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Exploring Public Speaking Anxiety: Does Gender Really Matter?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify differences in public speaking anxiety levels between male and female students. A quantitative approach with a comparative design was used. The participants consisted of all 194 twelfth-grade students at SMAN 61 Jakarta, including 83 male and 111 female students. Data were collected through a questionnaire adapted from the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety, which was translated and revalidated to suit the participant context. After a validity test, 27 items were included in the analysis. Anxiety scores were calculated using a three-step formula and categorized into low, moderate, and high levels. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test with SPSS version 29. The results showed no significant difference in public speaking anxiety between male and female students. However, descriptive findings indicated that female students generally showed slightly higher anxiety levels. This suggests that anxiety is influenced more by personal factors than gender. Educators are encouraged to provide equal speaking opportunities and build supportive classroom environments for all students.

Introduction

Speaking serves as a vital tool for communication, self-expression, and personal development across various contexts. It refers to a process by which individuals exchange ideas, perspectives, opinions, and any other information (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Nevertheless, Some people find it difficult to speak English in front of others, especially if English is not their first language (Daflizar, 2024). This difficulty may influenced by various factors, including anxiety, which is categorized as a personal factor (Fauziah et al., 2022).

Anxiety is a psychological condition; it is not a disease or health issue but rather a behavior pattern caused by expecting adverse outcomes that make learning difficult (Angellia & Listyani, 2019; Dimas & Dzul, 2024). One related study by Lamba et al. (2020) shows that individuals with higher levels of anxiety find it difficult to learn effectively in unstable environments, which can lead to difficulties in social interactions and learning contexts. Similarly, students often experience heightened self-doubt and a fear of negative judgment, which can hinder their willingness to participate in and engage in learning

activities (Lestari et al., 2024). Individuals with higher anxiety levels frequently struggle in unpredictable situations, which could cause their fear of public speaking (Li, 2020).

Public speaking anxiety describes students' communication nervousness and speaking anxiety during speeches, which influenced by factors such as lack of confidence, language proficiency, and peer pressure (Tarbani et al., 2024). A lack of confidence often cited as a primary contributor to public speaking anxiety; For instance Trisnaningati & Sinambela (2021) discovered that people with low self-efficacy and poor emotional regulation have higher levels of public speaking anxiety. Language proficiency also significantly impacts public speaking anxiety. A study conducted by Sokoy (2023) indicates that language proficiency is the primary factor leading to anxiety in English learners when they need to speak in English. Peer pressure is another critical factor contributing to public speaking anxiety. Sulastiani (2020) found that students sometimes worry about being laughed at or looked at by their classmates, which can lead to increased anxiety and lower performance.

Transitioning from those foundational factors, it is essential to consider how gender influences public speaking anxiety. Gender emerged as the most potent predictor of the observed features (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024). The study discovered that gender had a substantial impact on public speaking anxiety, with The research revealed that gender significantly influenced public speaking anxiety, with female participants reporting greater levels of anxiety (57.14) than their male counterparts (50.52). Females were particularly concerned about embarrassment and how their speaking abilities perceived by the audience (Rahman Hz, 2022).

Brown (2007, p. 209) states, "In English, another twist on the language and gender issue has been directed toward 'sexist' language: a language that either calls unnecessary attention to gender or is demeaning to one gender" (p. 234). The study conduct by Fauziah et al. (2022) revealed no significant difference between male and female students. However, despite the lack of statistical significance, the results suggested that females experience higher levels of anxiety compared to males. This finding aligns with previous research, which also did not reveal significant differences between male and female first-year students but did identify significant differences between female and male sophomore students(Pristiyaputri, A.E., Afiqoh, M., Jauhari, M.A., Al Afghani, M.J., 2023).

Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety, as discovered by Horwitz et al.(1986) is closely associated with three types of performance-related anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to the nervousness or fear experienced during interpersonal interactions, such as participating in group discussions, delivering speeches, or listening to verbal messages (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). A study involving Malaysian university students found that a majority experienced high levels of communication apprehension when learning English (Noor et al., 2015). It is essential to note that although this discussion primarily focuses on communication apprehension, test anxiety is not examined in detail in this context.

Another study, conducted by Ladarević (2021) among first-year undergraduate students in Croatia during the 2020-2021 academic year, found the major characteristics

influencing foreign language anxiety in online English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The study found that background factors such as gender, self-assessed skill, and frequency of English use had an important effect on anxiety levels. The study also found that five specific characteristics were correlated with general language anxiety: speech anxiety, evaluation, and comprehension anxiety, worry about speaking with native speakers, and a lack of willingness to attend class. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing individual differences in learners when addressing foreign language anxiety.

Additionally, The results of a study conducted by at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra indicate that 39% of English department students have an intense fear of negative evaluation, which negatively correlated with self-esteem and positively related to situational anxiety and shyness. This concern often leads to more motivation for social approval while also contributing significantly to general linguistic anxiety.

Foreign language anxiety represents a significant challenge to successful language acquisition, affecting students' performance and engagement. The connection between communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation highlights the importance of a deeper understanding of individual learner experiences.

Public Speaking Anxiety

Public speaking anxiety is defined as a fear or apprehension that arises when an individual believes they are required to speak in front of others. According to Hamandia (2022) Public speaking anxiety can be best described as an uncomfortable feeling marked by fear and worry, often leading to unpleasant sensations. These feelings may be experienced when someone is speaking in front of a crowd or when they imagine themselves speaking in public. This condition can manifest through physiological symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate), emotional responses (e.g., fear of negative evaluation), and behavioral reactions (e.g., avoidance of speaking situations)(Gallego et al., 2022). According to the literature, public speaking anxiety is significantly correlated with lower ratings of self-perceived performance in a speech and negative evaluations by external observers (Li, 2020). Another study notes that public speaking anxiety is characterized by intense fear and apprehension that students experience when required to speak in front of an audience. The study said that this anxiety can lead to various coping mechanisms, which are critical for managing the discomfort associated with such situations (Tee et al., 2020).

The research was conducted by Gallego et al.(2022), who found that higher levels of self-reported public speaking anxiety are moderately associated with both lower self-perceived speech performance and lower speech performance evaluations by external observers. Another issues stated by Kalra & Siribud (2020) is the public speaking anxiety faced by Thai EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. The findings showed that anxiety has negative impacts on self-confidence, self-esteem, and risk-taking abilities, which eventually impede language proficiency.

For instance, a study by Megawati and Apriani (2023), The study revealed a significant relationship between the level of public speaking anxiety and students' speaking performance. The results indicate that students with higher anxiety levels tend to have lower speaking performance. Similarly, Fathikasari et al. (2022) found that students who felt unprepared for public speaking could report higher anxiety levels, which can be an effect

connected with poorer self-assessment of their speech performance. In Conclusion, Public speaking anxiety is a major psychological challenge that affects many people, mostly students, when they are supposed to speak in front of an audience.

Public Speaking Anxiety and Gender

Gender influences speaking skills in different ways, based on social factors and personal backgrounds, due to its flexible nature. Another study shows that psychosocial and biological factors contribute to differences in anxiety between men and women; masculinity is a protective factor, while femininity is a risk factor. Other biological factors related to higher levels of anxiety include brain structures, genetics, and fluctuations in sexual hormones (Farhane-Medina et al., 2022). For example, cultural norms may encourage or discourage one from speaking loudly or in public, depending on their gender, which can affect one's confidence and opportunities to practice speaking.(Kadwa &Alshenqeeti,2020). It is essential to explore the connection between gender and public speaking anxiety to create more effective strategies and support systems for individuals facing this challenge.

A study conducted by Lintner and Belovecová (2024), dentified gender as the most significant predictor of the observed traits. Women, on average, exhibited higher levels of public speaking than their male classmates, with the highest levels observed among nonbinary students. On the other hand, a study conducted found that while women are more inclined to give face-to-face presentations, they are significantly less likely to participate in public presentations. It also revealed that this aversion to public speaking in women is not linked to differences in ability or other psychological factors. However, the study conduct by Broeckelman-Post et al. (2020) showed no difference between men and women in terms of performance. Both course formats resulted in proficient speech performances at the mastery level, with slightly stronger performances in the public speaking course.

Building on these findings, the present study addresses the research gap regarding public speaking anxiety among high school students. Additionally, this study seeks to examine whether there is a significant difference in speaking anxiety levels between male and female students.

Research Questions

To achieve the aims, the following research questions are:

1. Does gender significantly influence students public speaking anxiety among high school students?
2. Is there a significant difference in the level of public speaking anxiety between male and female high school students?

Research Methods

Design

The study employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing questionnaires as the primary tool for collecting data from participants. This study will adopt the quantitative approach since it deals with measurable data that can be statistically analyzed to understand the aims to determine whether there is a significant difference between male and female students regarding their levels of public speaking anxiety.

Sample

The sample in this study consisted of all 12th-grade students at SMAN 61 Jakarta, totaling 194 participants. All students shared the same academic background, ensuring consistency in the learning environment. The sample included 83 male and 111 female students. This gender variation contributed to the richness of the data and supported the investigation of whether significant differences existed between male and female students in their levels of public speaking anxiety.

Instruments

The data collection instrument used in the study is a questionnaire the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) developed by Mccroskey (1970). The PRPSA includes 34 statement items specifically designed to measure an individual's level of anxiety when speaking in public. Respondents are asked to rate each statement using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

In this study, the PRPSA scale was translated into Indonesian to adjust to the context of the participants who were high school students. The translation process was done carefully to maintain the original meaning of each statement. In particular, the term ‘speech’ contained in some statements on the original version of the PRPSA was adapted to ‘public speaking’, to be more relevant to the participants' experience and understanding.

Although PRPSA is an instrument that has been theoretically and empirically validated by its developers, validity tests were still conducted in this study to ensure the suitability of the instrument in the context of a different population, namely high school students in Indonesia. The validity test between items was conducted using Pearson correlation analysis. The test results showed that there were 6 items that had a significant negative correlation or did not support the direction of the theoretical construct, namely Q4, Q6, Q7, Q11, Q17, and Q18. Therefore, the seven items were removed, and the analysis continued with 27 valid items

The scoring procedure follows the formula established by McCroskey, which consists of three steps. The first step is to add up the scores of the positive items, which are item numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34. Next, in the second step, the scores of the negative items—that is, item numbers 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, and 26—are also totaled. Finally, in the third step, the total score was calculated using the following formula:PRPSA = 72 - (Sum of Step 2) + (Sum of Step 1).

The PRPSA total score is within the range of 34 to 170, where the higher the score indicates a higher level of public speaking anxiety. In this study, the interpretation of anxiety levels was categorised into three groups, namely: low anxiety for scores below 98, moderate anxiety for scores between 98 to 131, and high anxiety for scores above 131. These categories were used to classify participants based on the level of anxiety they experienced when speaking in public.

Data Collecting Technique

The data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. All participants received the exact instructions and had full access to the questionnaire, ensuring consistency and minimizing bias. Students responded voluntarily and

anonymously, providing honest answers to each item. The use of a digital format also facilitated efficient data management and minimized data entry errors.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 29. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to determine the distribution and central tendencies of students' public speaking anxiety levels. Following that, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the anxiety scores between male and female students. This test was used to determine whether the mean difference in anxiety levels between the two groups was statistically significant. The effect size was also calculated to provide a more straightforward interpretation of the practical significance of gender differences in public speaking anxiety.

Findings

Descriptive Analysis

The participants in this study were 194 students from class XII at SMAN 61 Jakarta, comprising 83 male students and 111 female students. All participants completed the questionnaire without missing data. The instrument used in this study is the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), which consists of 34 statements with a 5-point Likert scale. The total score ranges from 34 to 170, where a higher score indicates a higher level of public speaking anxiety experienced by the participant.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis

	Gender	N	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
PRPSA	Male	83	0	122.53	122	13.8	86	163
	Female	111	0	126	124	15.2	97	163

As shown, descriptive statistics for each gender group in Table 1. Among the 111 female students in the group, the mean PRPSA score was 126, with a median value of 124. The standard deviation (SD) in this group is 15.2, which indicates a considerable variation in anxiety levels in the group. The minimum and maximum scores obtained were in the range of 97 to 163. Meanwhile, among the 83 male students, the average PRPSA score was 123, with a median of 122. The standard deviation value for the male group was 13.8, which was slightly lower than the female group, indicating a relatively narrower spread of data. The range of scores in this group was 86 to 163.

In general, both groups were in the moderate anxiety category based on the PRPSA score classification (98-131). Although there was a difference in mean scores between male and female students, the difference was relatively small, around 3 points. Thus, descriptively, female students have a slightly higher level of public speaking anxiety than male students. To understand the distribution of anxiety more comprehensively, the data was categorized into three levels: low, medium, and high, based on the PRPSA scores of each respondent.

Table 2. Anxiety Level

Range	Anxiety Level	Male	Female
> 131	High Anxiety	18	40
< 96	Low Anxiety	3	1
98-131	Moderate Anxiety	62	70

Based on the results of data analysis in Table 2, it is known that 58 students are in the high anxiety category, 131 students are in the medium anxiety category, and four students are in the low anxiety category. When viewed by gender, of the 83 male students, 18 students experienced high anxiety, three students experienced low anxiety, and only 62 students were classified as moderate anxiety. Meanwhile, of the female students, 40 students experienced high anxiety, one student experienced low anxiety, and 70 students were classified as experiencing high anxiety.

Overall, although the difference between the two gender groups was not significant in the extreme, the data showed that female students generally experienced slightly greater levels of anxiety when it came to public speaking compared to their male counterparts, both in terms of mean scores and the proportion of participants in the high anxiety category.

Normality Test

The normality test assesses whether the PRPSA data follows a normal distribution, which is essential for meeting one of the fundamental assumptions in parametric statistical analysis. The normality test in this study was conducted using two methods: the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, each of which was applied to the female and male gender groups.

Table 3. Test of Normality

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Gender	Statistic	df	Sig.	statistic	df	Sig.
PRPSA	Male	0.071	83	0.200	0.977	83	0.146
	Female	0.066	111	0.200	0.983	111	0.188

Based on the normality test results in Table 3, the test results showed that in the male group, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value was 0.200, and the Shapiro-Wilk value was 0.146, both of which exceeded the 0.05 threshold. In the female group, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value was 0.200, and the Shapiro-Wilk value was 0.188, both of which were greater than the 0.05 significance limit. Thus, it can be concluded that the PRPSA score data in both gender groups are normally distributed. This finding indicates that the assumption of normality is fulfilled, making this data suitable for parametric analysis to compare the level of public speaking anxiety between male and female.

Homogeneity test

Prior to conducting hypothesis testing, it is essential to verify that the data variances of the two groups being compared are equal or homogeneous; consequently, homogeneity testing is conducted using Levene's Test.

Table 4. Levene's Test.

	F	Sig. (P)
PRPSA	3.093	0.080

Based on the homogeneity test analysis conducted using Levene's Test, a significance value of 0.080 (> 0.05) was found, indicating that the variance between the two groups is considered homogeneous (equal variances are assumed).

Independent Sample T-Test

Following a descriptive analysis of Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) scores based on gender, the next step in this study is to conduct an inferential analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The Independent Samples T-test was employed because the data satisfied the requirements for normality and homogeneity of variance.

Table 5.Independent Samples T- Test

t-test for Equality of Means								
			Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
PRPSA	t	df	One-sided p	Two-sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
	-1.637	192	0.052	0.103	-3.470	2.120	-7.652	0.712

As illustrated in Table 5, the t-test results yield a value of t = -1.637, with 192 degrees of freedom (df) and a two-sided significance level of 0.103 (p > 0.05). The mean difference value is -3.470, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -7.652 to 0.712, which includes a value of zero. It indicates that the difference is statistically insignificant.

Table 6. Effect Size

				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
PRPSA	Cohen's d	14.611	-0.237	-0.532	0.048

Cohen's d value of -0.237 indicates that the mean difference between the male and female groups is negligible. The negative sign indicates that the anxiety scores of female students were higher than those of males; however, in practical terms, the effect was negligible. The 95% confidence interval range for Cohen's d is from -0.523 to 0.048, which also includes zero. This reinforces the conclusion that this difference is neither statistically nor practically significant.

Discussion

The findings of the statistical analysis indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of public speaking anxiety exhibited by male and female students. The independent samples t-test yielded a p-value of 0.103, which is greater than 0.05. The mean PRPSA score for females was 126.00, which is slightly higher than the mean score for males, which was 122.53. The Cohen's d value of -0.237 further substantiates the negligible practical significance of the observed discrepancy. Consequently, the response to both research questions (RQs) is "no significant effect," thereby supporting the null hypothesis (H0) and refuting the alternative hypothesis (Ha).

Despite the absence of statistical significance, the anxiety level categorization data evinces a pattern that merits consideration. The sample included 194 students, of whom 58 were classified as high anxiety, 131 as medium anxiety, and four as low anxiety. When viewed through a gendered lens, among 83 male students, 18 were categorized as high, three as low, and 62 as moderate. Meanwhile, 111 female students were included in the study. Of these students, 40 were classified as high, one as low, and 70 as moderate. A proportional analysis revealed that the proportion of females in the high anxiety category was nearly double that of males. While this difference was not statistically significant, it indicated a general tendency for females to exhibit comparatively higher levels of speaking anxiety.

This finding aligns with the research of Fauziah et al. (2022) and Broeckelman-Post et al. (2020) who also did not observe significant differences between men and women. Daflizar (2024) added that although there was a tendency for women to report higher anxiety, the gap was not strong enough in statistical analysis. So, it is clear that gender is not the only factor that drives anxiety when people speak in public.

However, the result contradicts the findings of Rahman Hz (2022) and most of the results of Lintner and Belovecová (2024), which instead suggest that women are more often distressed and anxious in such social situations. They also highlight gender as a predictor of how active one is in public speaking, rather than how anxious one is, so the direction of influence they observe does not automatically align with that of researchers before them. Farhane-Medina et al. (2022) even attribute this to biological factors, as hormonal changes and social expectations attached to women may indeed make them more vulnerable. The difference in findings may also influenced by the varied characteristics of the sample, such as age, culture, and the frequency with which respondents have experience performing in public.

This finding supports Horwitz et al. (1986) theory of foreign language anxiety, which states that fear when speaking is more closely related to feelings, such as a fear of being judged poorly, rather than physical causes or demographic background. Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) also emphasize that anxious communication situations can be experienced by anyone, regardless of gender. Trisnaningati & Sinambela (2021) provide additional support; they finding that students with low self-confidence and a lower ability to manage emotions tend to be more anxious. Sokoy (2023) further reinforces the argument that feeling

less proficient in the language is the main trigger of students' anxiety every time they have to speak in a foreign language class.

This finding has important implications in the educational context: speaking training approaches should not be differentiated by gender, as anxiety mostly influenced by personal factors such as self-confidence, experience, and perception of the audience. Teachers and schools need to create a supportive classroom atmosphere, provide gradual practice, and offer all students, regardless of gender, equal opportunities to speak. This also supports the concept that public speaking anxiety is a universal psychological issue, not gender-based.

Public speaking training should be gradual, structured, and conducted in a psychologically safe atmosphere. Activities such as small-group discussions, class presentations, and informal public speaking exercises can help build students' confidence without placing excessive pressure on them. This finding aligns with the results of Tee et al. (2020) who noted that effective coping strategies play a crucial role in mitigating public speaking anxiety.

This study has limitations. First, the sample was drawn from only one school in Jakarta and consisted of grade XII students, so generalizations should be made with caution. Second, the quantitative approach, using a questionnaire instrument, did not capture students' emotional experiences in depth. Third, only one independent variable was tested, whereas factors such as personality, self-efficacy, organizational experience, and social environmental pressure can also be influential.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that gender is not a significant determinant in the level of public speaking anxiety among high school students. Although no statistically significant difference was discovered, the descriptive data showed that more female students were in the high anxiety category. It reminds us that each student brings their own experiences and challenges when it comes to public speaking. Therefore, the development of public speaking skills should be tailored to student's individual needs and emotional states rather than being based on assumptions or labels related to gender. A learning environment that is supportive, open, and considerate of students' feelings will have a much more significant impact in helping them grow into confident speakers. An adaptive, supportive, and inclusive approach to education is needed so that every student can develop optimally without being constrained by gender-based stereotypes or expectations.

Future research is recommended to employ a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more comprehensive picture, involve a wider and more diverse population, and examine additional contextual and psychological variables. In addition, longitudinal analysis could be used to look at the development of speaking anxiety over time and the effects of specific interventions. Additional variables, such as language competence, participation in extracurricular activities, and perceptions of social support, could also enrich the understanding.

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