

Reading Interest and Speaking Skills in EFL Students: A Correlation Study with CEFR Approach and Demographic Analysis

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between reading interest and CEFR-based speaking ability in EFL students in Indonesia, while analyzing the role of demographic factors as moderators. The research method used a cross-sectional survey approach with 219 English Foreign Language students. The research instrument used a questionnaire to measure students' reading interest and speaking ability. Data analysis used the SPSS version 25 program. The results found that reading interest had a moderate positive correlation with speaking ability, confirming that reading activities contribute to building a foundation of vocabulary, sentence structure, and understanding of contexts relevant to oral communication. Age (>21 years) and parental education level (Bachelor's degree) strengthened the relationship between the two variables, while gender did not show significant differences. The main challenges in public speaking were more dominant in psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence than technical obstacles. These findings recommend the integration of the reading engagement approach with contextual speaking exercises and interventions to reduce anxiety, while emphasizing the need for a holistic language learning model that is responsive to students' subjective dynamics.

Keywords: CEFR; demographic factors; EFL students; reading interest; speaking ability

A. Introduction

Reading and speaking are crucial skills for EFL learners, especially in academic settings (Albadri & Halimah, 2022; Aprilia & Santoso, 2024; Poedjiastutie, Akhyar, & Masduki, 2020). Speaking abilities are directly supported by reading interest, which forms the foundation for vocabulary, sentence structure, and context understanding (Cahyani, 2023; Sari, Rambe, Ritonga, Aritonang, & Fauziah, 2024). Conversely, speaking abilities entail actively applying this knowledge (Juliana, 2024; Pratiwi & Rohmadi, 2021). However, the relationship between the two factors remains unclear, especially when taking into account the dynamics of EFL instruction at Indonesian universities.

When applied to Indonesian universities, where variables like age, parental education level, language environment, and access to reading materials all affect how well students learn both skills, the significance of the relationship between speaking and reading in EFL becomes even more complicated. In addition to absorbing information, reading helps students develop their active and passive vocabulary, comprehend grammatical structures, and become familiar with a variety of language registers and styles—all of which improve their oral speaking abilities (Parhadjanovna, 2023; Rachidi, 2023). Conversely, speaking exercises give students the chance to put the language skills they have learned from reading texts to the test and use them in presentations, group debates, or unplanned conversations (Asatryan, 2016; Filipczuk-Rosińska, 2019). As a result, when reading and speaking are successfully included into EFL instruction at universities, students' linguistic proficiency is enhanced as well as their capacity to communicate in English more fluently and contextually.

While the beneficial effects of reading interest on language acquisition have been confirmed by a number of earlier studies (Agustin & Suprapti, 2024; Hasyatun, 2022; Kasper, Uibu, & Mikk, 2018; Simanjuntak, Suparman, & Sukirlan, 2015), most of these studies only examined the linear relationship between reading frequency and vocabulary or text comprehension (Fernandes, Querido, Verhaeghe, Marques, & Araújo, 2017; Lawrence, Knoph, McIlraith, Kulesz, & Francis, 2022; Ma & Lin, 2015), without examining the potential interactions between this variable and performance-based speaking ability. Speaking abilities in the setting of EFL in Indonesia actually call for the ability to translate reading input into contextually relevant and coherent oral output in addition to the accumulation of passive knowledge (Mart, 2012; Perse, 2024; Shadiev, Liu, & Cheng, 2023).

Previous studies tend to treat reading interest and speaking skills as separate variables, with a dominant focus on technical aspects such as grammar mastery or pronunciation accuracy (Masito, Hermala, & Selasdini, 2024; Murtiningsih, Kurniawati, & Putri, 2022; Najilah, Sudirman, & Munawaroh, 2024; Sorohiti, Nugraha, & Rahmawati, 2024). Studies linking the two generally adopt a purely quantitative approach (Hasyatun, 2022; Rasyid, Akib, & Azis, 2020; Wahyuni, Kurniawati, & Sahrawi, 2021) without considering students'

subjective dimensions, such as their engagement in language activities. This gap creates the need for a more holistic approach to explain the complex interactions between reading interest and speaking skills, which have previously been rarely applied in the Indonesian EFL context, by considering the moderating role of subjective competence and engagement, as well as students' demographic factors. Based on the previous explanation, the researchers formulated the research problems as follow: (1) What is the correlation between reading interest and speaking ability based on CEFR standards in Indonesian EFL learners?, and (2) to what extent do demographic factors moderate the relationship between reading interest and speaking ability among Indonesian EFL learners?

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) measure the correlation between reading interest and speaking ability based on CEFR standards in Indonesian EFL learners, and (2) analyze the role of demographic factors in moderating the relationship. These findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions by extending the reading engagement model to the realm of oral ability, while challenging the traditional assumption that places speaking training only through formal practice in the classroom.

B. Method

A cross-sectional survey strategy was employed in the study. Students' reading interest and speaking proficiency were assessed using a questionnaire as part of the study tool.

The subjects of the study consisted of 219 university students in Indonesia who were studying English language programs. Inclusion criteria included: (1) active status as students; (2) ability to read and speak English at CEFR A2-B2 levels; and (3) no identified hearing or speech disorders. Demographic data such as gender, age, and parental education level were collected as moderating variables.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample

Group	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Gender		
Female	172	79%
Male	47	21%
Age		
≤19 years	145	66%
20–21 years	52	24%
> 21 years	22	10%
Parents' Education		
Primary/Junior School	58	26%
High School	89	41%
Bachelor's Degree	72	33%

C. Data collection

In this study, three instruments were used. Initially, the Reading Interest Scale, a validated survey consisting of a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). To calculate the reading interest composite score, participants were asked to rate their motivation to read, the types of books they read, and how frequently they read. Second, the Speaking Skills Assessment (CEFR-Aligned) was conducted through a performance-based assessment in accordance with the CEFR standards. The assessment was carried out by two independent assessors with a CEFR rubric that measures aspects of coherence, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary. Third, the Public Speaking Challenge Questionnaire was designed as an open-ended instrument to identify psychological barriers (such as anxiety and lack of confidence) and technical barriers (such as fear of mispronouncing and difficulty in structuring words). These three instruments were designed to explore the complex relationship between reading interest, speaking ability, and subjective inhibiting factors in EFL students in Indonesia.

D. Data Analysis

The following steps were used to analyse quantitative data using SPSS version 25: (1) item-total correlation and Cronbach's alpha were used to test the validity and reliability of the instrument; (2) Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used to test the data normality assumption; (3) Pearson correlation analysis was used to measure the relationship between speaking ability and reading interest; and (4) multiple linear regression analysis was performed using

the enter method to test the moderating role of demographic variables. In order to supplement the interpretation of quantitative findings, thematic coding was used to evaluate qualitative data from open-ended questions using the Miles & Huberman (1994) paradigm. With a 95% confidence interval, the level of statistical significance was established at $\alpha = 0.05$.

E. Result and Discussion

1. Result

The summary of the analysis results is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Correlation of Reading Interest and Speaking Ability

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Correlation (<i>r</i>)	<i>p</i> – value
Reading Interest (Composite Score)	219	3.45	0.89	0.48	< 0.001
Speaking Skill (Composite Score)	219	3.32	0.78		

Table 1 indicated a moderate positive relationship between the two variables, with a strong level of statistical significance. Although no specific numerical values are given, the data confirmed that higher reading interest tends to be associated with better speaking ability, and that the association is statistically reliable.

Table 2. Demographic Factor Moderation

Moderator	Group	Reading Interest (Mean \pm SD)	Speaking Skill (Mean \pm SD)	<i>p</i> – value
Gender	Female (<i>n</i> = 172)	3.48 \pm 0.87	3.35 \pm 0.76	0.12 (<i>t</i> – test)
	Male (<i>n</i> = 47)	3.33 \pm 0.95	3.21 \pm 0.81	
Age	\leq 19 years (<i>n</i> = 145)	3.42 \pm 0.91	3.28 \pm 0.79	0.08 (ANOVA)
	20–21 years (<i>n</i> = 52)	3.55 \pm 0.83	3.41 \pm 0.74	
	> 21 years (<i>n</i> = 22)	3.61 \pm 0.76	3.68 \pm 0.62	
Parents’ Education	Primary/Junior School (<i>n</i> = 58)	3.31 \pm 0.95	3.19 \pm 0.85	0.15 (ANOVA)
	High School (<i>n</i> = 89)	3.47 \pm 0.88	3.36 \pm 0.73	
	Bachelor’s Degree (<i>n</i> = 72)	3.54 \pm 0.83	3.43 \pm 0.71	

SD: Standard Deviation

Table 1 showed that demographic factors such as gender, age, and parental education appeared to have minimal influence on reading interest and speaking ability in the context of English language learning. Although there were some positive trends, such as increasing reading interest and speaking ability with age and association with parental education, these differences did not reach statistical significance. This suggested that other factors, besides demographics, might play a greater role in regulating students' reading interest and speaking ability. The challenges experienced by students in public are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Public Speaking Challenges

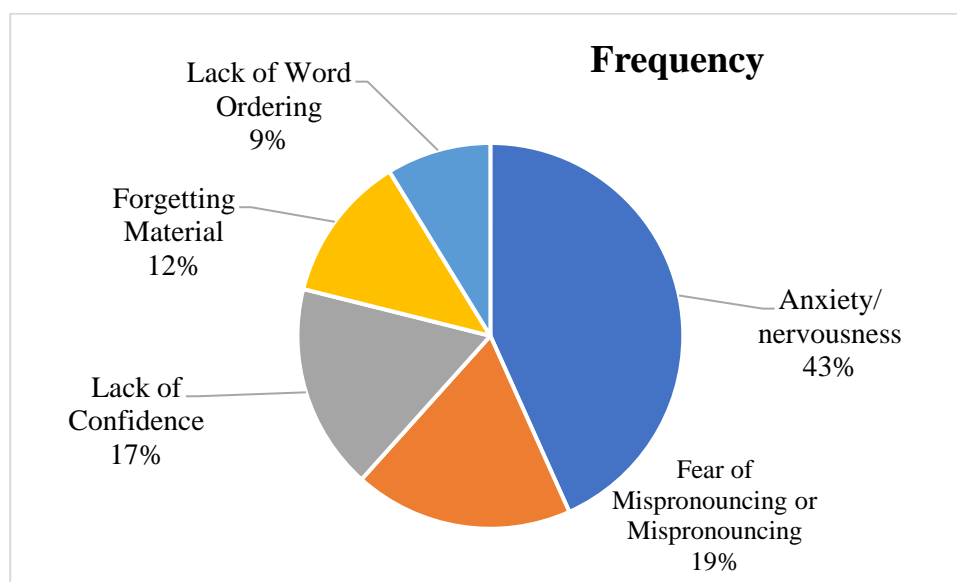


Figure 1. describes the distribution of the frequency of challenges faced in public speaking. The biggest challenge was anxiety/nervousness which is the most dominant, followed by fear of mispronouncing or mispronouncing, lack of confidence, forgetting material, and lack of word ordering. The data showed that psychological factors (such as anxiety and lack of confidence) and technical problems (pronunciation and wording) were the main obstacles to participants' verbal communication skills.

2. Discussion

The results showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.48$) between reading interest and CEFR-based speaking ability in Indonesian EFL students. This finding supports the

hypothesis that reading interest plays an important role in building the foundation of vocabulary, sentence structure, and contextual understanding needed to speak coherently and contextually (Liu & Saad, 2025; Sorenson Duncan, Mimeau, Crowell, & Deacon, 2021). Although this relationship is not deterministic, the data confirms that increased reading interest tends to be followed by increased speaking ability, underlining the importance of integrating reading activities (Mufaridah & Lutfiyah, 2020). In addition, the results of the moderation analysis revealed that age affects the strength of the relationship between reading interest and speaking ability. Respondents aged >21 years showed a stronger correlation than younger age groups. This can be explained by factors of maturity, broader academic experience, and intrinsic motivation that increases with age. In addition, older students may have more effective learning strategies for converting reading input into oral output, such as practicing idiomatic expressions or argumentative structures obtained from reading materials (Hasyatun, 2022; Norbaevna & Yuldashevna, 2019; Rwoo, 2020).

Furthermore, demographic factors like gender, age, and parental education level did not significantly differ from reading interest and speaking ability, according to the analysis's findings. This suggests that these factors may not be the primary determinants of EFL students' mastery of the two language skills. The effects were still trending and not strong enough to draw a statistically significant conclusion, even though speaking ability and reading interest were generally higher among female students, older age groups (>21 years), and students with higher parental education (bachelor's degree). These findings suggest that additional factors, such as the academic environment, learning methodologies, intrinsic motivation, or exposure to English outside of the classroom, should be taken into account as they may be more significant (Harrison & Rodriguez, 2023; Pandey, 2025; Peiteado & Rodríguez, 2024).

These findings provide important implications for educators and curriculum developers in the context of language learning in higher education. If demographic factors are not the main determinant, then learning interventions should focus on efforts to increase students' access and motivation to authentic reading materials and provide meaningful and contextual speaking practice spaces. A more inclusive and personalized approach to learning can help students from different demographic backgrounds achieve optimal reading and speaking skill development (Bisai & Singh, 2020; Erkaya & Akyil, 2025). Thus, the focus

of pedagogical policies and practices should not rely solely on assumptions based on demographic profiles, but rather on creating learning environments that support the development of linguistic competence holistically.

Qualitative analysis identified anxiety (nervousness) as the main challenge (72%), followed by lack of confidence (29%) and fear of mispronouncing (31%). These findings confirm that psychological factors are a significant barrier to the application of speaking skills, even though technical competence (such as vocabulary or grammar) has been formed through reading. Public speaking anxiety can hinder the conversion of passive knowledge into spoken output, indicating the need for psychological interventions such as relaxation techniques or gradual practice to increase confidence (Fadhilah, 2022; Ningsih, 2017).

These findings suggest integrating the “reading engagement” approach with contextual speaking activities. For example, group discussions based on reading texts or article-based presentations can strengthen the connection between the two skills. In addition, teachers need to design strategies to reduce speaking anxiety, such as providing constructive feedback or creating a non-threatening classroom environment. This learning model is in line with the CEFR principle which emphasizes holistic communicative competence (Megawati, 2016a; Tusino, Rokhayati, & Basuki, 2022).

This study has several limitations, including the use of a “cross-sectional” design that cannot establish causality and the reliance on subjective data through questionnaires. Longitudinal or experimental studies with manipulation of the reading interest variable will provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the two variables. In addition, exploration of other factors such as learning styles or exposure to digital media can enrich the moderation analysis. This recommendation aims to develop an EFL learning model that is more responsive to the needs of students in Indonesia (Megawati, 2016b; Sembodo & SS, 2018).

F. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study shows a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.48$) between reading interest and CEFR-based speaking ability in Indonesian EFL students, with age (>21 years) and parental education level (Bachelor) as moderating factors that strengthen the relationship

between the two variables. The main challenges in public speaking are more dominant in psychological factors (nervousness/anxiety, 43%; Fear of Mispronouncing and mispronouncing, 19%; lack of confidence, 17%) than technical barriers (1forgetting material, 12%; lack of word ordering, 9%).

This study, while providing valuable insights, has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the research was limited to Indonesian EFL learners, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader or more diverse EFL populations across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Secondly, the study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing data at only one point in time. This limits the ability to determine causal relationships between reading interest and speaking ability. Additionally, much of the data regarding psychological barriers and reading habits was self-reported, which may introduce subjectivity and potential bias. The study also considered only a limited number of moderating variables—specifically age and parental education—while overlooking other potentially influential factors such as socioeconomic background, access to learning resources, or the quality of the learning environment. Lastly, the focus was specifically on CEFR-based speaking ability, potentially neglecting other important dimensions of oral communication skills that fall outside this framework.

Given these limitations, several recommendations can be proposed for future research and educational practice. Expanding the participant pool to include learners from various regions, age groups, and educational settings would enhance the generalizability of the results. Longitudinal studies should also be conducted to explore how reading interest and speaking ability interact over time and whether changes in one lead to improvements in the other. It is recommended that future studies adopt a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of learner challenges and motivations. Moreover, the scope of moderating variables should be broadened to include additional demographic and psychological factors such as gender, income level, or language anxiety.

From a pedagogical standpoint, EFL instructors are encouraged to integrate contextual reading activities with guided speaking exercises that not only build linguistic competence

but also address students' psychological barriers, such as anxiety and low self-confidence. Psychological support strategies, such as mindfulness or confidence-building workshops, could be incorporated into language programs. Finally, curriculum developers should consider adopting a holistic approach that balances language skill development with learners' emotional and demographic contexts, ensuring more inclusive and effective teaching strategies.

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