English-Speaking Anxiety and Self-Esteem of Students at a Selected Private Junior High School in Minahasa Utara

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Abstract

This article reported descriptive, correlational, and comparative quantitative research on English-speaking anxiety and self-esteem: description level of the two variables, the relationship between them, and the difference between 190 female and male respondent students at a selected private Junior High School in Minahasa Utara, Indonesia. To answer research questions, two questionnaires used to collect numeric data were as follows: Horwitz' Anxiety in Speaking English and Rosenberg's Conventional Self-esteem which were examined as valid and reliable after a statistical analysis through the test of scale reliability. The findings revealed a high level of English-speaking anxiety ($M = 3.59$) and moderate
($M = 2.62$) level of self-esteem among the respondents; a statistically significant ($p = .00$) and negative ($r = -.40$) the relationship was found between English-speaking anxiety and self-esteem, and no significant difference ($p = .31 > \alpha = .05$) was found between the female and male students' anxiety in speaking English and their self-esteem. Nevertheless, the findings of this study were obviously deemed inconsistent with the findings of previous studies conducted in Indonesia and some Asian countries. Therefore, this study came up with recommendations that similar further studies be conducted in a local context which could bring about more relevant, useful, and applicable implications.

Keywords: English-speaking anxiety, gender difference, self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

English speaking anxiety is one of the major concerns among learners of English as a foreign language as they strive to master the language due to its status as a lingua France which has been more often used worldwide than before. Anxiety in speaking English has been the topic of numerous studies in non-English speaking countries where English is deemed more important in this digital era. When English-speaking anxiety was associated with self-esteem and gender, more complex and more inconsistent findings were revealed contrary to the traditional mainstream theories. A comprehensive review by Kalsoom, et al. (2021) recommended that more studies be conducted on "foreign language learning anxiety from different perspectives with different settings and by using a variety of methods" (p. 230).

Anxiety in English speaking is the fear or unease experienced by students when using the language, particularly in classroom scenarios where communication with peers or teachers is required. This anxiety often arises from factors like a lack of confidence in their English

speaking abilities, the fear of making errors in front of others, and concerns about negative judgment. Conversely, self-esteem refers to how students subjectively evaluate themselves in terms of abilities and self-worth. High self-esteem typically correlates with positive confidence in using English, while low self-esteem indicates a lack of confidence in utilizing the language.

English-speaking Anxiety

English-speaking anxiety is a sort of nervousness experienced by individuals when communicating English as a second or foreign language. This phenomenon can manifest in various contexts, such as English classroom settings, social interaction, or even professional environments. English-speaking anxiety has been defined conventionally as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Horwitz, et al., 1986). It is specifically associated with second language context, including speaking, listening, and learning (Harada et al., 2017). Furthermore, Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that subjective feeling is unique and complex self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. It is a distinct situation when learners of English as a second or foreign language experience anxiety which they do not undertake when learning other subjects. This type of anxiety emerges from the uniqueness of learning English as a foreign language.

Several factors may affect anxiety in speaking English such as self-confidence, limited vocabulary knowledge, and attitudes toward the English language (Tulgar, 2018). Some other affecting factors included student factors such as timidity, lack of confidence, afraid of making mistakes, and lack of grammar knowledge (Basri, 2019; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020), lack of English-speaking practice and fear of negative evaluation by English teacher (Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018; Mahdalena, 2021), and therefore in Indonesia, students have difficulties in expressing themselves in the English language. (Katemba & Buli, 2018)
. The English-speaking anxiety emerges from three major aspects: learners, teachers, and instructional practices, according to Young (1991). She further explains that the three aspects comprise six potential causes which include personal and interpersonal, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. Personal and interpersonal issues are the most common potential factor that causes anxiety, wherein low self-esteem is one of the significant sources of anxiety in speaking English since it is associated with interpersonal relationships in terms of competitiveness as the learners of English compare themselves with others. Macintyre and Gardner (1989) found that learners with foreign language anxiety had a more difficult time expressing their own views and tended to underestimate their own abilities, and those with higher levels of anxiety were associated with lower achievement in terms of foreign language acquisition.

More specifically, English-speaking anxiety negatively affects the acquisition of foreign language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, speaking performance was identified as the most anxiety-producing performance environment (Horwitz et al., 1996; Young, 1991). A study by Elkhafaifi (2005) revealed significant negative correlations between foreign language learning anxiety and listening anxiety, suggesting that reduction of student anxiety helps students improve their listening skills. In another study done by (Katemba, p. 8, 2013) stated that "there was no significant correlation between the anxiety level of the students and their academic achievement. It might be

because intelligence plays a major role here". The anxiety of the students was Facilitating anxiety - motivating the learner to fight ' the new learning task. Bosmans and Hurd (2016) focused on the effects of language anxiety on the pronunciation of learners who were enrolled in an online language course. They found that students with low levels of foreign language anxiety were significantly correlated with better pronunciation skills. Saito, et al. (1999) reported that students' reading anxiety level was found to be negatively correlated with their grades in reading skills: less anxiety was correlated with higher scores in their reading grades. Cheng (2002) revealed that perceived foreign language writing competence predicted foreign language writing anxiety and suggested that foreign language writing anxiety was distinct from source language writing anxiety.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a crucial component of healthy development from childhood through adulthood. It is a fundamental psychological construct that plays a significant role in various aspects of an individual's life, including mental health, social relationships, and overall well-being. Self-esteem can be defined as how someone subjectively evaluates themselves in terms of their own mental health, emotions, worth, and value. Since it is a personal concept of his knowledge and belief about their personal attribute, self-esteem tends to influence personal feelings, thought patterns, and behavior. When associated with learning, each student has a view of himself and his own worth towards their own learning process, meaning that every student has feelings that can control their self-esteem.

Self-esteem is often dependent on external sources. For example, individuals feel good about themselves when others praise them for their accomplishments or when they perceive others as liking them. Therefore, self-esteem is unstable and can fluctuate depending on the feedback received from other people. When feeling threatened, someone may also become defensive in order to protect our himself or herself. However, Jordan and Zeigler-Hill (2020) distinguished between fragile self-esteem and true self-esteem. Fragile self-esteem refers to feelings of unstable self-worth that are based on unrealistically positive self-views. Individuals with fragile self-esteem may frequently seek reassurance of their positive self-views. Fragile self-esteem contrasts with secure self-esteem, which refers to feelings of self-worth that are confidently held and based on more realistic self-views. Individuals with secure self-esteem recognize their shortcomings and are disappointed by failure, but still feel positively toward themselves. People with true self-esteem are relatively stable and intrinsically motivated, while those with fragile self-esteem tend to be dependent on external sources because they tend to be extrinsically motivated.

A widely used conceptualization of self-esteem was developed by Rosenberg's (1979, & 1995). It can be generally defined as an individual's overall sense of self-worth or how good they feel about themselves. The Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg et al., 1995; Flynn, 2003), which measures global self-esteem, is divided into two parts, high self-esteem (positive) and low self-esteem (negative). Individuals who have a positive assessment of themselves tend to have high self-esteem. This means that this individual admires himself or herself and expects others to do the same. Students with high self-esteem experience more happiness and optimism which can increase their motivation to learn and achieve their learning goals (Flynn, 2003; Baumeister, et al., 2003). Mann et.al. (2004) suggested that positive self-esteem is viewed as a basic characteristic of mental health and as a protective factor that contributes to positive health, and a social life that serves as a buffer against negative influence. On the other hand, people who

have a negative assessment of themselves tend to have low self-esteem and they can be characterized as genuinely unhappy and dissatisfied with themselves. Their personal belief is that they are inadequate, unlovable, unworthy, and also incompetent. Students with low self-esteem tend to imagine bad things and not believe in themselves. Low self-esteem can be a problem for students or someone in communicating with others because they feel they are not good enough in many things. On the other hand, a person can even receive negative feedback from low-esteem individuals.

METHODS

Respondents

The respondents of this study were 97 students who officially enrolled in the second semester of the 2022 / 2023 academic year at a selected private Junior High School in Minahasa Utara, Indonesia. They were students of grade VIII A (32 students), VIII C (33 students), and VIII D (32 students). There were 93 students who were available during the data gathering. Their voluntary participation was based on their willingness and availability during the data gathering.

Research Instrument

This descriptive quantitative study utilized two questionnaires were used to gather data. First, the questionnaire Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz (Horwitz et al, 1986) and the conventional self-esteem of Rosenberg (1979). For those items were adapted from Horwitz, et al (1986), there were 23 items for student anxiety in speaking English which was divided into three parts that were lack of vocabulary (items 1, 2, 3, 9, 19, 20, 23), panic anxiety disorder (5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21), and social anxiety disorder (4, 8, 12, 15, 16, 22). The Rosenberg self-esteem instrument consists of 10 items which were divided into three parts: high self-esteem (items 1, 3, 4, 10), low self-esteem (items 2, 5, 6, 9), and self-respect (items 7 and 8).   Both the questionnaires were designed with a 5-point Likert Scale, wherein the Anxiety in Speaking English ranges from 1 = Always to 5 = Never; and the Self-Esteem ranges from 1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. Scale reliability was conducted to test the two questionnaires which removed items 1 and 10 from the Anxiety in Speaking English scale, while the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale retained the 10 items.

Data Analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis of mean scores was used to describe the level of student anxiety in learning English and their self-esteem. The interpretation of the mean score was based on the rounding of the five points in the Likert scale, and thus the mean score ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Interpretation of Mean Score

Likert Scale	Mean Score Range	Interpretation
1	1.00 – 1.49	very low
2	1.50 – 2.49	low
3	2.50 – 3.49	moderate

| 4 | 3.50 – 4.49 | high |
| 5 | 4.50 – 5.00 | very high |

Bivariate Pearson Correlation analysis was used to interpret the significance of the correlation between Anxiety in Speaking English and Self-Esteem. If the significance value p was less than the significance level α = .05, there was a significant relationship between the student anxiety in speaking English and their self-esteem. An analysis of variance comparison analysis of mean score was used to interpret whether there was a significant difference between the female and male student anxiety in speaking English and their self-esteem. If the significance value p was less than the significance level α = .05, there was a significant difference between the female and male students' anxiety in speaking English and their self-esteem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Anxiety in Speaking English and Self-Esteem

The output of descriptive statistical analysis showed that the mean score was 3.59 which fell in the range of 3.50 – 4.49, indicating a high level of student anxiety in speaking English of 93 respondents in grade eight A, C, and D (See Table 2). The respondents were found to have higher levels of English-speaking anxiety, which is like the Malaysian students (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). However, this level of anxiety is higher than the moderate and low levels of English-speaking anxiety found among other Indonesian students (Tridinanti, 2018; Dellah, et al., 2020; Sinaga, et. al., 2020; Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021). There were still inconsistent findings in terms of English-speaking anxiety among students who learned English as a foreign language.

The overall mean score of self-esteem is 2.62 which was in the range of 2.50-3.49, implying that the student's self-esteem was classified as moderate level. This finding was consistent with the studies of Tridinanti (2018) who found a medium level of self-confidence among Indonesian students in a private university, but different from Mujahidah et al. (2022) who found that there was low self-esteem among 10th-grade Indonesian students in Parepare in terms of English learning. Apparently, the learners of English as a foreign language experienced different levels of self-esteem taking their education level into consideration.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Anxiety in Speaking English	93	1.89	4.84	3.59	.68
Self Esteem	93	1.00	5.00	2.62	1.06

Relationship Between Student Anxiety in Speaking English and Their Self-Esteem

Bivariate Pearson correlation analysis yielded the significance of relationship between the Anxiety in Speaking English and their Self-Esteem. As shown in Table 3, the significance value p was .00 which was less than the significance level α = .05 (See Table 3) indicating that there was a significant correlation between student anxiety and their self-esteem of this. The output also showed that the direction of the relationship was negative (r = -.40**), implying a

negative correlation between Anxiety in Speaking English and Self-Esteem: higher score in Anxiety in Speaking English was associated with lower score in Self-Esteem. It all meant that the higher the level of student anxiety in speaking English, the lower was the level of their self-esteem. This finding was not consistent with the findings of researchers such as Ariyani (2022) and ALGhazo (2023) that revealed no significant association between English-speaking anxiety and self-esteem.

Table 3. Correlation between Student Anxiety in Speaking English and Their Self-Esteem

		Self-Esteem
Anxiety in Speaking English	Pearson Correlation Coefficient r	-.40**
	Significance Value p (2-tailed)	.00
	N	93

The Difference between Female and Male Student Anxiety in Speaking English

One-way analysis of variance was carried out to find out whether there was a significant difference between female and male student Anxiety in Learning English. Shown in Table 4 the significance value p was .19 which was greater than significance level α = .05, meaning that there was no significant difference between female and male student anxiety in speaking English.

Table 4. ANOVA Output Student Anxiety in Speaking English by Gender

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Anxiety * Gender	Between Groups	.79	1	.79	1.74	.19
	Within Groups	41.53	128	.46		
	Total	42.32	129			

Additionally, a descriptive statistic was conducted to analyze the female and male student anxiety in speaking English, revealing that the mean score of females (M = 3.49) was higher than males (M = 3.68), yet not significantly different. The two mean scores were in the same high level when they were rounded up to four, implying a confirmation that the female students experienced somewhat the same level of anxiety as the male students in terms of speaking English. This finding is consistent with, for instance, that of Fauziyah, et al. (2022) in their study of Indonesian high school students at Tasikmalaya and of Dellah, et al., (2020) in their research of speaking anxiety among students at Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia, where the female students experienced anxiety level higher than the male students. However, Anteg (2021) found that the female students' English-speaking anxiety scored significantly higher than male among Filipino-Chinese high school students of Pace Academy.

Female and Male Student Self-Esteem

One-way ANOVA was also used to find out whether there was a significant difference in the student self-esteem based on their gender. Table 6 shows that the significance value p = .31 was greater that significance level < α = 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between female and male students' self-esteem.

Table 5. ANOVA Table: Student Self-Esteem by Gender

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Esteem * Gender	Between Groups	1.15	1	1.15	1.03	.31
	Within Groups	101.67	128	1.12		
	Total	102.82	129			

A descriptive statistical analysis of the female and male students' self-esteem resulted in the mean score of females (M = 2.73) and males (M = 2.51). Even though the females' mean score was higher than the males' mean score, they both were categorized as medium level of self-esteem. This confirmed that there was no significant difference between female and male students' self-esteem. This finding was consistent with that of Koosha et al. (2011) who suggested that self-esteem level of the students of English language was somewhat similar regardless of gender difference. Nevertheless, this finding was not consistent with study of Ulfiatunnikmah (2019) who unfolded the otherwise that there was a significant gender difference in self-esteem, where the male students showed higher level of self-esteem in English-speaking when compared to female students. This is also in line with that of Casale (2020) who held that men consistently reported higher self-esteem than women.

CONCLUSION

The respondents of this study, namely the students at a selected private Junior High School in Minahasa Utara, regardless of their gender difference, experienced a high level of English-speaking anxiety and a moderate level of self-esteem. Higher level of English-speaking anxiety was significantly associated with lower level of self-esteem: the higher was the student anxiety in speaking English, the lower was their self-esteem. Students with low self-esteem tended to experience heightened anxiety in speaking English. They were doubtful about their English-speaking skills and worried excessively about making mistakes or being judged by others. On the other hand, English-speaking anxiety can also have a reciprocal effect on self-esteem, wherein the students who consistently have hard times dealing with their self-esteem may struggle with using English to communicate in an English classroom. Students with higher self-esteem were more prone to approach English-speaking situations with greater confidence rather than personal failures. This positive attitude can help reduce English-speaking anxiety.

However, previous studies in different schools in some Asian countries reported inconsistent findings regarding the description of English-speaking anxiety and self-esteem levels, their relationship, and difference across gender. No consistent correlation was found between English-speaking anxiety and self-esteem and likewise no consistent difference regardless of gender. Given the inconsistency in previous studies regarding English-speaking anxiety, self-esteem levels, and their relationship across different schools in Asian countries, it is essential to conduct further research in this area. Future studies should focus on exploring the nuances of English-speaking anxiety and self-esteem among students, considering potential local cultural and contextual factors that may contribute to variations in findings. Additionally, it is advisable to investigate gender differences comprehensively to gain a better understanding of how these factors interact. This research can inform educational interventions and support systems tailored to the specific needs of students in different contexts.

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