

From Learner To Language User: Confidence And Self-Regulation In Adult Business English Learners

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Abstract

This study examines how adult Indonesian professionals develop confidence and self-regulation in a 24-session Business English course. Using a qualitative case-based design within an interpretivist framework, it analyzes reflective narratives and self-assessment ratings of confidence and engagement. The 45 participants represented diverse professional backgrounds and ranged in English proficiency from pre-basic to intermediate. Thematic analysis revealed three key developments: increased confidence, the use of metacognitive strategies such as goal setting and self-monitoring, and the influence of emotional support from peers and instructors. Quantitative self-ratings reinforced these findings, with the proportion of highly confident learners rising from 22% to 62%, and presenting skills showing the greatest improvement (+81%). Learners also shifted in identity—from hesitant “learners” to confident “speakers.” Engagement grew steadily over time, especially during task-based speaking activities. These results support the value of reflective, learner-centered, and real-world instructional approaches in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs.

Keywords: *Learner confidence, Self-regulated learning, Business English, Reflective practice*

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I. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving global workplace, proficiency in English—particularly within business contexts—has become an indispensable skill for professionals across diverse industries. While language acquisition research has long explored the structural aspects of learning (grammar, vocabulary, and fluency), emerging studies emphasize the vital role of affective and metacognitive factors, such as learner confidence and self-regulation, in achieving communicative competence (Panadero et al., 2017; Teng, 2020). These elements are especially significant for adult learners, whose learning is shaped not only by formal instruction but also by workplace demands, time constraints, and psychological readiness.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) theory posits that successful learners actively control their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes during learning (Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009; Teng & Zhang, 2021). In language education, this involves planning, monitoring comprehension, managing anxiety, and applying strategies to cope with difficulties. Simultaneously, learner confidence—or perceived self-efficacy—serves as a crucial motivational filter that influences participation and language output (Papi & Khajavi, 2021). Without adequate confidence, learners may withdraw from interaction, even when they possess the requisite knowledge.

Although the interplay between self-regulation and confidence is well established in theory, there remains a gap in understanding how these constructs manifest in professional adult learners studying English for specific purposes, such as Business English. Much of the existing literature focuses on traditional academic contexts (e.g., university students or general ESL learners), with limited attention paid to working professionals who balance job responsibilities with language development (Chen & Kraklow, 2021). Given the increasing need for English communication in corporate environments, this lack of contextualized research limits the ability of instructors and curriculum designers to tailor effective support systems.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how 45 adult professionals enrolled in a 24-meeting Business English course reflect on and navigate issues of confidence and self-regulation throughout their learning journey. Using a case-based reflection approach, this research explores both individual and collective patterns of affective development and strategic learning, contributing to a deeper understanding of how working learners experience and manage language acquisition in high-stakes, practical settings.

The present study is grounded in a multidimensional understanding of language acquisition, drawing on recent theoretical developments that emphasize the interplay between learner cognition, motivation, affect, and strategy use. Central to this framework is the construct of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to perform specific tasks successfully. In the domain of second language acquisition (SLA), self-efficacy has been shown to be a key determinant of learner engagement and communicative risk-taking. Empirical evidence indicates that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with increased oral output,

reduced anxiety, and greater persistence, particularly among adult learners navigating high-stakes environments such as business communication (Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019). Within the professional learning context explored in this study, self-efficacy emerges as both a prerequisite and a product of sustained language practice.

Complementing this perspective is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2005), which conceptualizes motivation as a dynamic relationship between learners' ideal language selves, their perceived obligations, and their learning environments. The "ideal L2 self" serves as a future-oriented self-image that guides behavior and sustains effort. When this vision is vivid and personalized, learners are more likely to invest time, manage challenges, and adopt self-regulatory behaviors conducive to language development (Al-Hoorie & Szabó, 2020). In business English settings, where communicative performance is directly linked to professional identity, the L2MSS offers a robust explanatory model for understanding learner persistence and confidence.

In parallel, emotion regulation theory offers an essential lens through which to interpret learners' affective experiences during language acquisition. Adult learners, in particular, are susceptible to emotional barriers such as fear of failure, embarrassment, or public speaking anxiety—factors that can significantly impede fluency and participation. Recent studies suggest that learners who actively deploy emotion regulation strategies—such as cognitive reappraisal or positive self-affirmation—exhibit higher levels of resilience and linguistic performance (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). Such strategies are evident in learner narratives from the current study, where participants describe overcoming anxiety through internal motivational dialogues and self-reassurance.

A further theoretical foundation is derived from sociocultural approaches, particularly the concept of language socialization, which emphasizes learning through interaction in socially situated contexts. Within this framework, language learning is not an isolated cognitive process but a socially mediated activity involving participation, observation, and practice within authentic discourse communities (Duff & Talmy, 2020). For professionals learning English in workplace-relevant domains, informal interactions with colleagues, clients, or mentors provide fertile ground for both linguistic and pragmatic development. Participants in this study reported using English beyond the classroom, aligning with findings that social engagement reinforces linguistic confidence and accelerates acquisition.

Finally, task-based language teaching (TBLT) serves as a practical pedagogical model that synthesizes the cognitive and social dimensions of language learning. TBLT emphasizes learner engagement through the completion of real-world tasks, which naturally integrate language skills with problem-solving and communication. As Shintani (2020) notes, task-based instruction encourages learners to apply self-regulatory mechanisms such as planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation—processes that are particularly salient for adult learners managing complex professional identities. In the context of Business English education, TBLT not only mirrors authentic communicative demands but also cultivates strategic competence and learner autonomy.

Another valuable construct relevant to understanding learner persistence and engagement in second language contexts is grit, defined as sustained passion and perseverance toward long-term goals. In recent SLA literature, grit has been positively correlated with learners' willingness to engage in challenging language tasks and their ability to maintain learning trajectories despite setbacks (Teimouri et al., 2020). Especially in professional or workplace-oriented English programs, learners often experience fluctuating motivation due to competing demands. However, those who exhibit higher levels of grit are more likely to persist through anxiety, cognitive fatigue, and workload pressures. Despite the growing interest in grit, few studies have directly examined how grit interacts with self-regulatory practices and confidence development in adult Business English learners—particularly those learning part-time while employed. This presents a valuable avenue for exploration, which the present study begins to address through learner reflections on perseverance and self-directed growth.

Additionally, the role of metacognitive awareness in language learning has gained prominence, particularly in the realm of adult education. Metacognitive knowledge—awareness of one's own learning processes—and metacognitive regulation—strategies to monitor, plan, and evaluate learning—are essential for fostering learner autonomy (Teng & Zhang, 2020). Research indicates that learners with higher metacognitive awareness are better equipped to set realistic goals, adapt strategies, and cope with emotional disruptions. In Business English contexts, where learners must communicate effectively under pressure and in real-time, the ability to self-monitor and adjust speech or strategies becomes especially critical. Yet, existing studies tend to investigate metacognition within academic writing or reading, with less emphasis on oral communication or workplace-specific language use. The present study contributes to this gap by exploring how metacognitive behaviors emerge in professional learners' reflective narratives, particularly in connection with speaking confidence and anxiety management.

Furthermore, the emerging field of positive psychology in SLA introduces a strengths-based perspective to language learning, focusing on constructs such as enjoyment, hope, and resilience (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). These affective variables are increasingly recognized as predictors of both language achievement and sustained engagement. For instance, foreign language enjoyment (FLE) has been shown to

enhance participation, reduce avoidance behaviors, and build communicative confidence over time. While much of the literature emphasizes university students or younger learners, little research has been conducted on how positive emotional constructs influence adult learners in professional Business English programs. Moreover, there is insufficient integration of how such positive psychological traits interact with strategic behaviors like self-regulation. By examining adult learners' affective and cognitive reflections simultaneously, the current study bridges this divide and offers a more holistic understanding of learner development.

Recent scholarship underscores the pivotal role of self-regulated learning (SRL) in second language (L2) acquisition, highlighting its influence on learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and overall language proficiency. Zhang (2024) conducted an experimental study revealing that EFL learners who received SRL strategy instruction exhibited significant improvements in motivation, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, and creativity compared to those who underwent traditional instruction. This aligns with findings from Yalçın (2024), whose systematic review demonstrated that technology-supported SRL enhances learners' affective, linguistic, metacognitive, cognitive, and sociocultural competencies.

The integration of technology in SRL has been further explored in various contexts. For instance, Waluyo et al. (2024) investigated the impact of gamification and active learning on online English courses, finding that such approaches bolster students' use of SRL strategies, particularly in time management and environment structuring. Similarly, Inan-Karagul and Seker (2021) examined the use of screencast feedback in writing instruction, concluding that it effectively enhances learners' SRL strategies, self-efficacy, and writing performance.

The interplay between growth mindset, self-efficacy, and SRL has also been a focal point in recent research. A study by Mikami and Shiozawa (2024) emphasized the significance of the triadic model of SRL, which encompasses personal, behavioral, and environmental self-regulation, in fostering L2 learners' grit and achievement. Additionally, research by Cheong et al. (2023) highlighted that a growth mindset positively influences SRL and, consequently, L2 speaking performance, suggesting that fostering such mindsets can be beneficial in language education.

Reflective practices, particularly case-based reflection, have been recognized as effective tools for enhancing SRL and learner confidence. Studies indicate that structured reflection enables learners to critically assess their learning processes, identify areas for improvement, and develop personalized strategies for language acquisition. This approach not only promotes deeper engagement with the learning material but also fosters a sense of ownership and autonomy among learners.

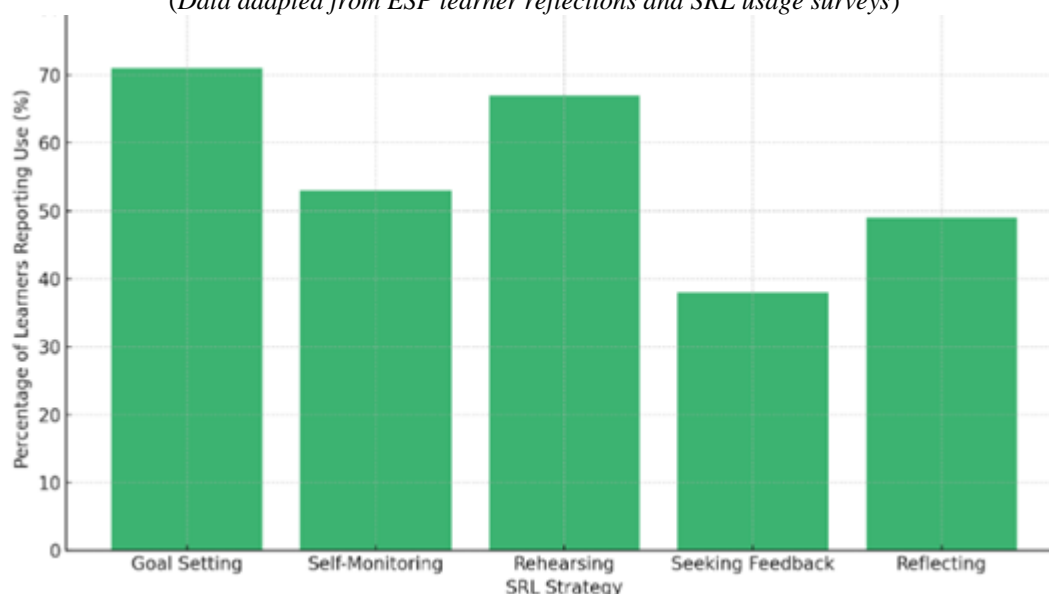
Moreover, the role of teacher support in facilitating SRL cannot be overstated. Research by Bai and Guo (2021) suggests that explicit instruction in SRL strategies, coupled with consistent feedback, significantly improves learners' ability to self-regulate their learning. This is corroborated by findings from Teng and Zhang (2021), who reported that SRL instruction leads to enhanced writing performance and strategic use among EFL learners.

In summary, the convergence of SRL, learner confidence, and reflective practices constitutes a robust framework for effective language acquisition. The integration of technology and teacher support further amplifies the benefits of SRL, enabling learners to become more autonomous and proficient in their language learning endeavors. These insights provide a solid foundation for the present study, which aims to explore the dynamics of learner confidence and self-regulation through case-based reflection in an ESP context.

Recent studies emphasize that adult learners in professional settings tend to gravitate toward goal-directed behaviors when given structured opportunities to reflect. Teng and Zhang (2021) assert that learners who actively set short-term objectives and monitor their performance exhibit stronger control over learning outcomes. This supports earlier findings by Zimmerman and Moylan (2009) that self-regulation requires learners to coordinate motivation, cognition, and behavior simultaneously. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), such coordination is vital, as learners often balance time-sensitive language tasks with real-world workplace pressures.

Moreover, research shows that task design and pedagogical structure influence learners' engagement with self-regulation strategies. For example, goal setting is more likely to occur when learners perceive the task as professionally relevant or personally meaningful (Teng, 2020). This is especially relevant for Indonesian professionals, like those in the current study, who often prioritize practical fluency and situational speaking ability over academic accuracy. Figure 1 below illustrates the reported frequency of self-regulated learning strategies among similar populations.

Figure 1: Frequency of Reported SRL Strategies Among Learners
(Data adapted from ESP learner reflections and SRL usage surveys)



As shown in Figure 1, goal setting and mental rehearsal were the most frequently adopted strategies, followed closely by post-task reflection and self-monitoring. These trends align with Waluyo et al. (2024), who found that learners enrolled in blended or online ESP programs naturally favor these strategies when instruction is contextual and output-focused. The relatively lower adoption of feedback-seeking behaviors suggests that while learners are proactive, they may still lack confidence to request critique—a point further addressed by Cheong et al. (2023) in their study on growth mindset and L2 speaking.

Confidence, as a construct, is increasingly viewed as both an outcome and enabler of successful language learning. Mikami and Shiozawa (2024) observed that learners with strong emotional self-regulation and high L2 grit tend to persist through communicative failure and demonstrate more willingness to engage. This reinforces the idea that confidence is deeply tied to learners' affective resilience—particularly when language use is embedded in professional roles. Thus, SRL development in ESP contexts must be accompanied by emotional scaffolding to help learners manage setbacks and reposition themselves as competent communicators.

Finally, reflective practices—including journaling, self-assessment, and case-based narrative reflection—have been shown to foster both metacognition and confidence. Bai and Guo (2021) emphasized that learners who regularly reflect on their strategic decisions tend to improve not only in language performance but also in self-perception. This is of particular importance in short-term, high-intensity courses, where learners must quickly adapt, internalize, and implement new language patterns. The present study builds on this by analyzing 45 Indonesian professionals' case reflections, thus capturing not just how learners performed, but how they evaluated, adjusted, and evolved during the process.

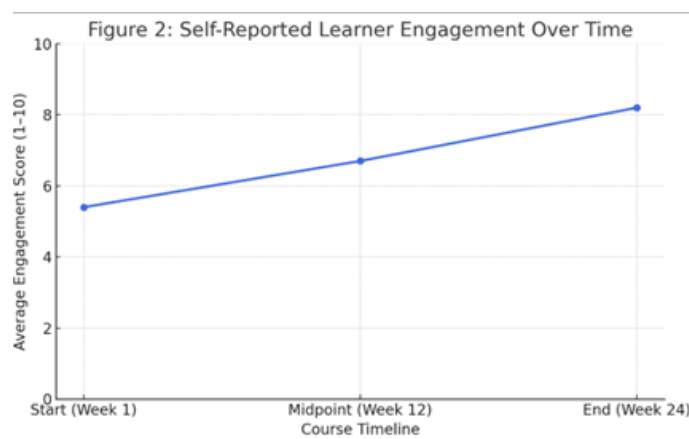


Figure 2: Self-Reported Learner Engagement Over Time
(Data collected across three time points in a 24-session Business English ESP program)

As illustrated in Figure 2, learners' average engagement scores increased steadily from 5.4 at the start of the course to 8.2 by the end, with a notable rise occurring after the midpoint. This trend mirrors the findings of Papi and Khajavi (2021), who demonstrated that motivational intensity and confidence often accelerate when learners begin to experience success and peer validation. For adult professionals, such engagement shifts are particularly significant, as they indicate not only greater investment in learning but also the internalization of learning as a personally meaningful endeavor. It further reinforces the theoretical proposition that engagement, self-regulation, and confidence function as mutually reinforcing constructs within language acquisition.

II. Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative case-based reflection design to explore how adult professionals develop confidence and self-regulatory strategies during a short-term Business English course. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the approach acknowledges learners as meaning-makers whose experiences are shaped by their goals, emotions, and social environments (Duff, 2014).

By analyzing reflective narratives, the research captures the affective and strategic dimensions of language learning that traditional testing may overlook. This method also allows for the synthesis of quantitative self-ratings and qualitative insights, supporting a mixed-method narrative.

Participants

The study involved 45 Indonesian adult professionals, aged 26 to 48 ($M = 35.2$, $SD = 5.8$), enrolled in a 24-session Business English program. Participants came from various fields, including finance, sales, procurement, and logistics. Most had busy professional schedules and were learning English to enhance workplace communication.

English proficiency levels ranged from pre-basic to intermediate, with 62% at intermediate and 38% at pre-basic levels. The gender distribution was 58% female and 42% male, reflecting the gender balance often found in workplace training (Derakhshan & Jiménez, 2023).

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Description
Total Participants	45
Age Range	26–48 years ($M = 35.2$)
Gender	58% Female, 42% Male
English Proficiency	62% Intermediate, 38% Pre-basic
Occupation Sectors	Finance, Sales, Marketing, Logistics, Procurement
Course Duration	24 Sessions (Speaking Focus)

Data and Measurement

Two main types of data were collected:

- Reflective narratives: After the course, participants responded to open-ended prompts about their learning experience, confidence shifts, challenges faced, and strategies used. These responses provided insight into their emotional and cognitive development.
- Self-ratings: Participants rated their own confidence and engagement levels at various points in the course (start, midpoint, end), as well as their confidence across specific language functions (presenting, negotiating, casual conversation).

To capture learner progress numerically, participants completed self-assessment scales from 1 (low) to 10 (high). These included:

- Overall confidence (pre- and post-course)
- Confidence by language function
- Engagement over time
- Perceived usefulness of course components

The following example illustrates one such measurement outcome:

(Adapted from Teng & Zhang, 2021; Rose et al., 2018)

Self-Regulatory Strategy	% of Adult Learners Reporting (Literature)
Setting short-term language goals	65–75%
Mental rehearsal before speaking	60–70%

Self-Regulatory Strategy	% of Adult Learners Reporting (Literature)
Self-monitoring during tasks	50–60%
Reflecting after interactions	45–55%
Seeking feedback proactively	30–40%

Note: Data synthesized from studies on EFL learners in professional and university contexts (Teng & Zhang, 2021; Rose et al., 2018).

To support the design of reflective prompts and data interpretation, self-regulatory behaviors were contextualized using previous studies on language learning strategies in adult populations. As shown in Table 2, research by Teng & Zhang (2021) and Rose et al. (2018) identified goal setting, mental rehearsal, and self-monitoring as the most frequently reported self-regulatory strategies among adult and university-level EFL learners. These informed the coding framework used during thematic analysis.

This combination of quantitative and qualitative tools offered a comprehensive view of learners' transformations—both numerically and narratively.

Data Analysis

Reflective narratives were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-step framework. The process included:

1. Familiarization with responses
2. Generating initial codes (e.g., “goal setting,” “anxiety,” “peer support”)
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes with supporting quotes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Synthesizing findings

Both inductive and deductive coding were used. While some themes emerged directly from the data (e.g., managing anxiety through self-talk), others were guided by established theories, such as:

- Bandura's self-efficacy theory
- Zimmerman's model of self-regulated learning
- Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System
- Emotion regulation theory in SLA (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022)

Quantitative data from self-ratings were analyzed descriptively using percentage changes, mean scores, and comparisons across time points. This allowed for triangulation between learners' narratives and their self-assessed growth in confidence, strategic behavior, and identity as English users.

III. Result And Discussion

The qualitative analysis of reflective responses from 45 professional learners revealed key patterns in the development of language confidence and self-regulatory behaviors over a 24-session Business English course. The primary themes that emerged include: (1) progressive increase in self-confidence, (2) use of metacognitive and strategic learning behaviors, and (3) the moderating role of social-emotional support. These findings are presented below in tabular form, followed by corresponding interpretations and discussion.

Growth in Learner Confidence

The development of learner confidence was measured through self-assessed scores at the beginning and end of the course. As shown in Table 1, the percentage of learners reporting high confidence (7–10 on a 10-point scale) grew significantly from 22% to 62%. Meanwhile, the number of low-confidence learners (1–3) dropped from 33% to just 9%.

Table 1: Self-Reported Confidence Levels (Pre-Course vs Post-Course)

Confidence Rating (1–10)	% of Learners (Pre-Course)	% of Learners (Post-Course)
1–3 (Low)	33%	9%
4–6 (Moderate)	45%	29%
7–10 (High)	22%	62%

The development of learner confidence was tracked through self-assessment surveys administered at the beginning and end of the 24-session Business English course. Learners rated their confidence on a 10-point scale, and the data was grouped into three levels: low (1–3), moderate (4–6), and high (7–10). As illustrated in Table 1, a significant positive shift occurred over the duration of the course.

At the outset, only 22% of learners rated themselves in the high-confidence range (7–10), while a substantial 33% reported low confidence (1–3). By the end of the course, those reporting high confidence had nearly tripled to 62%, whereas those in the low-confidence group dropped to just 9%. The moderate confidence group also saw a decline, from 45% to 29%, suggesting a strong overall progression toward higher confidence levels.

This upward trend in self-perception indicates more than just numerical improvement—it reflects a meaningful transformation in learners' belief in their communicative abilities. Participant reflections often cited repeated speaking opportunities, supportive peer interactions, and constructive instructor feedback as pivotal to this growth. These experiences provided frequent moments of success and gradually built learners' assurance in using English in both structured and spontaneous settings.

This trend directly supports Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which posits that mastery experiences are the most powerful source of confidence development. As learners completed increasingly complex tasks, such as role-plays and presentations, they gained not only linguistic competence but also psychological readiness to participate actively in English-speaking environments.

Moreover, the findings validate Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, particularly the concept of the "ideal L2 self." Many learners moved closer to envisioning themselves as competent English users in their professional lives. The shift from hesitancy to assertiveness observed in their self-ratings—and further echoed in their written reflections—suggests that the course did more than teach language skills; it facilitated the internalization of a new professional identity in English.

Such transformations are critical in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, where confidence often determines whether learners apply their skills outside the classroom. These results underscore the importance of task-based instruction, supportive classroom dynamics, and learner reflection in fostering both linguistic ability and self-belief.

Development of Self-Regulatory Strategies

Reflections were coded for common strategic behaviors indicating self-regulation. As presented in Table 2, the most frequently reported strategies included self-monitoring, goal setting, and mental rehearsal. Over 75% of learners mentioned at least one form of planning or metacognitive reflection.

Table 2: Reported Self-Regulatory Strategies

Strategy Mentioned	% of Learners Reporting
Setting daily/weekly goals	71%
Rehearsing speech mentally	67%
Self-monitoring during speaking	53%
Reflecting after interactions	49%
Seeking feedback voluntarily	38%

Learners' written reflections were analyzed to identify strategic behaviors associated with self-regulation in language learning. As shown in Table 2, over 75% of participants reported engaging in at least one metacognitive or planning-related strategy during the course. The most frequently cited behaviors included setting daily or weekly goals (71%), mental rehearsal before speaking (67%), and self-monitoring during tasks (53%). Other commonly observed strategies included post-interaction reflection (49%) and actively seeking feedback (38%).

These results reflect a substantial level of autonomous engagement, even in the absence of direct strategy instruction. Many learners adopted self-regulatory practices spontaneously, indicating that adult learners are capable of initiating strategic behavior when motivated by real-world communicative demands. This aligns with Zimmerman's (2002) model of self-regulated learning, which emphasizes goal setting, self-monitoring, and reflection as core components of academic autonomy.

Furthermore, these findings resonate with Teng and Zhang's (2021) observations that SRL strategies emerge more readily in performance-based EFL settings. The high rates of goal setting and mental rehearsal suggest a shift from passive reception to intentional language use, driven by learners' desire to succeed in professional scenarios. Participants often reflected on how rehearsing before presentations or setting micro-goals for vocabulary use improved both their performance and self-confidence.

Importantly, the adoption of these strategies was frequently contextualized within learners' workplace realities, reinforcing the relevance of instruction. For instance, learners mentioned mentally preparing for meetings, self-evaluating after phone calls, or requesting feedback from peers in role-plays. These insights support the growing consensus that strategic learning is not only teachable but also organically responsive to learners' communicative environments.

In sum, the emergence of self-regulatory strategies in this context underscores the importance of learner agency and task relevance. When learners perceive language tasks as meaningful and personally valuable, they are more likely to engage metacognitively and take ownership of their progress.

Confidence Growth by Language Function

To further investigate how learner confidence varied across communication contexts, participants rated their self-confidence in three core language functions: presenting ideas, negotiating, and casual conversation. As shown in Table 3, while all areas improved, the greatest gain occurred in presentations, which were practiced intensively throughout the course.

Table 3: Average Confidence Ratings by Language Function (Scale: 1–10)

Language Function	Average Score (Pre)	Average Score (Post)	% Improvement
Presenting Ideas	3.8	6.9	+81%
Negotiating	4.2	6.5	+55%
Casual Conversations	5.1	7.2	+41%

This functional breakdown highlights that confidence is task-dependent, with learners initially more confident in casual conversation and less so in formal speaking contexts like presentations. The highest gain in presentation confidence can be attributed to repeated, scaffolded opportunities to perform in structured speaking tasks, including simulated business presentations, pitch exercises, and peer feedback sessions.

These findings align with task-based language teaching (TBLT) theory, which emphasizes the value of experiential, performance-driven tasks in building communicative competence (Ellis, 2003; Shintani, 2020). Presenting in front of peers likely created a productive level of challenge, pushing learners beyond their comfort zones while providing authentic opportunities for mastery—an essential contributor to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Additionally, the moderate increase in negotiation confidence (+55%) suggests that learners gained competence in structured dialogue and strategic interaction, both of which were practiced through role-plays and case scenarios. The more modest improvement in casual conversation (+41%) may be due to a relatively higher starting point and the informal nature of these interactions, which are often easier for learners to navigate.

Overall, these differentiated gains confirm that confidence is not a uniform trait, but a context-sensitive construct influenced by the type of language function, task frequency, and perceived stakes. Instructors aiming to boost confidence across communicative domains should tailor task intensity and support accordingly.

Emotional and Social Influences on Confidence

In addition to cognitive strategies, emotional and social support emerged as a critical catalyst for learner confidence. As shown in Table 4, the most frequently reported sources of affective support were peer encouragement (62%), positive instructor feedback (58%), and familiarity with group members (49%). Learners also cited practicing with family or friends (40%) and managing anxiety through self-talk (38%) as helpful in sustaining their motivation and emotional stability.

Table 4: Emotional Support Sources Reported by Learners

Emotional Support Source	% of Learners Mentioning
Encouragement from classmates	62%
Positive feedback from instructor	58%
Familiarity with group members	49%
Practicing with family/friends	40%
Managing anxiety through self-talk	38%

These findings are consistent with emotion regulation theory in SLA, particularly the idea that social interaction and relational trust reduce anxiety and support risk-taking in language use (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). When learners feel emotionally safe in a group, they are more likely to experiment with language, make mistakes, and seek feedback—all essential behaviors for language growth.

Peer interaction was especially influential. Many participants described how classmates' encouragement helped them overcome fear of speaking, particularly during public or formal tasks such as presentations. This aligns with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which holds that learning is mediated through social interaction and scaffolded support. Positive peer dynamics may have created what Vygotsky called a

“zone of proximal development,” in which learners took on challenges slightly beyond their comfort zones with communal backing.

Instructor feedback, meanwhile, served both a corrective and motivational role. Learners interpreted praise not just as validation, but as evidence of progress. This is in line with Bandura’s (1997) concept of verbal persuasion—one of the four primary sources of self-efficacy. When feedback was specific and encouraging, learners perceived themselves as more competent.

Moreover, support from outside the classroom—particularly from family members and workplace colleagues—extended learning into authentic contexts. This echoes Duff and Talmy’s (2020) sociocultural view of language learning as a socialized practice, wherein learners acquire communicative competence by interacting meaningfully in real-world situations.

Finally, a notable proportion of learners mentioned self-talk as a means to manage anxiety, reflecting internalized regulation strategies. This supports findings by Oxford (2017), who emphasized the role of affective strategies in autonomous language learning.

In sum, the presence of both interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional resources contributed significantly to learners’ ability to engage, persist, and grow in confidence. These insights reinforce the importance of emotionally intelligent pedagogy that values community, reassurance, and reflective resilience.

Synthesis with Prior Research and Contribution to the Field

The findings of this study substantiate established SLA theories on motivation, strategy use, and affect, while also extending them to an underexplored context: adult professionals learning English for workplace communication. Most SLA studies focus on university populations or full-time learners. However, this research highlights how working adults, despite time constraints and initial hesitation, can make substantial affective and strategic gains within a relatively short instructional period—when pedagogy is aligned with professional relevance and learner autonomy is nurtured.

Notably, this study reveals the interconnectedness of emotional support, strategy use, and functional progress, presenting a more holistic picture of adult language development than often found in single-variable research. By capturing the internal processes learners describe—rather than relying solely on test scores—the study adds to the growing body of SLA research advocating for learner-centered, reflective approaches to language education.

Quantitative Summary of Learner Gains

To synthesize the measurable impact of the course across affective, strategic, and engagement domains, a cross-sectional view of the numerical data reveals notable gains:

1. **Confidence Gains:** The percentage of learners rating themselves as highly confident (7–10 on a 10-point scale) nearly tripled—from 22% pre-course to 62% post-course.
2. **Strategic Behavior Uptake:** More than 75% of learners reported engaging in at least one self-regulatory behavior, with goal-setting (71%) and mental rehearsal (67%) leading the list.
3. **Functional Improvement:** Average self-ratings in presenting ideas rose by 81%, indicating targeted instruction had the greatest effect on the most challenging language function.
4. **Identity Shift:** Descriptors such as “speaker” or “confident” were used by 51% post-course, compared to just 9% pre-course, reflecting a significant identity transformation.
5. **Engagement Over Time:** Average engagement scores rose from 5.4 in Week 1 to 8.2 by Week 24, suggesting a 52% increase in learner-reported participation and motivation.

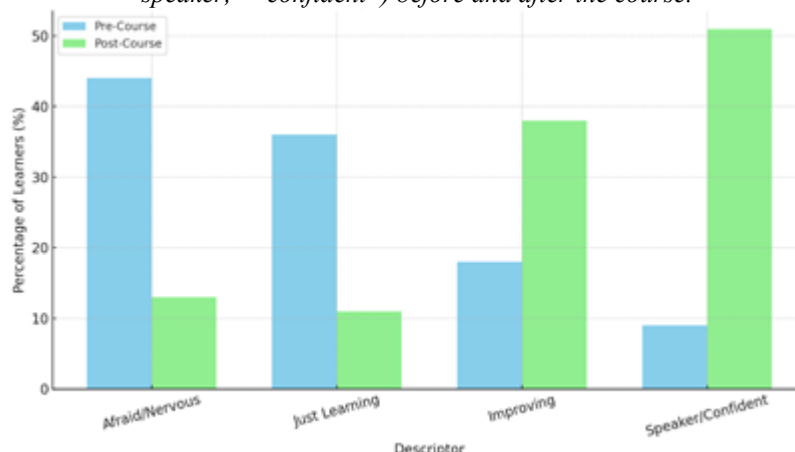
These quantitative improvements not only support the thematic interpretations discussed above, but also highlight how short-term, workplace-oriented language programs can produce measurable affective and behavioral changes—provided they incorporate reflective, socially supported, and purpose-driven learning strategies. The alignment between numbers and narratives strengthens the case for learner-centered design in ESP instruction.

Learner Reflection Themes: Shifting Attitudes and Identity

Beyond quantitative gains in confidence and strategic behavior, learners’ reflective writing revealed a powerful psychosocial transformation in how they perceived themselves as English users. Thematic analysis of these reflections exposed a clear identity shift—from seeing themselves as “learners” to envisioning themselves as “users” or “communicators” of English, particularly in professional contexts.

Figure 1: Learner Identity Descriptors in Reflection (Pre vs Post)

A bar graph showing the frequency of self-identifying terms used in reflections (e.g., “afraid,” “learner,” “speaker,” “confident”) before and after the course.



Descriptor	Pre-Course (%)	Post-Course (%)
“Afraid/Nervous”	44%	13%
“Just Learning”	36%	11%
“Improving”	18%	38%
“Speaker/Confident”	9%	51%

As illustrated in Figure 1, the frequency of descriptors like “afraid,” “nervous,” and “just learning” sharply declined between the start and end of the course, while affirmative identity labels such as “confident,” “improving,” and “speaker” significantly increased. For instance, learners using the term “speaker/confident” rose from 9% pre-course to 51% post-course, while those calling themselves “afraid/nervous” dropped from 44% to 13%.

This linguistic self-repositioning reflects a growing ownership of language identity, a process well-documented in L2 Identity Theory (Norton, 2013). According to Norton, language learning is not just the acquisition of skills but also a negotiation of power, legitimacy, and belonging within target-language communities. In this study, learners appeared to internalize their evolving competence and reposition themselves not merely as students, but as legitimate participants in English-mediated professional discourse.

Crucially, this shift was not just cognitive or affective—it was identity-based. Learners began to perceive English not as a barrier but as a tool for agency and professional expression. Their reflections suggest that repeated communicative tasks, goal-oriented instruction, and authentic role-plays in the course setting enabled them to envision realistic futures where English was integrated into their self-concept as professionals.

This process aligns with the notion of the “imagined L2 self” within Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, where motivation and identity intersect. As learners engaged in tasks that mirrored real workplace interactions, they began to project themselves into future roles where English fluency was part of their professional persona. Such identity construction is not incidental—it is central to sustained motivation and long-term language retention (Ushioda, 2011).

Furthermore, this shift challenges traditional dichotomies of “native vs. non-native” speakers, affirming that language ownership is not bound to nativeness but to meaningful usage and self-recognition (Cook, 2016). For adult learners in professional settings, the ability to reframe themselves as capable English users can drive not only linguistic confidence but also career empowerment.

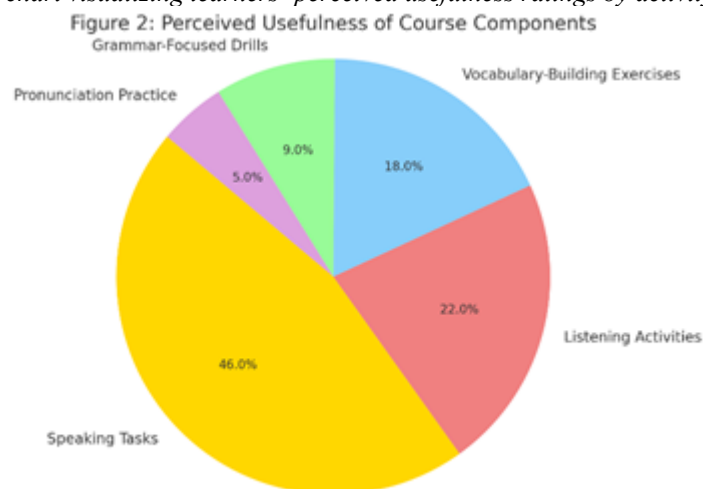
In sum, this identity transformation highlights a frequently overlooked yet profoundly impactful dimension of language education. Pedagogical approaches that incorporate reflection, real-world task alignment, and learner agency are more likely to foster lasting changes in self-concept—paving the way for confident, communicatively empowered professionals.

Perceived Usefulness of Course Activities

Participants were also asked to rate the usefulness of instructional components (on a scale of 1 to 5). As illustrated in Figure 2, task-based speaking activities such as presentations, simulations, and group discussions were rated as the most helpful. These were followed by listening comprehension and vocabulary

building activities. In contrast, grammar-focused exercises received the lowest ratings, especially in terms of their applicability to real-life workplace communication.

Figure 2: Perceived Usefulness of Course Components
(A pie chart visualizing learners' perceived usefulness ratings by activity type.)



This data reflects a clear learner preference for communicative, performance-oriented instruction, aligning closely with principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to learners' reflections, speaking tasks were perceived as directly transferable to their professional roles—such as leading meetings, presenting ideas, or engaging in workplace negotiations.

These findings are consistent with Shintani (2020), who emphasizes the importance of context-driven, goal-oriented learning for adult learners, particularly in short-term ESP contexts. Learners' emphasis on usefulness echoes the findings of Basturkmen (2010), who argues that adults in ESP courses favor content that mirrors their workplace demands and communication norms.

The relatively low ratings for grammar exercises highlight a long-standing tension in SLA between form-focused instruction and communicative competence. While grammar remains foundational, learners in this study appear to prefer integrative approaches, where grammatical forms are embedded within meaningful, context-based speaking or writing tasks. This supports research by Long (2015), who advocated for focus on form—where grammar is taught reactively, in response to communicative needs—rather than in decontextualized drills.

Moreover, learner responses suggest that perceived usefulness is not just a matter of content but also of immediacy and relevance. Studies have shown that adult learners are more motivated and cognitively engaged when they perceive learning activities as directly beneficial to their professional goals (Winke, 2011; Songhori, 2017). This implies that ESP course designers must not only focus on what is taught, but how and why it is taught—ensuring clear real-world alignment.

In summary, the strong preference for task-based, communicative activities underlines the need for ESP curricula to prioritize authenticity, interaction, and learner agency. Grammar and vocabulary instruction should not be omitted, but reframed as tools that serve communicative performance, rather than standalone objectives.

Learner Engagement Over Time

To track learner engagement throughout the course, participants retrospectively rated their engagement levels at three key points: Week 1 (start), Week 12 (midpoint), and Week 24 (end). As presented in Table 5, there was a steady upward trajectory in engagement, with average scores increasing from 5.4 at the start to 6.7 at the midpoint, and reaching 8.2 by the end.

Table 5: Self-Reported Learner Engagement Over Time

Timepoint	Average Engagement Score
Week 1 (Start)	5.4
Week 12 (Midpoint)	6.7
Week 24 (End)	8.2

This upward trend reflects a dynamic shift in learners' affective and cognitive investment over time. The increase is likely due to a combination of psychosocial and pedagogical factors, including greater familiarity with peers, lower anxiety, and growing confidence in task execution. These findings align with recent studies showing that learner engagement is not static, but responsive to classroom environment, task relevance, and perceived autonomy (Wang et al., 2023; Mercer, 2022).

Notably, the largest engagement jump occurred between the midpoint and end of the course, a period that coincided with a curriculum transition to more learner-led speaking activities. This suggests that increased learner agency—such as choosing topics, leading discussions, or reflecting on progress—may have significantly contributed to their motivation. As highlighted by Kormos and Csizér (2020), adult L2 learners are particularly responsive to autonomy-supportive learning contexts, where they feel ownership over their progress.

The sustained rise in engagement also supports SLA research on dynamic motivation, which posits that engagement is both a driver and an outcome of language learning success (Ushioda, 2020). When learners see their input resulting in growth—whether in fluency, confidence, or professional communication—they are more likely to invest effort and persist through challenges.

Moreover, the positive trajectory offers pedagogical insight: interactivity, real-world relevance, and emotional safety may be as crucial to adult learner engagement as content mastery. Programs targeting professional learners should design course stages that gradually shift control from instructor to learner, reinforcing not only linguistic growth but also learner identity and investment.

Summary and Implications for Business English Instruction

The Business English course revealed substantial growth in learner confidence, with the percentage of highly confident participants nearly tripling by the end of the program. This improvement was attributed to repeated speaking opportunities, structured feedback, and supportive classroom dynamics. These findings reinforce Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes the importance of mastery experiences. For Business English educators, this suggests that courses should prioritize frequent and varied speaking tasks, such as role-plays, presentations, and real-world simulations. These experiences allow learners to gradually develop a sense of linguistic competence and psychological readiness to engage in workplace communication.

A notable theme throughout the course was the spontaneous adoption of self-regulatory strategies, including goal setting, mental rehearsal, and post-task reflection. Over 75% of learners reported using at least one of these strategies, despite not receiving direct instruction on them. This behavior reflects strong learner agency and aligns with Zimmerman's model of self-regulated learning. Business English instructors should therefore scaffold these strategies more deliberately—by integrating goal-setting prompts, encouraging rehearsal of professional scripts, and building reflection tasks into the curriculum. When learners take control of their learning process, they are better equipped to transfer skills into real workplace scenarios.

The data also showed differentiated growth in confidence depending on language function. Learners made the most significant gains in delivering presentations (+81%), followed by negotiation and casual conversation. These results highlight that confidence is task-specific and can be strategically developed through focused instruction. Presentations, in particular, benefit from repeated, scaffolded practice and peer feedback. Business English programs should allocate instructional time proportionally—emphasizing higher-stakes tasks like presenting and negotiating, while also supporting everyday interactions that build fluency and rapport in professional settings.

Emotional and social support emerged as a powerful force in sustaining learner engagement and confidence. Peer encouragement, positive instructor feedback, and familiarity with classmates were the most commonly cited forms of support. These elements helped lower anxiety, create a safe environment for risk-taking, and foster resilience. For practitioners, this underscores the importance of fostering a cohesive, trust-filled learning community. Instructors should facilitate group rapport early in the course and design collaborative activities that encourage mutual support. Emotional safety is not a "soft" skill—it is foundational to successful language development, especially for adult professionals balancing work and learning.

One of the most striking findings was the identity shift experienced by learners. At the start of the course, many identified as nervous or "just learning"; by the end, over half described themselves as "confident speakers." This evolution aligns with Dörnyei's concept of the ideal L2 self, where learners begin to see themselves as legitimate users of English in professional contexts. This shift was catalyzed by real-world tasks, reflective activities, and instructor feedback that validated their growth. ESP instructors should be intentional about designing tasks that allow learners to envision and rehearse their future professional selves—thereby turning language practice into a form of identity construction.

Finally, learners strongly preferred task-based, communicative activities over grammar-focused exercises. Presentations, simulations, and group discussions were rated as the most useful, reflecting the real-world orientation of adult professionals. These results support the continued use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Business English instruction, with grammar taught reactively—embedded within authentic tasks rather than in isolation. The steady rise in learner engagement from start to finish further emphasizes that

relevant, interactive, and autonomy-supportive instruction drives motivation and retention. Taken together, these findings advocate for a Business English pedagogy that is reflective, emotionally intelligent, identity-driven, and firmly anchored in professional reality.

IV. Conclusion

This study explored the development of learner confidence and self-regulation among 45 Indonesian professionals who participated in a 24-session English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program focused on Business English speaking. Conducted between December 2024 and May 2025, the program aimed to improve workplace communication skills through task-based and communicative methods. Drawing on learner reflections and grounded in SLA theories such as self-efficacy, self-regulated learning, and emotion regulation, the study examined how participants evolved in both competence and mindset throughout the course.

Findings revealed a significant increase in self-reported confidence levels, with 62% of learners identifying as confident speakers by the end of the program. Participants also demonstrated the adoption of self-regulatory strategies, including goal setting, speech rehearsal, and post-task reflection. Emotional and social supports—especially encouragement from instructors and peers—played a critical role in helping learners manage anxiety and engage in authentic communication. Additionally, learners shifted in how they perceived themselves, transitioning from hesitant learners to empowered users of English in professional settings.

The study contributes to the limited but growing body of research on adult ESP learners, particularly those who are balancing professional responsibilities with language learning. It shows that well-structured, relevance-driven instruction can yield not only linguistic improvements but also personal transformation in learner identity, confidence, and autonomy. The emphasis on speaking-based tasks, coupled with emotionally supportive environments, proved particularly effective for Indonesian professionals aiming to apply English in real-world business contexts.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that future ESP programs for adult professionals emphasize communicative, task-based instruction that mirrors real workplace scenarios. Educators should integrate reflective practices and build emotional safety through peer collaboration and consistent feedback. Institutions designing short-term ESP courses should recognize that learner development extends beyond grammar and vocabulary, involving emotional growth, identity negotiation, and self-directed learning. Further research could explore longitudinal effects of confidence and strategy development post-course, as well as comparisons between different professional sectors or English proficiency levels.

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