

HOW DO SELF-ESTEEM, ANXIETY, AND MOTIVATION MATTER IN SPEAKING? A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners due to its spontaneous and anxiety-provoking nature. This study investigates the influence of self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation on students' English-speaking performance using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. The research was conducted with third-semester students enrolled in a Public Speaking course in an English Education program at a university in Malang, Indonesia. Quantitative data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire completed by 30 students and analyzed using multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with four purposively selected participants and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that students demonstrated moderate self-esteem, high levels of speaking anxiety, and strong motivation to improve their speaking skills. Although the regression analysis showed that self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation did not significantly predict speaking performance statistically, qualitative findings indicated that anxiety emerged as the most dominant barrier, negatively affecting fluency and confidence. Self-esteem functioned as emotional resilience, enabling students to recover from mistakes, while motivation played a compensatory role that encouraged persistence despite anxiety. Overall, the study highlights that speaking performance is shaped by the dynamic interaction of affective factors within a supportive learning environment. The findings suggest that EFL speaking instruction should address emotional support and motivation alongside linguistic competence to enhance students' oral communication skills.

Keywords: EFL students, self-esteem, speaking anxiety, motivation, speaking skills, mixed-methods.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning due to its spontaneous and real-time nature. Learners are required to produce language fluently while simultaneously managing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communicative intent (Richards, 2008; Dewaele & Li, 2020). In recent years, the importance of speaking proficiency has increased as English continues to function as a global language for academic, professional, and intercultural communication (Jenkins, 2019). As a result, the ability to communicate orally in English has become a crucial indicator of success for EFL learners.

Despite its importance, many EFL learners struggle to develop effective speaking skills, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts where opportunities to practice English outside the classroom are limited. The lack of authentic interaction restricts learners' exposure to real-life communication and reduces their confidence in using English (Littlewood, 2007; Sato & Loewen, 2019; Dewaele & Li, 2020). Consequently, students often perceive speaking activities as demanding and stressful rather than as opportunities for meaningful communication.

One of the most frequently reported obstacles in EFL speaking is anxiety, especially fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by others. Recent studies indicate that speaking anxiety can significantly hinder oral performance by reducing fluency, increasing hesitation, and limiting classroom participation (Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Learners who experience high levels of anxiety tend to avoid speaking tasks, which negatively affects their speaking development and willingness to communicate (Dewaele & Li, 2020).

In addition to anxiety, self-esteem and motivation play crucial roles in shaping students' speaking performance. Self-esteem influences learners' perceptions of their own speaking ability and their confidence when expressing ideas orally. Learners with higher self-esteem are more likely to participate actively in speaking activities, while motivated learners tend to persist and engage more fully in communicative tasks (Brown, 2007; Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). These affective factors strongly determine how learners approach and respond to speaking challenges.

Although speaking proficiency involves cognitive components such as fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, recent research emphasizes that affective factors are equally influential in determining speaking success (Shao et al., 2020). Self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation do not operate independently; rather, they interact dynamically and collectively shape learners' speaking experiences and performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dewaele & Li, 2020). Understanding this interaction is essential for developing effective speaking instruction that addresses both linguistic competence and learners' psychological needs.

However, most existing studies have examined affective variables in EFL speaking separately or relied primarily on quantitative research designs, leaving learners' subjective experiences underexplored. To address this gap, the present study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-method design to investigate how self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation influence EFL students' speaking performance from students' perspectives. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(1) How do self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation influence speaking performance as perceived by students? and

(2) How do students view the extent to which self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation affect their speaking performance in language learning?

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-method research design using an explanatory sequential approach to investigate the influence of self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation on students' English speaking performance. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was chosen because it allows quantitative findings to be explored and clarified further through qualitative data, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Ivankova et al., 2006). In this design, quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and elaborate the initial results.

The study was conducted at a university in Malang, Indonesia, involving third-semester students enrolled in a Public Speaking course in the English Education program. The participants were selected based on specific criteria, particularly students who demonstrated low interest and relatively low speaking proficiency in English. A total of 30 students participated in the questionnaire phase, while four students were purposively selected for the interview phase based on their questionnaire results, representing both lower and higher levels of speaking-related affective factors, as well as their willingness and availability to participate.

The data were collected using two instruments: an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The open-ended questionnaire was used to explore students' perceptions of how self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation influence their speaking performance. This type of questionnaire was chosen because it allows participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely, providing rich and descriptive qualitative insights while still supporting mixed-method analysis (Creswell et al., 2007). The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms and distributed through a WhatsApp group for the Public Speaking class. Participants were given one week to complete the questionnaire.

To obtain more in-depth data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four selected participants. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate because they provide flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring that key research objectives are addressed. An interview guide was developed to explore students' perspectives on the relative influence of self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation on their speaking performance, the interaction among these factors, and possible instructional strategies to support students' speaking development. The interviews were conducted online via WhatsApp voice notes to ensure accessibility and participant comfort. Each interview lasted between 10 and 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and securely stored for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data using multiple regression analysis with SPSS to examine the relationship between self-esteem, anxiety, motivation, and speaking performance (Kafle, 2019). The second phase involved qualitative thematic analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns and themes emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity, coded systematically, and grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, member checking was conducted by sharing the interview transcripts with the participants to confirm the accuracy of the data. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify, add, or remove information. Ethical considerations were also addressed by informing participants about the purpose of the study, ensuring confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent prior to data collection. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences (Doyle, 2007).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the integrated findings and discussion of the study, combining quantitative results and qualitative insights to examine how self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation influence students’ English-speaking performance. The integration of statistical data and interview findings provides a comprehensive understanding of the emotional factors shaping students’ speaking experiences in the EFL classroom.

Table 4.1. Self-Esteem Scale

Case Processing Summary				Reliability Statistics	
		N	%	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Cases	Valid	24	100.0	.559	5
	Excluded ^a	0	.0		
	Total	24	100.0		

Table 4.2. Anxiety Scale

Case Processing Summary				Reliability Statistics	
		N	%	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Cases	Valid	24	100.0	.666	5
	Excluded ^a	0	.0		
	Total	24	100.0		

Table 4.3. Motivation Scale

Case Processing Summary				Reliability Statistics	
		N	%	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Cases	Valid	24	100.0	.731	5
	Excluded ^a	0	.0		
	Total	24	100.0		

Table 4.4. Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Self-Esteem	0.559	Acceptable
Anxiety	0.666	Good
Motivation	0.731	Acceptable

The analysis begins with an examination of the reliability of the research instruments. As shown in Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, the Cronbach's Alpha values for self-esteem ($\alpha = 0.559$), anxiety ($\alpha = 0.666$), and motivation ($\alpha = 0.731$) indicate acceptable internal consistency. The summary of reliability results is presented in Table 4.4, confirming that all constructs were sufficiently reliable for exploratory research. Although the self-esteem scale showed a lower reliability value, this reflects the multidimensional nature of self-esteem, which is often influenced by situational and contextual factors (Schmitt, 1996).

Table 4.5. Descriptive Statistic

STATISTICS

Questions		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
N	Valid	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.92	3.96	3.79	2.92	4.13	4.13	4.00	4.25

Std. Deviation		.830	.908	.833	1.018	.850	.900	.933	.737
Minimum		1	1	2	1	3	2	2	3
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Percentiles	25	2.25	4.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
	50	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
	75	3.00	4.75	4.00	3.75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Following the reliability analysis, descriptive statistics were used to explore students' general perceptions toward emotional factors in speaking. As presented in Table 4.5, the mean scores across questionnaire items ranged from moderate to high levels. The findings indicate that students demonstrated moderate self-esteem, relatively high levels of speaking anxiety, and strong motivation to improve their English-speaking skills. While students expressed confidence in certain speaking situations, many reported fear of making mistakes, nervousness during oral performance, and concern about being evaluated by others. These results align with previous research suggesting that anxiety remains a dominant emotional challenge in EFL speaking contexts (Horwitz et al., 1986; Teimouri et al., 2019; Dewaele & Li, 2020).

Correlation analysis further revealed meaningful relationships among emotional variables. Self-esteem displayed moderate positive correlations with speaking-related confidence, suggesting that students who perceived themselves as capable tended to evaluate their speaking performance more positively. Anxiety showed strong intercorrelations among its items and demonstrated a negative association with speaking confidence, confirming its disruptive role in oral communication. Motivation, meanwhile, showed positive relationships with students' efforts and desire to improve speaking skills. These findings support affective theories emphasizing that emotional factors interact dynamically rather than operating independently (Bandura, 1990; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dewaele & Li, 2020).

Table 4.6. Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	t	p
Self-Esteem	0.238	0.866	0.397
Anxiety	0.195	0.839	0.411
Motivation	-0.069	-0.237	0.815

Despite these observable relationships, the results of the multiple regression analysis presented in Table 4.7 indicate that self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation did not significantly predict students' perceptions of emotional influences on speaking performance. The regression model explained only a small proportion of variance, suggesting that students may share similar emotional experiences regardless of individual differences. This result may also be influenced by the small sample size, which limits statistical power (Green, 1991). Nevertheless, the non-significant findings do not negate the importance of emotional factors but instead highlight the complexity of affective influences in speaking performance, as also noted in recent EFL speaking research (Shao et al., 2020).

The qualitative findings strongly reinforce the quantitative results by revealing how students experience and regulate emotions during speaking activities. Across all participants, anxiety emerged as the most salient emotional barrier. Students consistently reported fear of making mistakes, being judged by peers, and speaking in front of fluent speakers. This anxiety often resulted in hesitation, loss of focus, and reduced fluency, supporting Horwitz's (1986) concept of foreign language classroom anxiety and more recent findings on speaking anxiety in EFL contexts (Teimouri et al., 2019; Dewaele & Li, 2020).

Self-esteem was perceived as emotional resilience rather than mere confidence. Participants with higher self-esteem demonstrated greater willingness to take risks and recover from mistakes during speaking tasks. This finding supports Bandura's (1990) self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes belief in one's ability as a mediator between emotion and performance, and is consistent with recent studies highlighting the role of self-efficacy in regulating emotions during speaking activities (Zhang et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2020). Motivation, meanwhile, functioned as a compensatory force that helped students persist despite anxiety. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation enabled learners to shift their focus from fear toward long-term goals, such as career aspirations and communication competence (Gardner, 1985; Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020; Papi et al., 2019).

Another important finding relates to emotional regulation and learning environment. Students reported that calmness and emotional control directly improved speaking clarity and fluency. Supportive teachers and positive classroom atmospheres were found to reduce anxiety and increase motivation, while strict or judgmental environments heightened emotional barriers. This finding aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and recent research emphasizing the importance of low-anxiety and emotionally supportive EFL learning environments (Dewaele & Li, 2020).

Overall, the integrated findings and discussion suggest that English-speaking performance is shaped by a dynamic balance among self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation within a supportive learning environment. High motivation and self-esteem can partially offset the negative effects of anxiety, while unmanaged fear and low confidence may hinder students' willingness to speak. This study highlights that effective speaking instruction should address not only linguistic competence but also emotional support, motivational scaffolding, and positive classroom climate to enhance students' oral communication skills.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation on students' English-speaking performance among third-semester English Education students at Universitas Islam Malang using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. The findings reveal that these affective factors interact dynamically in shaping students' speaking experiences and performance in the EFL classroom.

The results indicate that self-esteem contributes to students' confidence and willingness to communicate, while anxiety emerges as a major barrier that disrupts fluency, pronunciation, and idea organization. Motivation plays a crucial compensatory role, enabling students to persist in speaking activities despite fear and low confidence. Highly motivated students demonstrated greater engagement, practice, and resilience in improving their speaking skills. The interaction among self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation suggests that strong motivation can enhance self-esteem and reduce the negative impact of anxiety, leading to more effective speaking performance.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing affective factors alongside linguistic competence in EFL instruction. Creating supportive classroom environments, providing constructive feedback, and implementing engaging speaking activities are essential to fostering students' confidence and motivation while minimizing anxiety. Overall, this study underscores that successful speaking development is not solely determined by language knowledge, but also by learners' emotional readiness and motivational support.

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