

## **Positive psychology and students' English-speaking performance: A correlational study of senior high school students**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to determine the Correlation between Positive Psychology (PP) according to Gratitude and Self-Efficacy and Student Speaking Performance. Concrete understanding of main ideas and supporting details in the first semester of twelfth grade for senior high school students in the academic year 2023/2024. The researcher employed a correlation study as the research strategy to understand the correlation. The population is students from the XII MIPA 2 semester. First, a total selection of students from each class is conducted, providing a sample of 32 individuals for this research. Researchers obtain data by using questionnaires and speaking test interviews. The researcher analyzed and calculated the correlation using SPSS. The correlation level was determined to be 0.803, a strong positive correlation between both. The findings of this investigation indicate that students' Positive Psychology (PP) in Speaking Performance in terms of literal understanding has a significant correlation. Considering these findings is recommended for teachers who carry out activities in class with various student characters.

**Keywords:** Gratitude; positive psychology (PP); self-efficacy; speaking performance

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### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the English Proficiency Index (EPI) reported in 2022, Indonesia ranks 81 out of 111 countries. Meanwhile, compared to countries in Asia, Indonesia ranks 15th out of 24 countries in terms of English proficiency. No wonder Indonesia is in the category of low proficiency in English language skills. The English proficiency level greatly affects the workforce's competitiveness in Indonesia. English is still one of the subjects that are respected and used as a scary lesson for most students in Indonesia. Involving fun and easy-to-understand ways is the same as inviting students to involve their emotions, as well as removing the mental block paradigm of the difficulty of learning English that is still strongly embedded in the minds of some students in Indonesia.

Many learners believe that English is a difficult language to learn. Additionally, because English is rarely spoken in Indonesia, both in schools and in the social sphere, it gradually forms a mental block paradigm that causes people to avoid challenges. Not to mention, Oktaviani (2013) stated that the presence of people who comment excessively on beginners' English mistakes reduces learners' confidence in communicating in English, and fear of others' negative judgment is the most impactful component of students' anxiety in learning English, followed by communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and finally anxiety about being in an English class.

Based on this understanding, the researcher interprets the lack of understanding and ability to speak English around students within the scope of educational institutions, namely teaching and learning activities in delivering the materials, one of the methodologies that were delivered by researchers a few years ago we can learn through Positive Psychology (PP).

It is critical to discover the connection between positive psychology and learning activity, and starting from the contribution of well-being itself, Seligman (2011) formulated the well-being theory, which is abbreviated as PERMA. PERMA, the five factors of positive psychology aspects, can be influencers through the EFL classroom (Gush & Greeff, 2018), which is classified as: (i) Positive Emotion (P), involving positive feelings through the EFL classroom. (ii) Engagement (E) is the

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utilization of one's character traits in activities. (iii) Relationship (R), creating a good interpersonal relationship. (iv) Meaning (M), as noted in the desired learning result or a recognized area, finds meaning by serving a cause beyond oneself. (v) Achievement/accomplishment (A), recognizing the area or described in the expected learning outcome.

Not to mention, this research is concentrated on finding a correlation between the positive psychological aspects level according to Gratitude and Self-Efficacy in question and their speaking skills. The assessment of speaking skills focuses on their efforts to describe picture materials with many criteria in measuring students' speaking skills, namely grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension.

### **The nature of positive psychology**

Positive psychology is the study of conditions and processes that promote the optimal growth or function of individuals, communities, and organizations. Martin Elias Seligman, a psychologist born in 1942 and a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, coined the term "positive psychology."

He is known as the father of positive psychology in the world and also served as president of the APA (American Psychological Association) in 1998. Besides, he has written many books on self-development. Seligman (2000) states that positive psychology is a scientific area of study that focuses on understanding and promoting human strengths and virtues. It seeks to recognize and promote the good feelings, actions, and attitudes that promote human thriving and well-being. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) described positive psychology as the study of human strengths; positive traits are divided into individual and group components.

### **Gratitude in education**

When students can interpret bad things as something specific, Seligman (1991) interpreted that learned optimism means being able to interpret bad events as something external or internal. For example, if high school students realize that when they cannot understand English well, they simply interpret that the difficulties are the materials, not themselves. So that they can be more resilient in facing every difficulty they encounter because they are fully aware that the difficulty does not come from internally but comes from externally; what forms this mindset is the contribution of the positive psychological aspects that humans possess outwardly, namely gratitude and self-efficacy. Gratitude is a positive attitude toward life that prioritizes attention. Gratitude is the consequence of two phases in information processing. Before engaging with outside sources, the person must be aware of their positive experiences (McCullough et al. 2001). A feeling of regard for one's abilities can lead to gratitude. Gratitude serves as a coping technique, allowing people to focus on positive memories rather than a pattern of lack of appreciation when faced with a problem (Watkins, 2004). The gratitude that grows in every learner for what they are experiencing will cause them to walk in a more positive direction, regardless of how little they learn. People with a strong belief in their skills see challenging activities as challenges to be overcome rather than threats to avoid. They also create tough goals for themselves and remain committed to them. Following that, they increase and maintain their efforts in the face of adversity. As a result, individuals swiftly regain their sense of gratitude following disappointments. It is because they approach threatening situations with the confidence that they have control over them.

### **Self-efficacy in education**

Like the gratitude aspect, self-efficacy is also an aspect that is very necessary for the human ability to achieve a target, especially for students studying English. Self-efficacy beliefs also give students a sense of control over their learning by allowing them to formulate goals, monitor themselves, evaluate themselves, and adopt strategies (Zimmerman, 2000). Over the last 15 years, extensive research has revealed a link between self-efficacy and academic success (Meera and Jumana, 2015). Bandura (1977, p. 193) defines self-efficacy as the belief in one's competence to organize and execute the processes required to finish a task successfully.

Hsieh (2008) observed that students with high self-efficacy are more interested in learning foreign languages than those with low self-efficacy. Furthermore, they have a more upbeat attitude and a stronger integrative orientation. Furthermore, Bandura (1995) states that the more students believe in

their ability to govern their motivation and learning activities, the more confident they are in their ability to master academic subjects.

### Speaking performance

Amsori et al. (2021) argue that speaking skills are intrinsically related to speaking. It is regarded to be the hardest ability for pupils to implement during the learning process.

Not infrequently, both students and teachers tend to be reluctant to use English to explain material in class. Starting from this, the level of speaking skills obtained by students is minimal due to a lack of implementation in the classroom. Besides, according to Richards (2008), speaking involves investigating ideas, accomplishing tasks, subtracting various components of the world, or simply being present. It implies that if pupils can speak clearly and smoothly, they will be able to convey and explore their ideas more effectively. Speaking English also helps pupils gain a current understanding of health, technology, and science. According to Cameron (2001), communication should be ordered so that the listener understands what the speaker says. Speaking is important for language learners because it is the primary mode of communication. They are required to be able to speak English accurately, acceptably, and fluently in everyday situations. It takes a lot of practice to be able to talk fluently in a foreign language.

## METHOD

The quantitative strategy and descriptive method were used for 32 students in this study because the main goal was to see if there was a link between students' gratitude and self-efficacy levels based on their positive psychological aspects and English-speaking performance.

### Respondents

To determine the correlation, the researcher used a group of 32 students from XII MIPA 2, including 14 males and 18 females from a senior high school in Subang. To collect data, the researcher employed a questionnaire and a speaking test interview by describing pictures, with assessment indicators adapted from Brown (2010).

### Instruments

To find out the gratitude aspect, the questionnaire used in this study was gratitude, according to Wilang (2022), a prominent gratitude researcher who had not specifically developed gratitude questionnaires for English foreign language learners. In addition, the researcher administered a questionnaire and conducted a speaking test interview. The "Children's Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire" developed by Pastorelli et al. (2006) was used in this study to assess pupils' self-efficacy levels. The questionnaire was used to determine the student's level of self-efficacy.

### Data analysis

A survey questionnaire designed to measure gratitude in foreign language learning environments may be considered for future research and used a Likert-type scale, as can be seen in Table 1, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) in terms of students' behavior in English class. The reliability test revealed that the device was quite reliable.

The questionnaire also explored students' beliefs and confidence in utilizing English in the classroom (Table 2). An instrument or questionnaire is said to be legitimate if the questions on it can expose information that the questionnaire will measure (Ghozali, 2018:51). As a result, a pilot test was conducted to ensure the questionnaire's validity with 32 students as respondents. To calculate the r-table, the degree of freedom has to be determined as well. The degree of freedom is calculated as ( $df = n - K$ ). Since the pilot test's sample ( $n$ ) was 32, and  $K$  is a variable in this study. So  $32 - 2 = 30$ . Following that, the r-result and r-table values are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 1**

*Likert Scale of Gratitude*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4
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**Table 2**

*Likert Scale of Self-Efficacy*

Not quite sure	A little sure	Somewhat sure	Sure	Very sure	Really sure	Completely sure
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Table 3**

*The Result of the Validity Test on Students' Gratitude*

Question	r-result	r-table	Description
1	.31	.36	Invalid
2	.56	.36	Valid
3	.42	.36	Valid
4	.57	.36	Valid
5	.78	.36	Valid
6	.70	.36	Valid
7	.53	.36	Valid
8	.58	.36	Valid
9	.71	.36	Valid
10	.55	.36	Valid
11	.66	.36	Valid
12	.73	.36	Valid
13	.68	.36	Valid
14	.56	.36	Valid
15	.57	.36	Valid

**Table 4**

*The Result of Validity Test on Students' Self-Efficacy*

Question	r-result	r-table	Description
1	.75	.36	Valid
2	.86	.36	Valid
3	.87	.36	Valid
4	.93	.36	Valid
5	.67	.36	Valid
6	.88	.36	Valid
7	.69	.36	Valid
8	.86	.36	Valid
9	.84	.36	Valid
10	.82	.36	Valid
11	.80	.36	Valid
12	.87	.36	Valid
13	.89	.36	Valid
14	.84	.36	Valid

According to the questionnaire results, 14 items were deemed valid, with only one judged invalid. Question 1 was deemed invalid since  $r\text{-result} (.31) < r\text{-table} (.36)$ . As a result, the invalid item was removed from the questionnaire. The table below displays the results of Cronbach's Alpha reliability test of students' self-efficacy questionnaires. The results also demonstrate whether or not the research questionnaire is credible.

The stability and consistency of the measuring instrument used are referred to as reliability. Reliability refers to equipment's ability to generate consistent outcomes across multiple uses (Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020). However, the instrument employed in this study must be tested for reliability. By assessing the instrument's reliability, it was expected that the instrument would offer the same result even when performed in a different setting. The table below displays the results of Cronbach's Alpha

reliability test on the gratitude and self-efficacy surveys for students. The results in Table 5 also demonstrate whether or not the research questionnaire is credible.

**Table 5**

*The Result of Reliability Test on Students' Gratitude and Students' Self-Efficacy*

Variable	K	R	Criteria
Students' gratitude for speaking English	14	.866	Reliable
Students' self-efficacy in speaking English	14	.965	Highly Reliable

According to the preceding data, Cronbach's Alpha value for 14 eligible items of gratitude is .866. The 14 items for self-efficacy is .965, where from the results obtained by the two questionnaires above, the reliability is described as reliable and very reliable according to George and Mallery (2003) proposed a criterion for describing internal consistency of data to explain the amount of dependability of instruments. See Table 6. below.

**Table 6**

*The Reliability of the Data Interpretation*

Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

(George & Mallery, 2003)

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the reliability of the questionnaire was good. Besides, it can be concluded that the instrument can be used in this research. The questionnaire was given to one class of 12th-grade students at a senior high school in Subang. The class consisted of 36 students, but only 32 were taken as participants in this research because four students did not attend the class. After that, the data from the questionnaire were calculated using SPSS 25.0. The statistical calculation was intended to see the questionnaire's validity, mean, and standard deviation. After the questionnaire results were obtained and the validity and reliability tests were passed, the researcher looked for the average value of the two aspects to make the value of these two aspects on a scale of 100.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Level of positive psychology according to the students' speaking test

The following are the mean and standard deviation values for the two characteristics of gratitude and self-efficacy. This stage involved further processing of the data using the ordinal category formula. It was intended to determine the three levels of positive psychology among pupils. From here, the researcher will only show data from nine pupils who are classified as low-, moderate-, or high-level performers. Table 7 displays the positive psychology scores for each of the nine students. The mean and standard deviation values obtained from the two are as follows.

**Table 7**

*The Result of Positive Psychology Aspect*

No. Respondents	Positive Psychological Aspect		Total Score	Classification of Students' Achievements
	Gratitude	Self-Efficacy		
S7	41	27	68	Low
S24	46	26	72	
S15	49	33	82	

S10	53	57	<b>110</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
S4	43	68	<b>111</b>	
S11	49	63	<b>112</b>	
S20	55	70	<b>125</b>	<b>High</b>
S17	54	73	<b>127</b>	
S30	56	96	<b>152</b>	

\*S7 means Student in the speaking test serial number.

The questionnaires utilized were the Foreign Language Gratitude Scale (FLGS) from Wilang's Gratitude in Foreign Language Learning (2022) and the Self-Efficacy Scale from Pastorelli et al.'s Children's Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (2006). The following table shows the scores received by students at three levels: low, moderate, and high. Each level was represented by three students.

**Table 8**  
*Students Speaking Test*

No. Resp	Score					Total Score	Criteria
	G	V	P	F	C		
S24	1	1	1	1	1	20	<b>Low</b>
S7	1	2	1	1	1	24	
S15	2	2	2	2	2	40	
S11	3	2	3	2	3	52	<b>Moderate</b>
S4	3	3	3	2	4	60	
S10	4	4	3	3	4	72	
S30	5	4	4	4	5	88	<b>High</b>
S17	5	5	5	4	5	96	
S20	5	5	5	4	5	96	

The table above shows that students with low levels of positive psychology also have low speaking scores. Low-level performers had scores of 20, 24, and 40, indicating that they may struggle to explain or describe the visuals in the speaking test due to weak grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension.

Students who had a medium level of positive psychology received scores of 52, 60, and 72. They are able to explain and describe despite their limited language. The pronunciation is fairly decent. However, there are still limitations in expressing knowledge of what they mean. Aside from that, kids with a strong sense of positive psychology scored the highest on the speaking test. There are 88 and 96. They typically can express the descriptions of the images they see with a high level of knowledge. Their vocabulary is also fairly wide, and they communicate effectively.

### **The correlation between positive psychology and students' English-speaking performance**

A correlation design was utilized to determine the relationship between two variables. The data were also analyzed using SPSS 25.0. A correlation design was utilized to determine the relationship between the two variables. Following that, the data from both the questionnaire and the speaking exams were analyzed to determine whether they were regularly distributed. The data were further correlated to get the correlation coefficients between the two variables.

The result shows that the standard deviation was 325.92. A standard deviation closer to '0' (zero) indicates that the data points tended to be very close to the mean of the set, while a high standard deviation indicates that the data points were spread out over a wider range of values. From the table above, the mean score of the students' positive psychology was 1963.39. It could be concluded that the data tended to be spread out close together. Another way to interpret the standard deviation is by comparing the value with the range of the data. Here, the minimal score gathered from the questionnaire fell to 1410, and the maximum score was 2771. So the range was 1361. In particular, the standard

deviation should not exceed one-quarter of the range. A 1/4 of 1361 was 340. Because the standard deviation was less than 1/4 of the range, the data was fairly well distributed (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*The Result of Descriptive Statistic*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY	32	1410.71	2771.43	1963.3929	325.92225
SPEAKING TEST	32	20.00	96.00	47.2500	20.28029
Valid N (listwise)	32				

The normality test was used to determine if the questionnaire and speaking test scores followed a normal distribution. Since the variables were classified as interval data, the data normality should be assessed. As a result, the data was calculated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov algorithm. Suppose the data has a Sig. value larger than 0.050, and it is regularly distributed. However, if the Sig. value was less than 0.050, and the data did not follow a normal distribution.

Table 9 displays the results of the normalcy test. Based on the computation above, it is clear that the data from the positive psychology surveys were normally distributed since the Sig. of data exceeded 0.050. Meanwhile, the data from the speaking exam did not follow a normal distribution because the Sig. was less than 0.050. When data does not follow a normal distribution, the cause should be determined. The data distribution in this study was not normal because it included ordinal and ranking data. In this case, a nonparametric test was recommended because it could handle ordinal and ranking data.

**Table 9**

*Tests of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Positive Psychology	.107	32	.200*	.966	32	.405
Speaking Test	.233	32	.000	.892	32	.004

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

When the variables in the correlation study are measured on an ordinal (ranking) scale, Hatch and Farhady (1982, p. 205) recommend using Spearman's rank-order correlation (represented by rho, p). Spearman's rank-order correlation is a nonparametric analog to the Pearson product-moment correlation. The Spearman's correlation coefficient measures the degree to which two ranked variables are related. Table 10 demonstrates that the value of Sig. (2-tailed) between students' positive psychology and the speaking test was 0.00. The significance level (2-tailed) is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. It suggested that there was a link between students' positive psychology and speaking examinations. Meanwhile, the two variables had a correlation of 0.803. Table 11 shows that there was a correlation, which means that the strength of the association between the variables students' positive psychology and the speaking exam is 0.803, or extremely strong.

**Table 10**

*Table of Correlation*

Correlation			Speaking Test
Spearman's rho	Students' Positive Psychology	Correlation Coefficient	.803**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

**Table 11***Guidelines of the Correlation Value Interpretation*

<i>R</i>	<b>Strength</b>
0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak
0.2 – 0.39	Weak
0.4 – 0.59	Moderate
0.6 – 0.79	Strong
0.8 – 1.00	Very Strong

(Evans, 1996)

The correlation coefficient value in the test results above is positive (0.803), indicating that the relationship between the two variables is in the same direction. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the higher the quality of pupils' positive psychology, the better their speaking performance. As previously stated, a correlation value of  $r$  was 0.803. Based on the parameters outlined above, it is possible to conclude that there was a significant positive association between students' positive psychology and their speaking performance. Furthermore, the data were calculated to get the coefficient of determination indicated as  $r^2$ , and the calculation is as follows;

$$0.803^2 = 0.644$$

The coefficient correlation is useful since it indicates the fraction of variation (fluctuation). One variable is predicted based on the other. The coefficient of determination is the measurement that determines how a model or graph performs. In this study,  $r = 0.803$  and  $r^2 = 0.644$ , indicating that students' positive psychology levels may predict 64% of the overall variation in the speaking exam. Other factors explained the remaining 36% of the total difference in the speaking exam. To determine the role of positive psychology in students' speaking performance, a hypothesis test is required. The theory is interpreted as follows;

$H_0$  = There is no statistically significant relationship between 12th-grade students' positive psychology levels and their speaking performance.

$H_1$  = There is a statistically significant relationship between 12th-grade students' positive psychology levels and their speaking performance.

Following the two aspects of positive psychology, gratitude and self-efficacy are also studied by some researchers to improve students' speaking skills. Faqe et al. (2019), in their research about the use of thanking speech, gave the result that the findings revealed that Kurdish EFL students employed thanking speech act styles ranging from simple thanking to longer ones, in addition to explaining the cause and the favor. Because of the settings and situations offered to the participants, all of the participants utilized thanking speech acts ranging in length from simple to complicated. Friendship, age, gender, and familiarity would all be factors in encouraging English speakers to behave and talk politely. According to the findings of this study, the most commonly utilized tactics by Kurdish EFL learners were thanking or gratitude feeling, compensation, appreciation, state of the cause, and repayment.

Furthermore, the act of glad disposition consists of two steps: encouraging a positive outcome and attributing it to an external source (Weiner 1986). Wilang (2022) noted in her research, Gratitude in Foreign Language Learning that the antecedents provide critical insights into how gratitude can be encouraged in English language learning and how to comprehend the concept of thankfulness in the EFL environment. As previous research has shown, thankfulness increases prosocial actions, fosters motivation, and improves relationships, among other things. Maulida (2016) did a study on self-efficacy to improve students' speaking skills, which received a moderate positive ranking and found a statistically significant association between students' self-efficacy levels and their speaking performance. Furthermore, Agustina (2022) reported that there is a significant relationship between



self-regulated learning and speaking skills, with the five indicators indicating that students have a high level of ability to support their speaking skills both inside and outside of the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

The data suggest that there is a considerable beneficial association between students' gratitude and their speaking performance. However, the speaking test yielded an  $r$  score of 0.803, which was moderately favorable. The study revealed that there is a relationship between thankfulness beliefs and academic accomplishment. There are guidelines for students regarding this study. Students suggested speaking frequently and employing various speaking tactics to improve their speaking abilities. It is recommended that individuals practice their speaking methods more frequently in order to identify which speaking tactics they may lack and need to develop and to avoid being afraid of making mistakes. Aside from students, other recommendations were made for English teachers.

The research findings can help high school EFL teachers have a better understanding of their students' positive psychological aspects in the classroom while also enhancing their speaking abilities. The findings of this study may assist teachers in determining the most relevant teaching tactics to incorporate into their English-speaking performance, as well as focusing more on effective and pedagogical components of teaching. Of course, in order to do so, students must have a desire or encouragement from both within and outside themselves. After receiving this support, pupils will be more motivated to enhance their English learning skills. This implies that both teachers and students must be skilled in the learning process in order for learning outcomes to be achieved.

So, in order to do better research in the future, suggestions for future researchers are required. Furthermore, this study provides valuable information about the relationship and impacts of positive psychology on foreign language learners' speaking performance. For future research, researchers can include a speaking test category, such as role-playing or story-telling performance. As a result, this study can be utilized as a reference for future studies with similar difficulties or variables, and researchers can investigate additional factors that are more closely associated with student's capacity to understand and improve their English-speaking accomplishments.

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