

**THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SPEAKING ANXIETY AND PERCEPTION OF
ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN FOURTH-SEMESTER
STUDENTS AT UINFAS BENGKULU**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the correlation between speaking anxiety and perceived oral communication competence among fourth-semester students of the English Education program at UINFAS Bengkulu. Using a quantitative correlational approach, the study involved 67 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The instruments used were the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) Scale, with very high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.963). Tests for normality and linearity assumptions showed the data were normally distributed and had a linear relationship. Analysis results indicated an average speaking anxiety score of 87.15, and an average perceived oral communication competence score of 82.76. The Pearson correlation test produced a very strong positive relationship ($r = 0.965$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that the higher the speaking anxiety, the higher the students' perception of their oral communication competence. These findings enrich psycholinguistic studies by challenging the assumption that speaking anxiety always has a negative effect (debilitating anxiety). Instead, in this context, anxiety functions as facilitating anxiety that reflects students' critical awareness and high academic standards as prospective educators.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety, Perceived Oral Communication Competence, EFL Learners

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji korelasi antara kecemasan berbicara dan persepsi kompetensi komunikasi lisan pada mahasiswa semester empat Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris UINFAS Bengkulu. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional, penelitian melibatkan 67 responden melalui purposive sampling. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) dan Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) Scale dengan reliabilitas sangat tinggi (Cronbach's Alpha = 0,963). Uji prasyarat normalitas dan linearitas menunjukkan data berdistribusi normal dan memiliki hubungan linear. Hasil analisis menunjukkan rata-rata skor kecemasan berbicara 87,15 dan persepsi kompetensi komunikasi lisan 82,76. Uji korelasi Pearson menghasilkan hubungan positif sangat

kuat ($r = 0,965$, $p < 0,01$), yang berarti semakin tinggi kecemasan berbicara, semakin tinggi pula persepsi kompetensi komunikasi lisan mahasiswa. Temuan ini memperkaya kajian psikolinguistik dengan menantang asumsi bahwa kecemasan berbicara selalu berdampak negatif (*debilitating anxiety*). Sebaliknya, dalam konteks ini kecemasan berfungsi sebagai *facilitating anxiety* yang mencerminkan kesadaran kritis dan standar akademik tinggi mahasiswa calon pendidik.

Kata Kunci: *Kecemasan Berbicara, Persepsi Kompetensi Komunikasi Lisan, Pembelajar EFL*

A. Introduction

In the era of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, mastery of English as an international language has become a fundamental necessity across various sectors, including higher education. In Indonesia, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been integrated into university curricula with an emphasis on developing holistic communicative competence. Oral communication skills play a central role in facilitating academic interaction, research collaboration, and global career readiness. However, behind the urgency of mastering these skills, there is a psychological phenomenon that often becomes a significant yet hidden barrier: speaking anxiety.

Speaking anxiety is not merely a temporary manifestation of nervousness, but a persistent affective

barrier that can disrupt learners' cognitive processes, reduce communicative intent, and hinder overall oral performance. Numerous studies in second language acquisition consistently confirm that speaking skills occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of language anxiety triggers, especially because of their real-time nature, public exposure, and concerns about negative evaluation from peers and instructors. If left unaddressed, this anxiety can form a sustained negative cycle: anxious learners avoid opportunities to practice speaking, their fluency develops less, and this condition further reinforces anxiety and avoidance behaviors in the future.

Initial observations in the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu, particularly among fourth-semester students, reveal an interesting educational paradox.

Although the students have been exposed to adequate language structures and vocabulary and have completed several basic language courses, many of them still show psychological resistance when asked to perform orally in English in class. The symptoms vary, ranging from avoidant behaviors such as sitting in the back row and making minimal contributions in group discussions, to physiological manifestations such as a trembling voice, cold sweats, and losing their train of thought during presentations. Further analysis shows that these barriers are not only caused by linguistic deficiencies but also by affective-emotional factors that are known in the literature as foreign language anxiety, with a particular focus on the speaking dimension.

Foreign language speaking anxiety is a multidimensional construct that includes fear of negative evaluation, communication anxiety, and exam-related anxiety. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), such anxiety can directly disrupt oral communication performance through psychological mechanisms like cognitive interference and excessive self-monitoring. For prospective English teachers, this impact is even

more critical because they not only must master speaking skills but also model them confidently for their future students.

Previous research has revealed that speaking anxiety is a critical issue in learning English as a foreign language. EFL students experience anxiety when speaking in English, both during classroom discussions with instructors and when giving presentations (Alshiabani & Algraini, 2024). They tend to have speaking ability at a moderate level and experience anxiety influenced by cognitive factors as well as the social environment (Montaño et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with Suparia et al. (2022), who confirmed a strong correlation between foreign language anxiety and speaking ability, particularly related to students' perceptions of their oral communication competence. In Indonesia, Mustamir (2024) identified that speaking anxiety among EFL learners is not only caused by fear of negative evaluation and lack of self-confidence, but is also influenced by cultural dimensions. Meanwhile, Hasibuan & Irzawati (2020) concluded that speaking anxiety is negatively correlated with speaking performance,

thereby directly affecting the achievement of oral language competencies.

Although previous research has established a relationship between speaking anxiety and oral communication competence in general, there are limitations in the methods used to measure these two constructs in an integrated way within the local context. Montaña et al. (2022) and Mustamir (2024) used qualitative or mixed approaches focusing on identifying causal factors, while Hasibuan & Irzawati (2020) and Suparia et al. (2022) measured correlations with actual performance or broader perceptions. No study has specifically measured the correlation between levels of speaking anxiety and specific perceptions of oral communication competence using standardized questionnaire instruments on a population of early-semester students in the context of an Islamic higher education institution. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by investigating the relationship between the two variables quantitatively among fourth-semester students at UINFAS Bengkulu.

Based on the identified research gaps and contextual urgency, this

study is designed as a quantitative study with a descriptive correlational approach, using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection method. The anxiety instrument was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986), while perceptions of oral communication competence were measured using the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) Scale by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988).

B. Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. The selection of this approach and research design is based on its suitability for the research objective, which is to identify and measure the relationship between two predetermined variables. A quantitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to operationalize psychological phenomena and subjective perceptions, in this case, foreign language speaking anxiety and perceived oral communication ability into numerical data that can be measured, calculated, and analyzed

statistically. This approach provides a systematic and structured framework for testing relationships between variables based on objective empirical data. As emphasized by Creswell (2014), quantitative research focuses on measuring variables and testing relationships among variables using statistical procedures, which enables generalization of findings from the sample to the population.

Correlational design was chosen because it aligns with the research objective of identifying whether there is a relationship, and the strength and direction of the relationship between speaking anxiety (the independent variable) and perceived oral communication competence (the dependent variable). Correlational research aims to reveal the degree of association between two or more variables without manipulating those variables (Sugiyono, 2013). In this study, the researcher observes both variables as they occur in their natural setting without providing any intervention or specific treatment.

It is important to emphasize that this correlational study does not aim to prove a causal relationship between speech anxiety and perceived oral communication competence.

Correlational research can only show that two variables are related, but it cannot determine whether one variable causes changes in the other (Sugiyono, 2013). Interpretation of the study's results will focus on the pattern of relationships identified, while remaining aware that other factors beyond the scope of the study may also influence those relationships.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

This study involved 67 fourth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu as respondents. All collected data were found to be 100% valid and complete with no missing data, making them suitable for further analysis.

Based on descriptive statistical analysis, the respondents' average Speaking Anxiety score was 87.15 with a standard deviation of 17.659, a median of 88.00, and a score range from 33 to 127. According to Oetting's (1983) criteria, this score falls into the "mild anxiety" category. Meanwhile, the average score for Perceived Oral Communication Competence was 82.76 with a standard deviation of 17.802, a median of 82.00, and a

score range from 49 to 125. According to McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) criteria, this score is in the "moderate" category approaching "high."

Before conducting hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests were performed first. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test results showed that both variables were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), and the linearity test indicated a linear relationship between the two variables ($p > 0.05$). Thus, the parametric assumptions were met and the Pearson correlation analysis could proceed. The results of the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Test Results

Variabel	Ukuran Statistik	Speaking Anxiety	Self Perception
Speaking Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	0,965
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000
	N	67	67
Self Perception	Pearson Correlation	0,965	1

	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	
	N	67	67

Based on the table above, the correlation test results show a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.965 with a significance value (p) of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). According to the criteria of Schober et al. (2018), this value falls into the category of a very strong relationship. The positive sign on the correlation coefficient indicates a unidirectional relationship, meaning that the higher the students' Speaking Anxiety level, the higher their Perception of Oral Communication Competence, and vice versa. Thus, there is a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between Speaking Anxiety and Perception of Oral Communication Competence among fourth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu ($r = 0.965$, $p < 0.01$).

2. Discussion

The study results show a very strong positive correlation between speaking anxiety and perceived oral communication competence ($r = 0.965$, $p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that the higher the speaking

anxiety experienced by students, the higher their perception of oral communication competence. This pattern is consistent with the descriptive data, where respondents with the lowest anxiety score (33) had a low competence perception (50.00), while respondents with the highest anxiety (127) had the highest competence perception (125.00).

These findings challenge the common assumption that anxiety always has a negative impact on language learning. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety is a multidimensional construct that includes fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test-related anxiety. In this context, anxiety arises not from inability, but because students hold high performance standards and fear they may not meet them. The similarly high average scores for anxiety (87.15) and perceived competence (82.76) indicate that the anxiety experienced by students is adaptive. Students view the challenge of speaking in public as crucial to their academic image, so anxiety emerges as a defensive mechanism that drives better preparation. Thus, in this context

anxiety is not debilitating but functions as a facilitating force reflecting students' seriousness in meeting academic demands.

These findings differ from Salainti and Sumajouw (2024), who found a negative correlation between speaking anxiety and perceived speaking ability among high school students in Indonesia. This difference can be explained by the differing characteristics of participants. Fourth-semester university students have had longer and more intensive academic exposure to demands for speaking in English compared with high school students who are still at an early stage of language learning. Larasati et al. (2026), in a mixed-methods study involving 43 English education undergraduates in Indonesia, reported that speaking anxiety negatively affected students' self-confidence and the effectiveness of their oral performance. Although contextually similar, differences in findings may stem from methodological differences, since their study focused more on students' perceptions of anxiety experiences rather than quantitatively correlating anxiety levels with perceived competence. Similarly, Muftah (2023) reported that students

with high communication anxiety tend to have lower self-perceptions of competence, which contradicts the findings of this study. This difference can be explained by differences in academic context and professional identity. Participants in this study were English education students with professional aspirations to become teachers, so they interpreted speaking anxiety as a reflection of seriousness in meeting professional standards, not as an indication of inability.

Implicitly, these findings enrich psycholinguistic studies by showing that speaking anxiety is not always detrimental, but in certain contexts can reflect students' critical awareness of their academic standards. These findings align with McCroskey and McCroskey (1988)'s concept that perceptions of communication competence are an individual's subjective judgments that do not always reflect objective ability. Thus, anxiety and perceived competence can coexist as two sides of the same academic awareness. Practically, these findings imply that instructors need not view students' anxiety as an absolute weakness. Instead, anxiety can be managed as positive energy through the creation of a supportive

yet challenging learning environment and the provision of progress-oriented feedback.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the data analysis that has been conducted, there is a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between speaking anxiety and perceptions of oral communication competence among fourth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu ($r = 0.965$, $p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that the higher the students' speaking anxiety, the higher their perceived oral communication competence.

This study also reveals that speaking anxiety and perceptions of oral communication competence are not two opposing phenomena, but rather two sides of the same academic awareness in prospective teacher students. In this context, anxiety functions as a reflection of critical awareness and high academic standards.

Practically, instructors are advised to create a supportive yet challenging learning environment and provide constructive feedback focused

on progress. Further research is recommended to use a qualitative approach to explore more deeply the factors that mediate the relationship between the two variables and to expand the scope of the population.

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