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# Research Paper: The Relationship between Personality Traits and Public Speaking Anxiety among Mizan-Aman Health Science College Students, South West Ethiopia

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aimed to assess the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and public speaking anxiety among students at Mizan-Aman Health Science College, South West Ethiopia.

**Methods**: An institutional-based cross-sectional survey design was employed. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each stratum, resulting in a total of 320 participants (154 males and 166 females). Data were collected using the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) scale and the Big Five Inventory (BFI). Percentages, independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to address the study's specific objectives.

**Results:** The analysis revealed that the prevalence of public speaking anxiety was 28.1%. The mean public speaking anxiety scores for female students (M = 54.15, SD = 10.99) were significantly higher than those of male respondents (M = 47.90, SD = 11.04), t (318) = -5.07, p = 0.01. Significant mean differences were found between students with different year levels. A moderate to low negative correlation was observed between the Big Five personality traits and public speaking anxiety, except for agreeableness, which showed a positive correlation. Multiple linear regression analysis indicated that 20.5% of the variance in public speaking anxiety could be explained by personality traits.

**Conclusions**: The findings suggest that the Big Five personality traits significantly correlate with public speaking anxiety. Gender difference was also reported. Thus, special consideration should be given to female students in speaking classes.

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## 1. Introduction

Social phobia, commonly referred to as social anxiety disorder (SAD), is one of the most prevalent anxiety disorders and is characterized by an intense fear of social situations in which individuals may be negatively evaluated (American Psychological Association, 2022). Recent surveys indicate that approximately 7% of adults in the United States experience SAD in a given year, with onset commonly occurring during adolescence (American Psychological Association, 2022). One subtype relevant to academic settings is performance-only SAD, defined in the DSM-5-TR as fear confined to performance situations such as giving speeches or presenting to an audience (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Public speaking, a common academic performance activity, involves the structured delivery of information to a live audience with the intent to inform, persuade, or engage listeners. As described in APA (2022), public speaking anxiety is characterized by marked fear/anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, avoidance or endurance, disproportionate fear, and significant distress/impairment which must last for not less than six months**.** These symptoms have become part of SAD. When individuals experience an excessive fear response during public speaking situations, it is referred to as public speaking anxiety (PSA) or glossophobia, a phenomenon now increasingly recognized as a public health and educational concern. More recent global studies have documented high PSA prevalence among university students, including 61% reporting moderate to high PSA in the Philippines (Del Villar & Tan, 2023), 46%, and over 45% among medical students in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Beyond prevalence, emerging research examines psychological correlates of PSA. The Big Five personality trait model continues to be the leading framework for understanding personality–behavior associations in higher education, with studies showing that traits such as neuroticism are positively associated with PSA, whereas extraversion and openness tend to predict lower PSA levels (Wanying et al., 2024). Personality traits play a substantial role in academic experiences and performance-related tasks, including speaking, presenting, and group collaboration.

The rise of student-centered pedagogy, including case-based learning, discussions, seminars, simulations, and project-based assessments, requires learners to articulate ideas clearly and confidently in front of peers and evaluators. However, many students still struggle with performance-related anxiety. Recent findings suggest that socially comfortable individuals may experience heightened fear when required to speak publicly, often resulting in avoidance behaviors, cognitive impairments, and physical anxiety symptoms (Christy et al., 2021). Studies also indicated that students with PSA may also experience reduced academic engagement, absenteeism before presentations, diminished confidence, and poorer academic outcomes (Maryam et al., 2024).

In Ethiopia and much of Sub-Saharan Africa, research on PSA remains limited

despite its relevance for academic success and professional readiness. Recent evidence shows that PSA substantially disrupts learning and contributes to impaired academic performance and reduced career self-efficacy (Ahmed et al., 2025). The scarcity of studies examining PSA among Ethiopian college students, along with inconsistent findings on gender differences and personality correlates, highlights the need for further investigation. Therefore, the present study aims to address the following questions: To what extent is public speaking anxiety prevalent among nursing students at Mizan-Aman College of Health Sciences? Is there a significant gender difference in PSA among these students? Do PSA levels differ significantly across year levels? What is the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and PSA among these students?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research Design, Population, and Sampling

An institution-based cross-sectional survey design was employed. Because such a type of research design gives an advantage of studying prevalence and looking at the relationship between different variables at the same time. In addition, in such research designs, data can be collected from a cross-section of a population in a short time, and then results can be generalized to represent the entire population of the study. A quantitative research approach was adopted because each specific objective of the study was analyzed through statistical expressions. The study was conducted in Southwestern Ethiopia, South Nations and Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR), Bench Maji Zone, Mizan-Aman College of Health Science. The college is among the four government health science colleges in the South Nation Nationalities and People Region. It was about 550 km from Addis Ababa. The target population of the study was 803 males and 887 females, a total of 1690 nursing students of Mizan-Aman College of Health Science, comprising those from Midwifery, Compressive Nursing, Laboratory, Health Informatics, and Pharmacy Departments. Students who were willing to participate and had no current physical illness or emotional disturbance were included in the study. Students who were experiencing physical discomfort, emotional disturbance, or any illness at the time of data collection were excluded to minimize the risk of careless or unreliable responses.

Stratified random sampling was used in selecting the samples for this study. This helped the researcher to get a representative sample from each stratum. Though there were many means of stratification, gender and year level were the basis for forming the strata in this study. Stratifications were also further made based on the field of study. This was done to get representative and proportional samples.

The sample estimates according to Yamane's simplified formula for proportion were: - $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$ = 323 from the total 1690 students. From the total population, the total number of first-year, second-year, and third-year students was 750(345 males & 405

females), 560 (291 males and 270 females), and 379 (167 males and 212 females), respectively. Applying the proportional allocation formula for each stratum, a proportional sample was allocated. Finally, systematic random sampling was employed to select actual samples.

### 2. 2. Instruments

The study employed two self-report questionnaire guides in collecting data from the respondents. These were the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) and the Big Five Inventories (BFI).

**Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)** is a self-report instrument developed by McCroskey (1970) to assess individuals' levels of anxiety specifically associated with public speaking situations. Theoretically, it is grounded in communication apprehension theory and basically focuses on cognitive, emotional, and physiological responses experienced by the respondents before and during public speaking. The original PRPSA consists of 34 items**,** each reflecting feelings or reactions related to public speaking anxiety. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale**,** typically ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Some items are reverse-scored to control for response bias, for instance (item 6, I have no fear of making classroom presentations, item 7, Although I am nervous just before starting a presentation, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable, item 11, I feel relaxed while making presentation, item 12, I enjoy preparing for classroom presentation etc.) are reversely coded. The total scores are computed by summing all item responses, with higher scores indicating greater levels of public speaking anxiety. This instrument is **self-administered** and can be completed individually or in group settings. Administration typically requires **10–15 minutes**, and the instrument may be administered in paper-and-pencil format or electronically. Clear instructions are provided to respondents to answer based on their usual feelings toward public speaking situations rather than a single speaking event. It was originally developed for use with college and university students.

For the purpose of this study, the PRPSA with 34 items, which was reduced into 18 items by Mörtberg et al. (2018), was used. The psychometric properties of PRPSA were tested in a Sample of University Students in Sweden. This brief version was employed because it was more recent, valid, and reliable. The estimate for the scale was found to be α equals 0.90. Moreover, it could be easily administered compared to the 34-item PRPSA scale.

**The Big Five Inventory (BFI):** The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a self-report personality assessment developed by John and Srivastava (1999) to measure the five major dimensions of personality: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience**.** The instrument is based on the Five-Factor Model of personality and was designed to provide a brief yet reliable assessment of broad personality traits. The Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) is a very commonly used tool in psychology research to measure five dimensions of personality. It is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5 (where 1

indicates = disagree strongly and 5 = indicates agree strongly). It includes 44 statements that ask the respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a particular statement. These statements are related to five dimensions of personality that are, extroversion = 8 items (2 items reversely coded); agreeableness = 9 items (4 items reversely coded); conscientiousness = 9 items (4 items reversely coded); neuroticism = 8 items (3 items reversely coded); and openness = 10 items (2 items reversely coded). The alpha estimate for this tool is above 0.75 in many translations. According to Amente and Zeleke (2024), the Amharic version of the Big Five Personality Dimensions was found to have a very good to excellent alpha level. Extroversion (0.83), Neuroticism (0.86), Conscientiousness (0.86), openness (0.88), and agreeableness (0.77) were reported in their study. This instrument can be self-administered and is suitable for individual or group administration. Completion time is approximately 5–10 minutes**,** making it appropriate for research contexts where time constraints are a concern.

### 2.3. Procedure

Three data collectors were recruited. The necessary orientations have been provided for them for two consecutive days. Students were asked about their willingness to fill out the questionnaires. The data collection tools were translated into Amharic by two language professionals and finally translated into English to see their consistency. The two questionnaires (PRPSA and The Big Five Inventory) items were attached together to facilitate the coding system. After that, respondents were randomly selected and filled out the questionnaires in their free classes in an organized classroom setting. While filling out the questionnaires, students were helped by the data collectors. Finally, the questionnaires were collected and submitted to the researcher, so that the researcher organized and coded the questionnaires to facilitate data entry and analysis.

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed throughout the process of data analysis. Under descriptive statistics, percentages and Pearson Correlation Coefficients were used, and inferential statistics such as independent t-test, multiple regression analysis, and one-way ANOVA were used to test the statistical significance of the variables in the study. The Percentage was used to describe the prevalence of public speaking anxiety among students; Pearson Correlation was employed to see the correlation between each Big Five Personality Trait and public speaking anxiety. For further analysis of the statistical significance of the predicting values of the Big Five Traits on the variance in public speaking anxiety, multiple regression analysis was employed. The independent t-test was employed to test the significant mean difference between male and female students, while the one-way ANOVA was used to test the between-group mean differences among the first, second, and third-year student groups in their public speaking anxiety scores. SPSS version 25 was run to carry out the analysis. A written informed consent form was signed before the actual data collection. Participants were informed about

the purpose of the study and encouraged to participate voluntarily. The respondents were informed of the objectives of the study and asked for voluntary participation in filling out the questionnaires. The right to withdraw anytime without any consequence was also clearly stated. The proposal was approved by the College Research Standing Committee, stating that it has no significant harm to human participants.

## 3. Results

Among a total of 323 expected respondents, 320 participants filled out the questionnaire, yielding 99.07 % response rate. Among the respondents, 154(48.1 %) were males, while the remaining 166(51.9%) were females. From the total number of male respondents, 73(44%) were from the first year, 30(19.5%) from the second year, and 30(19.5%) participated based on their proportion. Regarding female respondents, 67(43.5%) were from the first year, 57(37%) from the second year, and 41 (25%) from the third-year group. Thus, a total of 141 (44%) first-year, 108(33.8%) second-year, and 71 (22.2%) third-year respondents participated in the study.

In assessing the prevalence of public speaking anxiety among the students, the frequencies and percentages of their scores on the self-reported questionnaire were computed based on the cutoff point. The analysis revealed that public speaking anxiety was prevalent among the students. Based on the respondents, the scores of 230 (71.9%) reported no anxiety towards public speaking, and 90(28.1%) reported anxiety levels above the cutoff point. From this, it could be concluded that, as to other groups of students in other fields, approximately one-third of the participants had experienced a high level of anxiety concerning public speaking.

Table 1

*An independent t-test for significant mean differences*

| Levine's test for equality of variance | | | t-test for equality of means | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | Sign | t | Df | sign (2, tailed) | MD | standard. error |
| Equal variance assumed | .000 | 1.000 | -5.072 | 318 | .000** | -6.25 | 1.23 |
| Equal variance not assumed | | | -5.071 | 315.98 | .000** | -6.25 | 1.23 |

The total number of respondents in this study was 320, and from these, 154 (48.1%) were males, while 166 (52.9%) were female respondents. By assessing the difference between male and female respondents on the public speaking anxiety score, a mean analysis was conducted. An examination of the group means indicated that the mean of public speaking anxiety scores of female students (M=54.15, SD=10.99) was higher than that of male students (M=47.90, SD=11.04). An independent sample t-test was conducted to evaluate whether the observed mean difference between male and

female respondents was statistically significant. The analysis revealed that the observed mean differences between the two groups (male & female respondents) were statistically significant t (*318*) =-*5.072*, *p = 0.01*).

Table 2

*Mean difference between respondents from different groups in terms of year level*

| Groups by year level | N | mean | std. deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st year groups | 141 | 51.2553 | 12.33428 |
| 2nd year groups | 108 | 53.500 | 10.54009 |
| 3rd year groups | 71 | 47.3521 | 9.95719 |
| Total | 320 | 51.1469 | 11.43992 |

As illustrated in Table 2 above, mean analysis was conducted to assess the differences between respondents from different year levels (1st, 2nd, and 3rd) with respect to their public speaking anxiety. The results of the analysis showed that the mean PSA of the participants from the third-year group (*M=47.35, SD=11.43*) was lower than that of respondents from the first-year group (*M=51.25, SD= 12.33*) and the second-year group (*M= 53.50, SD= 10.54*).

To check that the observed mean difference between the groups was statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The analysis of variance showed that respondents with varying year groups significantly differ in their public speaking anxiety, *F (2,317) =6.40, p = .002.*

Table 3

*Multiple comparison tests*

| (I) groups | (j)groups | MD | Standard. error | P value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1stYear groups | 2nd year groups | -2.24 | 1.43 | .265 |
| | 3rd year groups | 3.90 | 1.63 | .046 |
| 2nd year groups | 1st year groups | 2.24 | 1.43 | .265 |
| | 3rd year groups | 6.14 | 1.71 | .001** |
| 3rd year groups | 1st year groups | -3.90 | 1.63 | .046* |
| | 2nd year groups | -6.14 | 1.71 | .001** |

*Significance at 0.05 alpha level, ** significance at 0.01 alpha level

As shown in Table 3 above, to see between which groups statistically significant differences exist, a multiple comparison or Post Hoc test was conducted using Tukey's

test. The test revealed that public speaking anxiety scores of the third-year group (*M=47.35, SD=9.95*) were significantly less than those of the first-year group (*M=51.25, SD=12.33*) and second-year group (*M=53.500, SD=10.54*), *p=.001*. The public speaking anxiety scores of the first-year and the second-year groups do not differ significantly, *P=0.265.*

Table 4

*Relationship between the Big Five personality variables and public speaking anxiety*

| Variables | (r) | P-value |
|---|---|---|
| Extraversion | -412** | 0.001 |
| Openness | -395** | 0.001 |
| Agreeableness | 0.016 | 0.781 |
| Conscientiousness | -221** | 0.001 |
| Neuroticism | 0.244** | 0.001 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 -tailed)

As seen in Table 4 above, Pearson's correlation revealed that among the Big Five Personality Traits, four were found to have a significant positive and negative correlation with public speaking anxiety at the 0.05 level, except for the agreeableness personality trait. However, all of the correlations would be considered moderate to low based on the criteria.

Pearson's correlation revealed that extraversion (*r = -412, p=0.001*) and Openness (*r=-395, p=0.001*) personality traits had a moderate negative correlation with public speaking anxiety, and the correlation was also found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level. Conscientiousness had a weak negative correlation (*r = -221, P=0.001*), and neuroticism also had a weak positive correlation with public speaking anxiety (*r=.244, p=0.001*). Finally, the agreeableness personality trait had a very weak positive correlation with PSA, and the relationship was not statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level (r= 0.016, P=.781).

Table 5

*Regression coefficients*

| Model | β | Standard. Error | Beta | t | P | tolerance | BIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1(constant) | 71.303 | 5.814 | | 12.243 | .000 | | |
| Extroversion | -.436 | .125 | -248 | -3.480 | .001 | .499 | 2.004 |
| Openness | -.273 | .119 | -168 | -2.295 | .002 | .471 | 2.124 |
| Conscientious | -.126 | .104 | -067 | -1.215 | .067 | .834 | 1.198 |
| Neuroticism | .210 | .131 | .088 | 1.604 | .110 | .839 | 1.191 |

To see the combined predicting effect of the four personality traits that had shown significant correlation with PSA (Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, & Neuroticism), multiple linear regression analysis was conducted after checking the underlying assumptions. The analysis revealed that 20.5 % of the variance in public speaking anxiety could be explained by the differences in personality trait scores ($R^2$ =.205). The P-value for the overall model was F (4.315) =20.258, p = .001. Therefore, it could be understood that the amount of variance explained by the personality traits was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Extroversion and Openness to experience were found to be statistically significant and independent predictors of public speaking anxiety at the 0.05 level (p=0.001 & 0.022, respectively). The two variables (Conscientiousness & Neuroticism) were not significant and independent predictors of public speaking anxiety (p =0.22 and 0.11), respectively.

## 4. Discussions

The prevalence of public speaking anxiety according to this study was 28.1%, which is consistent with several recent studies of student populations. The observed rate is similar to pooled estimates of social-performance anxiety among students: a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of Ethiopian students reported a pooled social-phobia prevalence of 26.8% (Melkam et al., 2023), and larger multi-site student surveys and university samples show that public-speaking and presentation situations are among the most anxiety-provoking learning contexts for students. (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024). Although lifetime estimates for clinically diagnosed social anxiety disorder (SAD) in population surveys vary, epidemiological reviews report lifetime prevalence estimates that are substantially lower than the prevalence of situation-specific fears in student samples, and clinical SAD often co-occurs with performance fears (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024).

The obtained prevalence (28.1%) was somewhat higher than some published estimates from other countries (e.g., ranges reported across surveys), suggesting that a portion of the sampled students experienced SAD symptoms or elevated performance-specific fears. Cross-national differences in reported public-speaking anxiety can reflect cultural norms, pedagogical approaches, familiarity with public-speaking tasks, measurement instruments, and sampling differences — factors highlighted in recent work comparing student samples across settings. (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024; Melkam et al., 2023).

The study found a significant gender difference in public speaking anxiety, with females reporting higher anxiety, which aligns with recent university-based research showing that female students often report greater public-speaking and social-performance anxiety than male students (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024; Melkam et al., 2023). International student studies and recent multi-site investigations similarly report higher mean PSA (public speaking anxiety) among women, although some individual studies find no difference — likely

reflecting sample, cultural, and measurement variability (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024). The higher scores among female students may reflect a combination of higher social-evaluation sensitivity, socialization patterns, and context-specific expectations; Ethiopian-context syntheses also identify being female as a consistent correlate of higher social phobia among students. (Melkam et al., 2023).

One-way ANOVA analysis revealed significant differences between year groups: students in the third year scored lower on public speaking anxiety than the first- and second-year students, while the first- and second-year groups did not differ significantly. This pattern is consistent with the idea that increased exposure and practice (more presentations, projects, seminars, and clinical/practical tasks) reduce situation-specific anxiety over time. Recent large student samples showed that the level/year of study is a predictor of PSA, with students further along in their programs often reporting lower PSA — likely because of greater exposure, habituation, and developed presentation skills. (Lintner & Belovecová, 2024). Behavioral principles (gradual exposure, systematic desensitization) and modern interventions (including internet-based and VR exposure) are highlighted in the literature as effective ways to reduce public speaking anxiety through repeated, supported exposure. (Lim et al., 2022; Reeves et al., 2021).

The study found significant correlations between four personality traits and public speaking anxiety: extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness were negatively correlated with PSA, while neuroticism was positively correlated; agreeableness showed no significant correlation. The pattern and direction of the findings indicated that extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness can be taken as protective factors, while neuroticism could be a risk factor. These findings are consistent with recent empirical findings linking Big Five traits to anxiety in students. Several large, recent studies report negative associations of extraversion, conscientiousness (and sometimes openness) with anxiety, and a positive association of neuroticism with anxiety; mechanisms such as self-efficacy and academic burnout appear to mediate these relationships. (Wu et al., 2024).

Multiple linear regression in this study indicated that personality traits explained 20.5% of the variance in public speaking anxiety. This magnitude is consistent with recent work showing personality explains a meaningful but partial portion of variance in anxiety outcomes (with remaining variance attributable to situational, developmental, and environmental factors), and highlights that personality is an important contributor but not the sole determinant of PSA (Wu et al., 2024; Lintner & Belovecová, 2024). Extraversion and openness to experience emerged as independent negative predictors of PSA in the study; this may reflect the greater social approach tendencies and tolerance for new experiences that accompany these traits, which facilitate interaction and reduce fear in performance contexts (Wu et al., 2024).

Arranging frequent speaking tasks and ensuring the participation of all students in

the classroom would be very important. Avoiding/minimizing presentation tasks with predetermined presenters to encourage students to practice interns before the actual presentation in their groups would be seen as a systematic desensitization technique to help students gradually reduce their level of anxiety. Balance individual and group presentation tasks throughout the courses so that all students can have a chance to face public speaking challenges. Give close attention and facilitate separate public presentation practice for female students so that their high level of anxiety towards PSA might be reduced. Teachers need to appear friendly to their students and encourage their little attempts, considering experience issues, discouragements, and negative words during presentation sessions may increase (anticipate) the level of anxiety for next presentations.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that the prevalence of public speaking anxiety among students of Mizan-Aman Health Science College was found to be high. Female students had reported a relatively higher level of public speaking anxiety than males. The year of stay in college has a significant contribution in reducing the level of public speaking anxiety among the students. Participants who score high in extroversion and openness to experience traits reported a low level of public speaking anxiety. Therefore, educators should give close attention to female students and introverts to increase their confidence in speaking classes.

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## Conflict of interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any organization. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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