

UNDERSTANDING SELF-CONFIDENCE IN RURAL ADOLESCENT WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract: Self-confidence is a crucial psychological factor that influences adolescents' ability to participate socially and overcome academic and emotional challenges. This study uses a qualitative case study approach involving in-depth interviews and direct observation of a 17-year-old high school student in a rural area of Lamongan. Data were collected from the student, parents, and peers, then analyzed thematically to explore patterns related to self-confidence. The findings reveal four dominant themes: low social validation at school, authoritarian and emotionally distant parenting, dependence on external support, and negative academic self-perception. The subject's self-confidence only increased in an emotionally safe environment. These results indicate that the self-confidence of the subjects studied in a rural context is influenced by interpersonal dynamics and self-concept. These findings are contextual to one case and cannot be generalized, but they provide valuable insights into the importance of emotional support in shaping the self-confidence of rural adolescents.

Keywords: Self-confidence, rural adolescents, parenting, school support, qualitative study

1 INTRODUCTION

Self-confidence is one of the key aspects in adolescent development that directly impacts their ability to form social relationships, cope with academic pressure, and make decisions independently (Wagner et al., 2023). Adolescence is characterized by complex emotional and social dynamics, making individuals at this stage highly vulnerable to doubting their own abilities (Coll et al., 2020). Low self-confidence in adolescents is often associated with increased anxiety levels, reduced social participation, and decreased academic performance (Wardhana et al., 2024). As the primary environment after the family, schools play a crucial role in fostering students' self-confidence by providing a supportive social environment that promotes self-assurance, active participation, and the development of personal identity (Wang et al., 2022). Various studies have shown that high levels of self-confidence correlate positively with learning motivation, academic achievement, and grit in students (Clementino & Utami, 2025; Sidabutar et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2021). However, most similar studies still focus on schools in urban areas, necessitating further exploration in the context of rural schools, which have different social dynamics and resource availability.

Rural communities differ from urban areas in terms of social structure and patterns of interaction between individuals, as well as in terms of access to facilities and infrastructure. The social structure in rural areas of Indonesia is generally formed by interdependent relationships between residents in small communities, which can be seen through the value of mutual cooperation, the important role of local community leaders, and a social structure that tends to be uniform (Junaedi et al., 2023). Social interactions among adolescents in rural environments are often limited to a narrow social sphere, thereby strengthening social control from the community and reducing space for adolescents to express themselves freely and independently (Priatama et al., 2019). This situation has the potential to cause stress for adolescents, given that adolescence is an important phase in the process of self-identity formation (Negru-Subtirica, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore the dynamics of self-confidence among adolescent students in a rural environment.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the dynamics of self-confidence in adolescent students living in rural areas. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand psychological phenomena in depth in the context of real everyday life (Hanurawan, 2016). The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for understanding an individual's personal experiences in depth, as it allows for the use of diverse sources of

information and analysis developed from field data to build a comprehensive understanding. This approach not only explores observable behavior but also the personal meanings hidden behind the subject's responses and actions.

Data collection in this study was conducted through a combination of in-depth interviews and direct observation in the field to obtain a comprehensive picture of the subjects' conditions. Autoanamnesis interviews were conducted directly with the subjects in several meetings to access primary data that reflected their personal experiences and perceptions of themselves. Meanwhile, alloanamnesis interviews were conducted with the subjects' parents and classmates to obtain secondary data that served as comparative and reinforcing material for the main findings. Observations were carried out in two environments, namely at home and at school, to capture the subjects' daily behavior patterns and social interactions in natural situations that were not influenced by the research scenario. This strategy enables researchers to gain a richer and more contextual understanding of the dynamics of the subject's self-confidence in their social environment.

The subject of this study is a 17-year-old female student living in the rural area of Lamongan and currently enrolled at SMA Negeri 1 Ngimbang. The subject was selected purposively based on a referral from the school, which indicated challenges in social participation and difficulties in self-expression. To maintain research ethics, the subject's identity was kept confidential to protect privacy and ensure data confidentiality. The subject was selected because she was considered to represent the general profile of rural adolescents facing psychosocial pressures.

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach based on the framework developed by Hanurawan (2016), which includes the stages of data transcription, coding, theme development, and interpretation of thematic meaning. This technique was used to identify psychological patterns that emerged consistently in the subjects' narratives and behavior, particularly those related to the dynamics of self-confidence in various interaction contexts. Triangulation techniques were applied to enhance the validity of the findings by comparing results from various data sources. This approach enabled researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the contributions of internal factors (such as self-perception and emotions) and external factors (such as social support and environment) in the process of self-confidence formation among adolescents in rural areas.

3 RESULTS

First, the theme of low social validation at school was evident in the subject's interactions in class. He tended to be quiet, reluctant to express opinions, and only answered questions when prompted by the teacher. The guidance counselor and homeroom teacher described him as passive, while peers described him as friendly but rarely engaged in conversation. This situation indicated minimal social participation and a feeling of protection within the classroom community.

Second, the theme of authoritarian and emotionally unresponsive parenting was evident in the subject's experience of being frequently compared to his younger sibling. His mother repeatedly set a standard for his younger sibling's achievements, fostering feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, he often suppressed his emotions for fear of being misunderstood. His mother also admitted to being less sensitive to her child's emotional changes and placing more emphasis on academics and discipline.

Third, the theme of independence from external support emerged. The subject appeared more expressive and confident when in safe situations, such as with close friends or familiar teachers. However, when in large groups or open social situations, he becomes passive and withdrawn unless there is direct support from someone he considers safe. This indicates that the subject's self-confidence is not yet internally stable and is still heavily influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Fourth, the theme of negative academic self-perception is evident in how the subject views his abilities. He frequently calls himself "stupid" or "not good at speaking," even though teachers rate his abilities as quite good. The subject also frequently compares himself to more active friends, which reinforces feelings of inferiority. He even avoids difficult problems for fear of failure, despite possessing the basic skills to complete them.

Table 1. Findings on Emerging Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting Evidence
Low social validation in the school environment	Lack of confidence when interacting in class	The subject tends to be quiet and does not dare to express his opinions. The guidance counselor and homeroom teacher describe the subject as passive and only answering when asked directly.

Authoritarian and unresponsive parenting styles	Minimal participation in social groups	Classmates describe the subject as “nice but rarely participates in conversations.” The subject feels that she has few close friends.
	Comparison of achievements	The subject's mother used to compare the subject's achievements with those of his younger sibling. This caused the subject to feel inferior about his abilities.
	Unaccustomed to expressing emotions	Nowadays, the subject has become more open with his parents because he used to be afraid of being misunderstood or scolded. The mother also admitted that she was not very sensitive to her child's emotional state.
Reliance on external support	More expressive in supportive situations	Subjects express their opinions more confidently when they are with close friends.
	Awkward in open social situations	Subjects tend to withdraw when they are in large groups, unless they receive direct support from teachers or friends.
Negative self-perception of academic ability	Feeling incompetent	The subject referred to himself as “stupid” and “not good at speaking,” even though his participation in class was sufficient according to his teacher.
	Comparing yourself to more active friends	The subject often stated that his friends were braver and smarter than him, making him feel inferior.

4 DISCUSSIONS

One of the main findings in this study was the subjects' tendency to be inactive in classroom interactions. The subjects appeared passive, rarely expressed their opinions, and only responded when asked directly by the teacher. This indicates the presence of internal barriers that make the subjects feel insufficiently secure or worthy to speak in the classroom. The lack of social validation from teachers and peers reinforces this condition. This finding is in line with the research by Wang et al. (2022), which confirms that an unsupportive school climate can hinder the development of students' social and emotional skills, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In rural environments that tend to be conservative, support from teachers is crucial in building students' self-confidence.

Outside the learning context, the subjects also showed minimal social involvement in their social interactions. They rarely engage in casual conversations or group activities and only feel close to one or two friends. This reflects social isolation in the classroom environment. According to Coll et al. (2020), persistent social isolation can form a negative self-image and affect an individual's assessment of their social abilities. Priatama et al. (2019) add that adolescents in rural areas tend to live in a strict social control system with minimal psychological expression, which ultimately hinders their ability to form healthy relationships. The lack of interaction impacts social skills and reinforces feelings of rejection, thereby lowering self-confidence.

The subject's low self-confidence is also influenced by parenting patterns at home, particularly experiences of being compared to a sibling perceived as more accomplished. Although not always direct criticism, these comparative narratives shape the subject's view of themselves as less competent. This aligns with Coll et al.'s (2020) findings, which show that negative validation from significant figures within the family can hinder the development of healthy self-esteem. When praise is replaced by comparison, adolescents tend to internalize feelings of inadequacy, which then affect their self-confidence in social settings.

The subject also revealed that since childhood, they were not accustomed to openly expressing emotions to their parents. They felt afraid of being misunderstood or seen as excessive when showing emotions such as sadness or anger. The mother herself acknowledged being less attuned to her child's emotional changes and more focused on academic aspects and discipline. This aligns with the findings of Isni et al. (2024), which indicate low emotional awareness in parenting patterns in rural areas. Children's emotions are often not considered important, leading adolescents to learn to suppress

their emotions as a form of adaptation. As a result, they lose a safe space to understand and regulate their emotions, which impacts the formation of self-image and self-confidence.

One important pattern observed is the increased expressiveness and self-confidence of the subjects when in an emotionally safe environment. When with close friends or in a non-judgmental group, the subject is more open in expressing their thoughts. This indicates that their self-confidence is not yet internally stable but highly dependent on the quality of supportive interpersonal relationships. Afiatin and Andayani (2015) also found that social support group interventions can significantly enhance adolescents' self-confidence. This underscores the importance of a supportive social environment as a catalyst for self-expression.

Conversely, when in broader and unfamiliar social situations—such as large groups or open classes—the subject tends to become passive and withdrawn. They are only active when with figures they consider safe, such as close friends or familiar teachers. Feelings of insecurity and concerns about social acceptance lead to awkwardness. A study by Lestari et al. (2022) shows that group counseling can increase teenagers' courage to perform and interact, even in contexts such as orphanages. Although the setting is different, the underlying principle is the same: self-confidence develops with clear social support. Without it, teenagers prefer to withdraw to maintain emotional comfort.

The subject also demonstrated a very low academic self-perception, even though teachers rated his abilities as quite good. He often referred to himself as unintelligent and compared himself to friends who were more active or excelled in the subject matter. This indicates the presence of internalized negative beliefs about academic ability, which stem from the construction of self-concept, rather than from external factors such as learning facilities. Research by Salim et al. (2025) found that self-concept has a significant influence on students' self-confidence, explaining up to 57% of its variation. Negative views of oneself act as a barrier to active participation and acceptance of academic feedback.

This low self-perception is also evident in the subject's lack of confidence when completing assignments or exams. They avoid difficult questions out of fear of failure, even though they actually have the ability to solve them. This is similar to the findings of Pratiwi and Laksmiwati (2020) at SMA Negeri 1 Porong, which showed a high positive correlation between self-confidence and independent learning. Students with low self-confidence, such as the research subjects, face difficulties in managing independent learning and cannot maximize their academic potential. This situation underscores the importance of cognitive restructuring interventions to build positive narratives, both regarding learning outcomes and students' academic identities.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that in subjects who are adolescent students in rural areas, self-confidence is formed through the influence of internal and external factors, including emotional validation, parenting styles, social environment, and self-perception. Subjects' self-confidence was found to be fragile and context-dependent, often developing only in safe and emotionally supportive interactions. Limited social validation at school, authoritarian parenting styles, and negative academic self-perception emerged as major contributors to low self-confidence. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating an emotionally supportive environment both at home and at school to facilitate the development of a healthy self-concept, especially since in rural areas, many communities still ignore adolescent mental health.

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