The Relationship between Students' Speaking Anxiety and Their Speaking Scores: A Study at the Second-Grade of UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Parepare

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Abstract: Speaking is a vital skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, yet many students experience anxiety when required to speak in front of others. This study investigates the relationship between speaking anxiety and English-speaking performance among second-grade students at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Parepare. Employing a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 77 students through a speaking anxiety questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and a speaking performance test. Results indicated that most students experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety and achieved fair scores in speaking tasks. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a very strong and significant negative correlation between students' speaking anxiety and their speaking performance ($r = -0.858$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that higher anxiety levels are associated with lower speaking performance. The study highlights the importance of reducing anxiety in classroom settings to improve students' oral proficiency.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, speaking performance, correlation study, EFL, junior high school

Introduction

English has long been recognized as an international language essential for global communication, education, and professional opportunities. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject, with speaking skills considered one of the most challenging components to master (Rao, 2019). Despite its importance, many learners face psychological barriers such as anxiety, which often hinders their ability to perform effectively in speaking activities (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

Speaking anxiety, a form of situation-specific anxiety, is common in EFL contexts. It can lead to avoidance behaviors, hesitation, and reduced performance (Tanveer, 2007). Previous studies (e.g., Megawati, 2019; Manda & Irawati, 2021) have demonstrated a negative relationship between anxiety and speaking performance, though most were conducted at the university level. Plantika and Adnan (2021) emphasized fear of negative judgment as the most prevalent anxiety factor, while Dana and Aminatun (2022) linked speaking anxiety to lower proficiency test scores. Kulsum and Ridwan (2025) further found that self-confidence positively correlates with better speaking performance, reinforcing the inverse role of anxiety.

However, most of these studies targeted senior high school or university students. Few have investigated speaking anxiety at the junior high school level, where learners are still developing confidence in English communication. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the relationship between speaking anxieties and speaking scores among second-grade students of UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Parepare, offering new insights into how psychological barriers influence language learning in early adolescence.

Method

This research employed a quantitative correlational design to identify the relationship between students' speaking anxiety and their speaking scores. The population consisted of 338 second-grade students, from which a sample of 77 was selected using cluster random sampling across three classes.

Instruments

Data collection instruments included:

1. Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire.

   Adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986), focusing specifically on speaking anxiety. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Items assessed fear of negative evaluation, nervousness, hesitation, and avoidance behaviors.

2. Speaking Performance Test.

   Students were asked to deliver a 1–2 minute monologue about a memorable experience. Their performance was assessed based on five criteria: fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and content, using a rubric adapted from Brown (2004). Scores were converted into a 100-point scale.

Procedures

Questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms, while speaking performances were collected through video submissions. Each video was evaluated independently by two raters to ensure reliability. Descriptive statistics, normality testing, linearity testing, and Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis were performed using SPSS version 31.0.

Results

Findings showed that 48% of students experienced moderate speaking anxiety, 22% high anxiety, 26% low anxiety, and 4% very low anxiety. This indicates that nearly half of the participants felt noticeable discomfort when asked to speak in English, reflecting a common challenge in EFL classrooms.

In terms of speaking scores, most students were classified as fair, with 30% in the fair category, 26% in good, and 15% in very good. A smaller proportion (25%) was in the poor category, and only 4% in very poor. These results suggest that while some students performed well, the majority still struggled to reach higher levels of oral proficiency.

Correlation analysis revealed a very strong negative correlation between speaking anxiety and speaking scores ($r = -0.858$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.737$) indicated that approximately 73.7% of the variance in students' speaking scores could be explained by their speaking anxiety levels, highlighting its strong influence on performance.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that speaking anxiety is a significant barrier to effective language performance. The finding that most students experienced moderate anxiety aligns with Tanveer's (2007) claim that foreign language learners frequently encounter fear, hesitation, and nervousness in classroom communication. The very strong negative correlation found in this study exceeds the moderate correlations reported in earlier research (Megawati, 2019; Plantika & Adnan, 2021), suggesting that younger learners may be more sensitive to anxiety when speaking English.

These results highlight the importance of fostering supportive classroom environments. Teachers should reduce the fear of negative evaluation by promoting peer collaboration, using constructive feedback, and integrating activities that encourage risk-taking in language use. This aligns with Kulsum and Ridwan's (2025) suggestion that self-confidence plays a crucial role in improving performance. Moreover, the findings emphasize that addressing psychological barriers is as essential as teaching linguistic components.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on junior high school students in Parepare, a population underrepresented in existing literature. By demonstrating that anxiety explains a substantial portion of speaking performance outcomes, this research underscores the urgency for early interventions to build confidence in learners.

Conclusion

This study concludes that speaking anxiety significantly affects students' speaking performance, with higher anxiety levels associated with lower performance. Nearly half of the participants experienced moderate anxiety, and the majority achieved only fair speaking scores. The strong negative correlation ($r = -0.858$) indicates that reducing anxiety can directly improve students' oral proficiency.

Suggestions

Teachers should design classroom practices that create a positive, low-stress environment, such as incorporating pair work, games, and role-play activities. Schools can provide workshops or extracurricular programs to enhance speaking confidence. Future researchers may expand this study by including variables such as motivation, learning environment, or teacher feedback to better explain the remaining factors affecting speaking performance.

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