can be applied to increase student confidence. Mentoring allows for intensive personal interaction between teachers and students, so that it can build trust and support the development of the necessary skills (Novriadi et al., 2023). Therefore, learning designs that integrate mentoring are expected to overcome various psychological obstacles experienced by students during the learning process.

The mentoring-based learning model has a high urgency in the current educational context, especially in supporting continuous professional development and improving the quality of learning. Through mentoring, teachers play the role of facilitators who not only transfer knowledge, but also guide students in developing emotional and social skills, including self-confidence (Lellola, 2023). The scaffolding concept put forward by Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of gradual assistance from teachers in the learning process to encourage the optimal development of students' abilities. In the context of confidence, scaffolding can help students overcome the fear of failure and motivate them to face learning challenges with more confidence (Ramadani, 2023). In addition, mentoring also serves to identify students' learning styles and individual needs so that learning strategies can be tailored personally. Thus, mentoring not only improves the cognitive aspect, but also the affective aspect of the student as a whole.

Rafilda's research (2024) shows that learning interventions that focus on the psychological aspects of students, such as self-confidence, are able to improve learning outcomes and student involvement in the learning process. However, more comprehensive research is still needed to identify the specific issues students face in building their confidence. Identification of these problems will help design more appropriate and effective interventions according to the characteristics of students at the elementary school level (Sianipar et al., 2024). This study aims to conduct an analysis of students' confidence through the identification of problems they face during the learning process in grade 4 of elementary school. With this approach, it is hoped that a clear picture of the factors that affect self-confidence and solutions that can be applied through a mentoring-based learning model will be obtained. The findings of this study are expected to make an empirical contribution to the development of innovative learning strategies and focus on improving the psychological quality of students.

Overall, the background of this study emphasizes the importance of understanding and targeted interventions to overcome students' low confidence in the learning process. By identifying the problems that students are experiencing, teachers can more easily design effective and supportive

learning strategies. The mentoring-based learning model emerged as a relevant solution and has great potential in increasing students' confidence and learning readiness (Damayanti et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is very relevant in the context of basic education that demands the holistic development of students' potential. The results of the research are expected to be the basis for the development of learning policies and practices that are more responsive to the psychological needs of students, so that the educational process in elementary schools can run more effectively and meaningfully.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to gain an in-depth understanding of student confidence through the identification of problems they experience in the learning process. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to comprehensively explore phenomena based on the perspective of participants in their natural environment. The case study was used to describe in detail the psychological condition of grade IV students at SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen, Kepanjen District, Malang Regency. This research focuses on the phenomenon of student self-confidence in the context of social relationships, learning strategies, and interaction with teachers. With this approach, it is hoped that a complete understanding of the underlying factors underlying low or high student confidence will be obtained. In addition, this study also examines how the learning environment and pedagogical practices of teachers contribute to the formation of student confidence. The results of this research are expected to make a practical contribution to the development of learning strategies that are more humanistic and adaptive to students' emotional needs.

The subjects in this study were grade IV students of SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen who were selected purposively based on initial observations and recommendations from class teachers. The purposive selection of subjects is intended to capture relevant informants and can provide in-depth information according to the focus of the research. In addition to students, classroom teachers and parents are also involved as supporting informants to obtain stronger data triangulation. The criteria for selecting students are based on the variation in the level of confidence shown in learning activities, both students who show enthusiasm and students who tend to be passive. The number of main subjects in this study consisted of 10 students representing various characteristics based on the results of observations and initial discussions with the classroom teacher. By involving informants from various parties, this research was able to reach the personal and social dimensions that affect student confidence. The data collected from various perspectives will help researchers craft more objective and in-depth analyses.

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation is carried out directly in the classroom and school environment to observe student behavior during the learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, classroom teachers, and some guardians to explore their perceptions of confidence issues and the factors that influence them. Documentation is carried out by collecting data in the form of learning outcome records, student portfolios, and teacher diaries related to the development of students' attitudes and participation in the classroom. Triangulation techniques are used to ensure the validity and reliability of data by comparing results from various sources of information. All data obtained was systematically analyzed to find patterns and themes relevant to the focus of the research. The data collection process was carried out for approximately one month in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of student confidence in grade IV of SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis techniques consisting of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out by sorting, summarizing, and grouping information relevant to the focus of the research. The data that has been reduced is then presented in the form of a descriptive narrative to facilitate the interpretation process. The researcher identified key themes related to student confidence, such as internal factors, environmental support, teacher-student interaction patterns, and forms of self-

confidence that arise in learning activities. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn inductively based on the trends and patterns that emerge from the data. Validation of the results of the analysis was carried out through discussions with peers and triangulation between sources. This approach is used to ensure that the research results are not only descriptively accurate, but also substantively meaningful in the context of basic education development. Thus, the results of this research can be used as a basis for designing pedagogical interventions that support the strengthening of student confidence in a sustainable manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aimed to analyze the self-confidence of fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen, Malang Regency, by identifying the problems they face during the learning process. The findings of this study reveal that students' self-confidence is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, both internal and external. Through interviews, observations, and documentation, four major themes emerged that illustrate the complexity of students' self-perceptions and their participation in classroom learning: (1) fear of making mistakes, (2) lack of teacher-student interaction, (3) peer influence, and (4) supportive learning environment.

Many students expressed a strong fear of being wrong, which often prevented them from speaking up or answering questions during lessons. This fear was typically rooted in previous negative experiences, such as being laughed at by peers or receiving harsh corrections from the teacher. Some students stated that they preferred to remain silent even when they knew the answer, to avoid the risk of embarrassment. This aligns with teacher observations, which noted that several students hesitated to participate actively in group discussions or class activities. The fear of failure thus acted as a barrier to their engagement and self-expression in learning situations.

The second theme identified was the limited quality of interaction between teachers and students. Several students reported that they did not feel close or connected to their teacher, which led to feelings of insecurity and hesitation to ask questions or express opinions. Teachers themselves admitted that large class sizes and tight schedules reduced the opportunity for one-on-one mentoring. As a result, students with lower confidence levels received less individual attention and feedback. This dynamic contributed to their continued withdrawal from classroom participation, reinforcing a cycle of low confidence and minimal engagement.

Peer influence also played a crucial role in shaping students' self-confidence. Some students gained confidence through positive peer support, especially in group activities where they felt accepted and encouraged. However, others experienced bullying or exclusion, which negatively impacted their sense of self-worth. These contrasting experiences show that the classroom social climate significantly affects the development of self-confidence. Positive peer interactions promoted courage and willingness to take risks, while negative interactions led to avoidance behaviors and diminished motivation.

Finally, the availability of a supportive learning environment was found to enhance students' confidence significantly. Students who felt that their learning environment was safe, structured, and emotionally supportive demonstrated higher levels of confidence and readiness to participate. This included having routines that reduced anxiety, encouragement from teachers, and scaffolding that allowed students to gradually take on more responsibility. Such conditions enabled students to develop trust in their own abilities and reduced the fear of failure over time. These findings suggest the importance of designing learning environments that nurture psychological safety and foster positive emotional experiences.

Table 1 presents the four major themes that emerged from the analysis of students' self-confidence at SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen. Each theme reflects a distinct yet interconnected aspect of the students' psychological and social experiences in the classroom environment. The first theme, Fear of Making Mistakes, illustrates how anxiety related to failure and the potential for embarrassment serves

as a primary barrier to student participation. This fear often manifests in silent behavior, reluctance to speak in class, and minimal verbal contributions during group discussions, as observed in multiple classroom interactions.

Table 1. Emerging Themes in the Study of Students' Self-Confidence

Theme	Description	Indicators Observed
1. Fear of Making Mistakes	Anxiety and silence caused by fear of being wrong or laughed at	Avoidance of answering, hesitance to speak, low response during discussions
2. Teacher-Student Interaction	Lack of close communication and emotional connection with the teacher	Students rarely ask questions, feel unnoticed, lack of personal feedback
3. Peer Influence	Positive or negative effects from classmates on students' confidence	Supportive friends increase participation; bullying causes withdrawal
4. Supportive Learning Environment	Emotional safety and structure enhance participation and self-assurance	Active engagement in a calm atmosphere, responsiveness to teacher encouragement

The second theme, Teacher-Student Interaction, emphasizes the importance of emotional connection and communication between teachers and students. When such interaction is limited—due to time constraints, classroom management issues, or instructional style—students are less likely to seek help or feel supported. This sense of emotional distance can hinder students' willingness to engage in learning activities and diminish their confidence in expressing opinions or asking questions.

The third theme, Peer Influence, shows that classmates play a dual role in either supporting or suppressing self-confidence. Students who reported having empathetic and encouraging peers showed more active participation and risk-taking in their learning. Conversely, those who experienced exclusion, mockery, or negative comparisons with peers tended to withdraw from classroom interactions. These patterns highlight the critical role of the social environment in either fostering or undermining a student's sense of self-worth.

The fourth theme, Supportive Learning Environment, focuses on the structural and emotional conditions that encourage student growth. A classroom environment that promotes psychological safety, encourages positive reinforcement, and provides appropriate scaffolding was found to significantly enhance students' willingness to try, participate, and persist in learning tasks. These supportive conditions helped reduce anxiety, built resilience, and contributed to a more confident learner identity. Collectively, these themes underscore the multifaceted nature of self-confidence and the need for holistic approaches to strengthen it in primary education contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the multifaceted nature of self-confidence among fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen. The dominant theme of fear of making mistakes aligns with previous research showing that students often experience anxiety in academic settings due to a fear of negative evaluation (Febriani, 2024). This psychological barrier reduces participation, particularly when students associate classroom performance with the risk of being judged or embarrassed. In this study, many students refrained from speaking during class discussions, despite having relevant ideas. This behavior confirms that self-confidence is not merely about knowledge possession but about the willingness to express it under social pressure. The fear of ridicule, especially when reinforced by peers or unsupportive classroom norms, becomes a self-defeating cycle. It inhibits students from taking risks and limits opportunities for academic growth (Weadman et al., 2023). Therefore, a classroom culture that normalizes errors as part of learning is essential to dismantle this fear.

Teacher-student interaction was found to be another critical factor influencing students' confidence levels. Effective communication between teachers and students fosters a sense of emotional security and validation, which is fundamental to confidence development (Hidayat et al.,

2024). In this study, limited interaction due to classroom size or instructional style often led to students feeling disconnected. These students were less likely to ask questions or seek clarification, leading to a sense of isolation in their learning experience. Teachers who invest in building rapport and provide individual feedback help students perceive themselves as capable and valued members of the classroom (Murni et al., 2022). Without such interaction, students with low confidence may internalize their struggles as personal deficiencies. This reinforces a passive learning attitude that is difficult to overcome without deliberate pedagogical intervention. Hence, strengthening teacher-student relationships is a vital strategy in promoting self-assurance.

In addition to teacher interaction, peer influence emerged as a double-edged factor in self-confidence development. Positive peer relationships provided emotional encouragement and modeling of active participation, which boosted students' willingness to engage in learning tasks (Novita, 2021). However, the presence of negative peer interactions, such as bullying or social exclusion, significantly reduced students' self-esteem. This dichotomy underscores the social dimension of confidence, which is highly susceptible to the quality of peer dynamics within the classroom. Peer validation can reinforce students' belief in their abilities, while peer rejection may lead to self-doubt and avoidance behaviors (Azmi et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to cultivate a cooperative classroom environment that encourages mutual respect and supportive peer norms. Programs that promote peer mentoring or collaborative learning can enhance positive social interactions and, consequently, student confidence. Teachers must be vigilant in addressing negative peer behaviors that compromise emotional safety.

The role of a supportive learning environment was consistently found to enhance students' confidence and participation. Students reported feeling more comfortable when the classroom atmosphere was predictable, safe, and emotionally responsive. This finding supports Widyaningrum & Hasanah (2021), which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and psychological safety in learning development. Structured routines and clear expectations reduce anxiety, while timely encouragement promotes autonomy and self-efficacy. In this study, students who received emotional support and constructive feedback were more willing to take academic risks. A positive learning climate, therefore, serves as a protective factor that mitigates the negative effects of fear and social pressure (Manera & Anggraini, 2023). The physical and emotional arrangement of the classroom plays a key role in shaping students' engagement and belief in their own capabilities. Educators should intentionally design learning spaces that promote safety, dialogue, and growth.

These findings suggest that the development of self-confidence is not solely an internal process but is significantly influenced by the sociocultural context. According to Hasanah & Supriansyah (2022), motivation and self-perception are dynamically shaped by school structures, interpersonal relationships, and cultural expectations. In the context of SD Negeri 1 Kepanjen, students' confidence was both facilitated and hindered by their interactions with teachers, peers, and the learning environment. The presence of caring adults, positive peer models, and an inclusive classroom culture can transform students' self-doubt into self-assurance. Conversely, a lack of these elements reinforces feelings of incompetence and social withdrawal. Thus, fostering self-confidence requires a holistic approach that integrates social-emotional learning into daily instruction. Educational policies must support teachers in developing relational teaching practices that center on empathy and individualized support (Solihin et al., 2024). Addressing confidence as a systemic issue can lead to more equitable and empowering educational outcomes.

Another key implication of this study is the importance of early identification and intervention in addressing low self-confidence. Self-confidence issues, if left unaddressed, may evolve into chronic disengagement or learned helplessness (Amrillah et al., 2024). Observations from the classroom revealed patterns of avoidance behavior that, over time, may be internalized as fixed self-beliefs. This highlights the need for formative assessments that include emotional and behavioral indicators, not just cognitive ones. Teachers should be trained to recognize early signs of low self-confidence and implement responsive strategies, such as personalized encouragement, reflective questioning, or

mentoring (Suyuti et al., 2023). The mentoring-based approach proposed in the introduction shows promise, as it allows for continuous guidance and relationship-building between teacher and student. Such models align with social learning theory and emphasize the role of guided experience in shaping self-perception. Therefore, teacher training programs must incorporate socio-emotional competencies as part of professional development (Saputra et al., 2023).

The study also points to the need for involving parents in supporting children's confidence outside the classroom. Home environment and parenting style play a significant role in either reinforcing or undermining the emotional resilience built at school (Amrillah et al., 2024; Saragih & Manurung, 2023). Some students in the study indicated that parental criticism or lack of encouragement at home contributed to their fear of failure. Conversely, students who felt emotionally supported at home demonstrated more confidence and initiative in classroom tasks. This interplay between school and home contexts emphasizes the importance of parent-teacher collaboration in addressing students' psychological needs (Lestyono et al., 2024). Workshops or communication platforms that engage parents in their child's learning journey can bridge the gap between home and school. Encouraging parents to practice constructive praise, active listening, and problem-solving with their children will reinforce the school's efforts in developing confidence. A shared responsibility model between teachers and parents enhances consistency and stability in students' emotional development.

In conclusion, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the conditions that shape students' self-confidence and their readiness to engage in learning. While internal traits such as temperament may play a role, the external factors—namely social relationships and environmental supports—are more malleable and thus present greater opportunity for educational intervention. Teachers are positioned as key agents in shaping these experiences, and as such, need support to implement strategies that build inclusive, empathetic, and responsive learning environments. Addressing self-confidence should not be an isolated effort but an integrated part of classroom culture, pedagogy, and curriculum. As education systems evolve, there must be a stronger emphasis on socio-emotional learning as a foundation for academic achievement. Future research could explore the long-term impact of confidence-building interventions and how they intersect with academic success and student well-being. Ultimately, building confident learners requires more than instruction—it demands care, connection, and community.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' self-confidence in the learning process is significantly influenced by four key factors: fear of making mistakes, the quality of teacher-student interaction, peer influence, and the presence of a supportive learning environment. The fear of failure was found to be a dominant inhibitor of student participation, often rooted in prior negative experiences and lack of psychological safety. Moreover, limited interaction with teachers and negative peer dynamics further undermined students' confidence, contributing to passive learning behaviors. In contrast, students who received emotional support, encouragement, and a structured learning environment demonstrated higher levels of self-assurance and active engagement. These findings underscore the importance of a holistic, relational approach to fostering self-confidence in primary school settings. Teachers play a critical role in creating inclusive and empathetic classroom cultures that validate students' efforts and normalize mistakes as part of the learning journey. Additionally, peer collaboration and scaffolding strategies can reinforce positive self-perceptions and resilience. The study also highlights the need for early identification of low-confidence indicators and the implementation of mentoring-based pedagogies to strengthen students' sense of agency.

This research, however, is limited by its small sample size and its focus on a single school context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are recommended to involve broader and more diverse school populations, as well as to explore longitudinal impacts of mentoring interventions on self-confidence development. In sum, the development of students' self-confidence is not an isolated psychological trait, but a dynamic construct shaped by social interactions

and environmental conditions. Addressing this issue requires the combined efforts of educators, parents, and school systems to build emotionally responsive and empowering educational experiences. By nurturing confident learners, schools can contribute not only to academic success but also to the holistic growth of each student.

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