

Psychological Factors Affecting Speaking Performance of EFL Students at Tadulako University

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*Astrid Deswita Maharani, Abdul Kamaruddin, Sukmawati Sadilia, Mawardin M.Said 

¹²³⁴Tadulako University, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author: astriddeswita@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to identify and describe the psychological factors affecting the speaking performance of third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. The study employed a quantitative descriptive design using a survey method with 100 randomly selected respondents. The instruments used were adapted from standardized scales: the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, the Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS version 25, focusing on frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The results revealed that students experienced a high level of anxiety ($M = 3.13$) and low self-confidence ($M = 2.03$), both of which served as psychological barriers in speaking English. Conversely, students demonstrated high motivation ($M = 3.53$) and positive attitudes ($M = 3.59$) toward English-speaking activities, which acted as psychological strengths enhancing engagement and persistence in learning. Overall, these findings suggest that emotional and motivational factors significantly influence students' speaking performance. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers foster a supportive learning environment that reduces anxiety, enhances confidence, and maintains students' motivation and positive attitudes toward English learning.

Keywords: *Psychological Factors, Anxiety, Self-Confidence, Motivation, Attitude, Speaking Performance, EFL Students*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English. In today's era of globalization, the ability to communicate orally in English is highly essential –not only in academic environments but also in professional and social contexts. Language skills consist of four components: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Among these four skills, speaking holds a significant role as a productive skill that allows individuals to express their thoughts and feelings verbal (Afifah & Devana, 2020). This skill serves as the most direct and practical means of communication, enabling learners to express ideas, ask questions, convey opinions, and engage in meaningful conversations. Furthermore, speaking is often considered the ultimate goal of language learning, as it reflects one's fluency, confidence, and communicative competence in real-life situations.

These affective conditions—such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and low motivation—may shape students' willingness to participate and their overall comfort in speaking environments. Understanding these emotional states is essential for educators and researchers who aim to build a supportive classroom atmosphere where learners feel safe and encouraged to speak (Dong, 2022). While speaking involves knowledge of language and discourse, it also requires psychological readiness and emotional resilience to communicate effectively in public settings (Chou, 2021).

Speaking ability among university students is a crucial aspect, as they are expected to express ideas clearly and convincingly in various academic situations such as presentations, group discussions, seminars, and thesis defenses. However, many students in higher education still face difficulties expressing their thoughts in English, especially when required

to speak spontaneously in front of others. These barriers often arise not only from linguistic limitations but also from psychological pressures such as anxiety, lack of confidence, or low motivation in using spoken English.

At Tadulako University, this phenomenon is also commonly observed, particularly among third-semester students who are in a transitional stage from basic language learning to more academic use of English. Based on preliminary classroom observations, many students still hesitated to participate actively in speaking activities, with some showing signs of nervousness such as frequent pauses, avoidance of eye contact, and very limited verbal responses. Although they had received foundational English instruction in previous semesters, many of them still struggled to speak fluently and confidently. Psychological factors such as speaking anxiety, low motivation, and lack of self-confidence were often the main obstacles affecting students' performance in class. Therefore, it is important to explore and understand more deeply the psychological factors that influence students' speaking abilities in order to develop more effective and targeted teaching strategies that meet the local needs of students at Tadulako University.

This research was important because it can provide tangible contributions in empirically explaining how students' psychological conditions influence their speaking experiences. Additionally, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing more effective and responsive teaching strategies that align with students' psychological conditions, thus enhancing the English learning process – particularly speaking skills. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature in the fields of language education and educational psychology in EFL contexts. Practically, the findings can be utilized by lecturers, English teachers, and policymakers to design more adaptive and contextual learning approaches, especially in higher education settings such as Tadulako University and similar institutions in Indonesia.

This study focused on identifying and describing the psychological factors experienced by third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University during English-speaking activities. Specifically, the research addressed four main psychological conditions: anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitudes, which arise when students engage in speaking tasks such as class discussions, presentations, and oral practice. The scope of the study was limited to active third-semester students in the 2024/2025 academic year who participate in classroom speaking activities. This research did not assess linguistic components such as grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation, nor does it measure students' overall speaking proficiency. Instead, it emphasized the emotional and mental experiences that accompany the speaking process. By focusing on these boundaries, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the psychological conditions that shape students' engagement in speaking English.

Speaking Performance

Speaking performance is one of the most essential skills in English language learning, as it directly reflects learners' ability to use the language for real communication. For university students, strong speaking performance is particularly important, as they are expected to participate in academic discussions, deliver presentations, and express their ideas clearly in both formal and informal contexts. However, speaking should not be viewed solely from a linguistic perspective; it involves more than accurate grammar and vocabulary use. As Chou (2021) argues, speaking performance encompasses fluency, communicative strategies, and the ability to maintain interaction, which are all equally important in effective communication. In addition, (Dong, 2022) emphasizes that speaking performance represents learners' communicative competence, meaning their ability to integrate linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic knowledge in interaction.

In the context of language learning, speaking performance is a multidimensional construct encompassing several interrelated components such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and interactional competence. These elements collectively determine how effectively learners can express meaning and sustain communication in real-life contexts. However, despite extensive exposure to formal instruction, many English as a

Foreign Language (EFL) learners still struggle to attain communicative proficiency across these dimensions. As emphasized by Seli and Santosa (2023), even university-level students frequently encounter difficulties in producing spontaneous and confident speech, reflecting persistent challenges beyond the realm of linguistic mastery. This phenomenon highlights that speaking performance is not merely a linguistic endeavor but also a psychological process influenced by learners' emotional and affective states. Hence, effective oral communication in a foreign language requires not only the possession of grammatical accuracy and lexical range but also psychological readiness, self-confidence, and emotional regulation. Recognizing speaking as a complex interplay between cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors offers a more holistic framework for understanding the psychological variables that shape learners' participation, fluency, and overall communicative competence in EFL speaking activities.

Psychological Factors

Psychological factors in language learning can be broadly defined as emotional and mental states that shape learners' behavior, attitudes, and performance. In the context of speaking, they include dimensions such as anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitudes toward the language. As Okyar (2023) points out, affective conditions such as speaking anxiety, self confidence, and self-perceived competence strongly influence students' willingness to participate in oral tasks. These findings indicate that speaking is not simply a matter of linguistic knowledge but also of emotional readiness. In line with this, (Quvanch et al., 2024) emphasize that students' psychological states determine their comfort and preparedness to engage in oral communication. Learners with high motivation, strong self-confidence, and positive attitudes toward English are generally more willing to take part in speaking activities. Conversely, those who experience high anxiety or negative attitudes often hesitate, avoid eye contact, or withdraw from participation altogether.

For this reason, psychological factors are essential to examine in relation to students' speaking experiences. They serve as a bridge between what learners know linguistically and how they perform in real communicative contexts. Without supportive psychological conditions, even 13 students with adequate linguistic competence may fail to demonstrate their ability effectively in speaking situations. Therefore, this study focuses on four major psychological factors—anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitude—which will be elaborated in the following subsections.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive type Cross-Sectional survey design. The aim of this design was to identify and describe psychological factors—specifically anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitude—experienced by third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University during English speaking activities. The survey design allowed the researcher to collect data directly from participants in order to obtain factual information about their psychological experiences in speaking situations. This research did not involve testing hypotheses or measuring correlations, but instead focused on analyzing data descriptively using frequencies and percentages.

Respondents

Population and Samples

The population of this research comprised third-semester EFL students at Tadulako University. The total number of third-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University is 239, distributed across seven classes (A–G). Total population of third-semester EFL students at Tadulako University, 100 students were randomly selected to participate in this research.

Table 1. Table of Population

No	Classes	Students
1	A	35
2	B	34
3	C	34

4	D	34
5	E	34
6	F	35
7	G	33

The use of random sampling was expected to provide a more objective and generalizable description of the psychological factors under investigation – namely anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitude – that influenced students' speaking experiences in English

Instruments

This research, the scale was adjusted into a uniform 4-point format to ensure clarity, simplicity, and consistency across all psychological factors. Each psychological factor – namely anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitude – was measured using five items, resulting in a total of 20 items. All items were adapted from established sources but were slightly adjusted in wording and scaling to fit the context of EFL learners at Tadulako University.

Tabel 2 Table of Research Instrument

Psychological Factor	Instrument / Scale	Item No.	Scale	Reference
Anxiety	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)	1-5	4-point Likert (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree)	Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986)
Self-Confidence	Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale	6-10	4-point Likert	Bandura (1997); Mills et al. (2007); Tanyer & Öztürk (2014)
Motivation	Subscale of AMTB	11-15	4-point Likert	Gardner (1985)
Attitude	Subscale of AMTB	16-20	4-point Likert	Gardner (1985)

Procedures

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through questionnaires distributed both online via Google Forms and in printed form. Before distribution, the researcher informed participants about the study's purpose and obtained their consent. The questionnaires were delivered to class leaders to distribute to all selected respondents. The data collection process lasted for two weeks to ensure systematic and efficient participation.

Data analysis

Data Analysis Technique

The statistical techniques included frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations for each item and factor. Each questionnaire item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale, consisting of the following response options:

1 = *Strongly Disagree*

2 = *Disagree*

3 = *Agree*

4 = *Strongly Agree*.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 items divided equally into four psychological factors, each measured by five items. The scoring direction for each factor was determined based on the nature of its statements as follows:

Anxiety (Items 1–5): All items were negative statements, meaning higher scores indicated a higher level of anxiety.

Self-Confidence (Items 6–10): All items were positive statements, meaning higher scores indicated a higher level of self-confidence.

Motivation (Items 11–15): All items were positive statements, meaning higher scores indicated a higher level of motivation.

Attitude (Items 16–20): All items were positive statements, meaning higher scores indicated a more positive attitude toward English

$$\text{MeanScoreforEachFactor} = \frac{\text{TotalScoreofAllItems} \in \text{theFactor}}{\text{NumberofItems}(5)}$$

Table 3 Classification of Mean Scores

Mean Score Range	Category	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.75	Very Low	The factor rarely appears / very weak
1.76 – 2.50	Low	The factor appears occasionally
2.51 – 3.25	High	The factor frequently appears
3.26 – 4.00	Very High	The factor appears very strongly / consistently

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS version 25. The analysis focused solely on descriptive statistics, including the calculation of frequencies and percentages for each psychological factor. The descriptive results were tabulated to show how many students experienced different levels of anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitude in speaking English.

Frequency Distribution of Students' Psychological Factors

Variabel	Frequency	Persentages (%)
Anxiety		
Strongly Agree	28	28.6
Agree	56	57.1
Disagree	13	13.3
Strongly Disagree	1	1.0
Self Confidence		
Strongly Agree	1	1.0
Agree	16	16.3
Disagree	66	67.3
strongly Disagree	15	15.3
Motivation		
Strongly Agree	59	60.2
Agree	32	32.7
Disagree	7	7.1
Attitude		
Strongly Agree	68	69.4
Agree	20	20.4
Disagree	10	10.2

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Based on Table 4.1, most respondents selected "Agree" for the anxiety factor, indicating a high level of anxiety with 56 respondents (57.1%). For self-confidence, the majority chose "Disagree", representing a low level of self-confidence with 66 respondents (67.3%). Meanwhile, the motivation factor showed that most respondents selected "Strongly Agree", which means a very high level of motivation with 59 respondents (60.2%). Similarly, for the attitude factor, the majority also selected "Strongly Agree", indicating a very high level of attitude with 68 respondents (69.4%). To better understand each psychological factor, the following sections present a detailed description of each variable.

Students' Anxiety in English-Speaking Activities

Table 4. Students' Anxiety Level

Anxiety					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	28	28.6	28.6	28.6
	Agree	56	57.1	57.1	85.7
	Disagree	13	13.3	13.3	99.0
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that most students (57.1%) agreed that they feel anxious when speaking English, and 28.6% strongly agreed. This means that the majority of students experience high speaking anxiety. Only a few students showed low (13.3%) or Very low

anxiety (1.0%). These results indicate that fear of making mistakes, nervousness, and low self-confidence are the main emotional factors that affect students' speaking performance.

Students' Self-Confidence in English-Speaking Activities

Table 5. Students' Self Confidence Level

		Self confidence			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Agree	16	16.3	16.3	17.3
	Disagree	66	67.3	67.3	84.7
	Strongly Disagree	15	15.3	15.3	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that most students (67.3%) disagreed, meaning they have low self-confidence, and 15.3% strongly disagreed, showing very low confidence. Only a few students agreed (16.3%) or strongly agreed (1.0%), which indicates high confidence. This means that most students are not confident when speaking or sharing ideas in English, even if they know the words. The low confidence level also relates to their high anxiety, because confidence and anxiety usually work in opposite ways.

Students' Motivation in English-Speaking Activities

Table 6. Students' Motivation Level

		Motivation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	59	60.2	60.2	60.2
	Agree	32	32.7	32.7	92.9
	Disagree	7	7.1	7.1	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that most students (60.2%) strongly agreed, meaning they have very high motivation, and 32.7% agreed, showing high motivation. Only a few students (7.1%) disagreed, which means low motivation. This shows that most students are very motivated to improve their English-speaking skills, even though they feel anxious or lack confidence. Their motivation likely comes from personal goals, such as improving communication skills, doing well in school, and preparing for future careers that need English.

Students' Attitude Toward in English-Speaking Activities

Table 7 Students' Attitude Level

		Attitude			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	68	69.4	69.4	69.4
	Agree	20	20.4	20.4	89.8
	Disagree	10	10.2	10.2	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that most students (69.4%) strongly agreed, meaning they have a very positive attitude toward English-speaking activities. Another 20.4% agreed, showing a high attitude, while only 10.2% disagreed, which means a low attitude. None of the students showed a very low attitude. This means that most students enjoy learning and speaking English. They see English as an important skill for their studies and future careers.

Descriptive Statistics of All Psychological Factors

After analyzing each psychological factor individually, the overall descriptive statistics for all four variables – anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and attitude – were summarized to determine the general tendencies of students' psychological conditions during English-speaking activities.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Factors

		Statistics			
		Anxiety	Self Confidence	Motivation	Attitude
N	Valid	98	98	98	98
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Mean	3.13	2.03	3.53	3.59
	Std. Deviation	.668	.600	.629	.671

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The results in Table 8 indicate varying levels of psychological factors influencing students' English-speaking performance. Anxiety ($M = 3.13$) was categorized as high, showing that many students felt nervous and afraid of making mistakes, which lowered their confidence to speak. Self-confidence ($M = 2.03$) was low, suggesting that most students were hesitant to express themselves in English. In contrast, motivation ($M = 3.53$) and attitude ($M = 3.59$) were high, meaning that students were eager to improve their speaking skills and viewed English as an important tool for academic and career success.

Overall, the findings show that while anxiety and low self-confidence hindered students' speaking performance, their high motivation and positive attitude supported continuous learning. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to apply strategies that reduce anxiety and strengthen confidence, such as providing supportive feedback and using interactive speaking activities to build a more comfortable and engaging classroom environment.

Discussion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the psychological factors experienced by third-semester students of the English Education Department at Tadulako University exhibit varied tendencies across different dimensions. The analysis shows that anxiety and self-confidence act as psychological barriers that hinder students' oral performance, whereas motivation and attitude function as supportive psychological strengths that enhance engagement and improve English-speaking skills. These results indicate that affective factors play a significant role in shaping students' behavior in language learning, as they can either impede or facilitate communication depending on the learners' emotional states.

Anxiety and Its Influence on Speaking Performance. The analysis shows that students experience a high level of anxiety. ($M = 3.13, SD = 0.668$) This indicates that most students feel strong emotional pressure when speaking in English, whether in formal contexts such as class presentations or informal conversations. High anxiety manifests as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, worry about negative evaluation from teachers or peers, and low self-confidence in their language ability. This emotional condition represents a dominant barrier in achieving speaking competence.

This finding is consistent with Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope and Tuncer & Doğan (2022), who state that foreign language speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon among EFL learners, caused by fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. At Tadulako University, such anxiety may be triggered by a classroom environment emphasizing grammar accuracy and pronunciation, limited exposure to English outside class, and fear of failure during oral performance.

High anxiety directly affects fluency, willingness to communicate, and interactional competence. Psychologically, it activates the sympathetic nervous system, resulting in rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and difficulty concentrating. Linguistically, anxiety hinders vocabulary retrieval, sentence formulation, and spontaneous speech, often causing students to speak haltingly, experience long pauses, or avoid participating altogether. Consequently, anxiety negatively impacts overall speaking performance. Pedagogical strategies to address this include creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, reducing evaluative pressure, and providing constructive feedback to lower anxiety and enhance speaking performance.

Self-Confidence and Its Influence on Speaking Performance. The study also reveals that students' self-confidence is low ($M = 2.03, SD = 0.600$), indicating limited belief in their own English-speaking ability. Many students hesitate to speak, fear making mistakes, and are reluctant to take risks in front of peers or lecturers. This finding aligns with Zhang (2021) and Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, which highlight that individuals' belief in their capability directly influences their willingness to participate and persist in communication tasks.

Low self-confidence affects speaking performance by reducing fluency, accuracy, and interactive engagement. Students with low self-confidence often speak quietly, rely on memorized sentences, and avoid extended interactions due to fear of error. Conversely, confident students tend to speak more fluently, express ideas clearly, and display higher

communicative competence. Enhancing self-confidence through positive reinforcement, guided speaking activities, and meaningful practice can improve students' willingness to communicate and their overall speaking performance.

Motivation and Its Influence on Speaking Performance. The analysis shows that students' motivation is high ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.629$). High motivation indicates a strong internal drive to improve speaking skills, consisting of both intrinsic motivation (enjoyment, curiosity, personal satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (academic achievement, career prospects, social recognition). According to Gardner (1985), motivation is a crucial determinant of success in second language learning.

Motivation positively influences speaking performance by encouraging persistence, active participation, and risk-taking in communication. Motivated students are more likely to engage in practice, try new vocabulary or structures, and reflect on errors to improve. Motivation also serves as a psychological buffer, helping students cope with the negative effects of anxiety and low self-confidence, maintaining engagement and continuous improvement in oral skills.

Attitude and Its Influence on Speaking Performance. Similarly, students' attitude toward learning English is high ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.671$), reflecting positive perceptions of English as a valuable skill for education, career, and global communication. A positive attitude promotes openness to feedback, active participation, and enthusiasm in speaking activities. This aligns with Gardner (1985) and Alamer & Lee (2021), which indicate that positive attitudes significantly enhance language learning success.

A positive attitude directly impacts willingness to communicate, interactional engagement, and oral performance confidence. Students with positive attitudes speak more spontaneously, display natural expression, and internalize good language habits. In contrast, a negative attitude can lead to avoidance, boredom, and reduced participation, ultimately limiting fluency and communicative competence. Teachers can maintain and strengthen positive attitudes through role plays, group discussions, peer speaking practice, and real-life contextualized tasks.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest several implications for English language instruction. Teachers should create a supportive and low-anxiety classroom atmosphere by providing encouragement, constructive feedback, and ample opportunities for communicative practice. Reducing anxiety not only helps students feel more comfortable when speaking but also enhances their fluency, spontaneity, and interactional competence. Developing students' self-confidence can be achieved by recognizing their progress, giving them autonomy in selecting speaking topics, and encouraging risk-taking in communication. By fostering self-efficacy, students are more willing to participate actively and take initiative in oral activities.

Additionally, teachers should maintain and strengthen learners' motivation and positive attitudes by connecting learning materials to real-life contexts, setting achievable goals, and celebrating students' successes. High motivation drives persistence and consistent practice, enabling students to overcome the negative effects of anxiety and low self-confidence. Positive attitudes further support engagement, openness to feedback, and a greater willingness to communicate, which together enhance overall speaking performance.

In summary, the discussion of findings demonstrates that psychological factors play a vital role in determining students' English-speaking performance. High anxiety and low self-confidence act as emotional barriers that can limit fluency, accuracy, and participation, whereas strong motivation and positive attitudes serve as psychological strengths that sustain learning engagement and communicative competence. These findings highlight the need for English educators to focus not only on linguistic skills but also on nurturing students' emotional and motivational well-being. A classroom environment that values encouragement, collaboration, and positive reinforcement can help students manage anxiety, build confidence, and maximize their potential, ultimately leading to more effective and successful English-speaking performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University experience various psychological factors affecting their English-speaking performance. High anxiety and low self-confidence hinder fluency, spontaneity, and participation, while strong motivation and positive attitudes act as psychological strengths that encourage persistence and improvement. Thus, reducing anxiety and building confidence are crucial for enhancing students' speaking competence. It is suggested that students actively manage anxiety and develop self-confidence through regular practice, peer collaboration, and positive goal-setting. Lecturers should foster a supportive classroom environment by providing constructive feedback and using interactive speaking tasks to promote comfort and motivation. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate other psychological aspects, such as self-efficacy or coping strategies, using broader samples and mixed methods to gain deeper insights into factors influencing students' English-speaking performance.

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