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Predicting Speech Anxiety Based on Social Intelligence and Resilience in Students

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Abstract

Objective: *The present study aimed to predict students' speech anxiety based on social intelligence and resilience.*

Methods: *A descriptive-correlational research design was employed. The study population consisted of students at Islamic Azad University, Bandar Anzali International Branch, during the 2025-2026 academic year. Using convenience sampling, 150 participants were selected. Data were collected via the Public Speaking Anxiety Scale (PSAS), the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS-27, utilizing correlation and simultaneous regression analyses at a significance level of α=0.05.*

Results: *The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between social intelligence and speech anxiety, as well as between resilience and speech anxiety. Furthermore, the regression model indicated that social intelligence and resilience accounted for 35% of the variance in speech anxiety.*

Conclusion: *The results suggest that enhancing social intelligence and resilience may effectively reduce speech anxiety among students.*

Keywords*: Resilience; Social Intelligence; Speech Anxiety; Students*

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1. Introduction

The period of university education, often accompanied by numerous challenges such as financial difficulties, dormitory life, classroom demands, examination pressure, distance from family, and various new life experiences, represents a stage in which students may encounter different psychological problems (Balali et al., 2017). One of the most common clinical problems among university students is public speaking anxiety, or anxiety associated with speaking in front of an audience. Fear of public speaking is considered a form of social anxiety that involves a range of physiological responses, verbal behaviors, and motor reactions (Hekmatiyan Fard et al., 2021). Individuals with public speaking anxiety become highly self-focused when they have to speak in social situations, and this intense self-focused attention interferes with satisfactory social performance and effective social adjustment (Paradila & Hasanah, 2021). A core assumption among individuals who experience public speaking anxiety is that others are inherently critical and likely to evaluate them negatively. As a result, many students attempt to avoid situations in which they must appear or speak in front of others; however, when avoidance is not possible, they often experience intense pressure, embarrassment, voice trembling, rapid heartbeat, discomfort, and feelings of insecurity. Moreover, fear of speaking in public can negatively affect an individual's personal, social, and emotional life (Wang et al., 2020). Public speaking anxiety may arise from various internal and external factors. Several researchers have reported that lack of strong public speaking skills, limited proficiency in foreign languages, and difficulties in regulating emotional states are among the potential contributors to this type of anxiety (Hasibuan et al., 2022).

Research has reported a high prevalence of public speaking anxiety among university students. For example, a study by Lintner and Belovecová (2024) found that a considerable proportion of students experience moderate to severe levels of public speaking anxiety. Similarly, in Iran, Ghasemi (2024) reported a high prevalence of public speaking anxiety among Iranian language learners and university students.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the role of social and interpersonal skills in explaining public speaking anxiety, among which social intelligence has received considerable attention. Social intelligence refers to a set of individual abilities that reflect how effectively a person interacts with others and manages successful social relationships; it begins to develop in childhood and typically flourishes during young adulthood (Khilmiyah & Wiyono, 2021). Individuals with higher levels of social intelligence are generally more capable of establishing effective and satisfying relationships with others, exerting influence in social interactions, understanding the conditions and perspectives of others, demonstrating empathy, and providing support when needed (Brown et al., 2019). Social intelligence consists of several components, including social awareness (the ability to perceive and understand oneself and others in complex social contexts), social skills (the ability to enter new social situations and adapt effectively to them), and social information processing (the capacity to understand, interpret, and predict others' behaviors and emotions in social contexts) (Katou et al., 2021). As a multidimensional construct, social intelligence encompasses abilities such as

understanding others' mental states, engaging in effective verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, social participation, influencing others, solving social problems, motivating and encouraging others, and understanding appropriate behavior in different social situations (Sanwal, 2024).

Previous research suggests that social intelligence plays an important role in predicting public speaking anxiety. Esmailzadeh Ashini et al. (2022) found a significant relationship between students' public speaking anxiety, emotional balance, and social intelligence. Similarly, Wang and Zhang (2025) reported that emotional intelligence and components related to social intelligence play an important mediating role in reducing social anxiety.

In addition to social intelligence, resilience has been identified as one of the most important constructs in positive psychology and has received increasing attention from researchers in recent years. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt successfully to difficult circumstances, regain psychological balance after experiencing stress, and maintain effective functioning in challenging situations. Resilient individuals tend to employ adaptive coping strategies, effective emotional regulation, and positive cognitive appraisal when faced with evaluative situations, which in turn reduces the intensity of anxiety they experience (Li et al., 2020). Individuals with lower levels of resilience are at greater risk of psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, hopelessness, behavioral disorders, aggression, smoking, uncontrolled sexual behaviors, and academic difficulties (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Empirical evidence also supports the protective role of resilience in students' psychological well-being. Abulfaraj et al. (2024) demonstrated that resilience-enhancement programs among university students significantly reduced anxiety, stress, and mental health problems while improving psychological well-being. Similarly, Ramos-Galarza et al. (2024) reported that students who possess higher levels of both social intelligence and resilience are more likely to experience a greater sense of control in public speaking situations and to demonstrate more effective performance.

A review of previous studies indicates that most research on public speaking anxiety has primarily focused on the effectiveness of psychological interventions such as public speaking skills training, cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, and virtual reality exposure (Ebrahimi et al., 2019; McWilliam et al., 2023; Lestiono & Lee, 2024). On the other hand, studies on social intelligence have largely examined its relationship with general anxiety, social anxiety, mental health, and interpersonal relationship quality, with relatively limited attention given to its association with public speaking anxiety (Ramos-Galarza et al., 2024). Similarly, research on resilience has mainly concentrated on its role in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression or enhancing students' mental health and well-being (Abulfaraj et al., 2024). Recent systematic reviews have also emphasized the importance of identifying individual and psychological factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety beyond therapeutic interventions (McWilliam et al., 2023; Lestiono & Lee, 2024). Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the

prediction of public speaking anxiety based on social intelligence and resilience among university students.

2. Methods

The methodology of the study, including the research design and sampling, instruments, and data collection procedure, is described below.

2.1. Research design, population, and sampling

The present study employed a descriptive correlational design. The statistical population consisted of students of Islamic Azad University, Bandar Anzali Branch, during the 2024–2025 academic year. Considering that the minimum recommended sample size for correlational studies is 50 participants (Delavar, 2025), a total of 150 students were selected using a convenience sampling method, and the questionnaires were administered to them.

2.2. Instruments

The following instruments were used to assess the study variables and collect the required data.

Public Speaking Anxiety Scale (PSAS)

The Public Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire was developed by Bartholomay and Houlihan (2016) and consists of 17 items designed to assess anxiety experienced during public speaking. The questionnaire measures three main components: the cognitive component (items 1–8), the behavioral component (items 9–12), and the physiological component (items 13–17). Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The total score ranges from 17 to 85, with higher scores indicating greater levels of public speaking anxiety. In the original study by Bartholomay and Houlihan (2016), the reliability of the questionnaire, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was reported as 0.83 and 0.81 for the two subscales and 0.84 for the total scale. In Iran, Khoshnama et al. (2021) confirmed the content and construct validity of the instrument and reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.72 and 0.79 for the two subscales and 0.86 for the total scale.

Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)

Social intelligence was measured using the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), developed by Silvera and Martinussen (2001). The scale consists of 21 items and includes three components: social information processing (items 1–7), social awareness (items 8–14), and social skills (items 15–21). Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "always" to "never," scored from 5 to 1, respectively. In the original study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported as 0.73 for social information processing, 0.66 for social awareness, 0.64 for social skills, and 0.75 for the total scale (Silvera & Martinussen, 2001). Rezaie (2011) examined the factor structure and reliability of the Persian version of the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale among university students. The

results indicated that Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was 0.75, and for the subscales of social information processing, social skills, and social awareness the values were 0.73, 0.66, and 0.64, respectively. Furthermore, the test–retest reliability coefficient for the total scale was 0.81, while the coefficients for social information processing, social skills, and social awareness were 0.76, 0.86, and 0.66, respectively.

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

Resilience was assessed using the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). This instrument consists of 25 items and measures five dimensions: personal competence, trust in one's instincts and tolerance of negative affect, positive acceptance of change and secure relationships, control, and spiritual influences. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "not true at all" (0) to "true nearly all the time" (4). The total score ranges from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating higher levels of resilience. To evaluate validity, the developers assessed construct validity using confirmatory factor analysis, reporting factor loadings ranging from 0.44 to 0.93. The reliability of the scale was reported as 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha, and the test–retest reliability over a one-month interval was 0.87 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). In Iran, Keyhani et al. (2015) examined the psychometric properties of the scale and reported that concurrent validity coefficients indicated a significant negative correlation between resilience and aggression, and significant positive correlations with self-efficacy and life satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha and the Spearman–Brown split-half reliability coefficients were reported as 0.669 and 0.665, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis also indicated that the indices of the single-factor structure demonstrated an acceptable model fit.

2.3. Procedure

After obtaining the necessary permissions, the researchers visited the Islamic Azad University, Bandar Anzali Branch. The Public Speaking Anxiety, Social Intelligence, and Resilience questionnaires were distributed online through students' academic groups. Participants completed the questionnaires electronically and voluntarily. After the data were collected, the responses were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Pearson correlation analysis and simultaneous multiple regression were used to examine the relationships among the study variables. In addition, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation, and they were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes.

3. Results

In the present study, 150 male and female students participated, with a mean age of 24.43 years and a standard deviation of 4.28. Of these, 84 participants were female (56%) and 66 were male (44%). In terms of academic level, 14 participants were associate degree students (9.3%), 81 were undergraduate students (54%), 47 were master's students (31.3%), and 8 were doctoral students (5.3%).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the study variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Social Intelligence	38.71	14.90
Resilience	13.61	52.80
Public Speaking Anxiety	38.51	15.93

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the study variables

Table 2

Correlation matrix of the study variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Social Intelligence	1		
2. Resilience	0.18**	1	
3. Public Speaking Anxiety	-0.67**	-0.29**	1

**P<0.01

Table 2 showed that there was a negative relationship between social intelligence and public speaking anxiety. Also, there was a negative relationship between resilience and public speaking anxiety. There was a positive relationship between social intelligence and resilience. The skewness and kurtosis values of all components were within the range of 2; therefore, the assumption of univariate normality of the data was satisfied. In addition, the assumptions of regression analysis, including the linearity assumption among the research data, were met (p>0.05), and the variance inflation factor (VIF) was also less than 10.

Table 3

Results of Multiple Regression Coefficients and the Significance of Predicting Speech Anxiety Based on Social Intelligence and Resilience

Criterion variable	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	sig	R	R2	Adjusted R2	Durbin-watson
Public Speaking anxiety	**Regression**	4200.50	2	1050.12	2.32	0.001	0.61	0.37	0.35	1.98
	Residual	7120.30	147	11.49						
	Total	11320.80	149							

As shown in Table 3, the regression model of the present study is statistically significant (F= 2.32, P < 0.01). The overall correlation coefficient of the model is 0.61, and the coefficient of determination is 0.37, which was reported as 0.35 after adjustment. Therefore, approximately 35 percent of the variance in speech anxiety is explained by the variables of social intelligence and resilience. Furthermore, the Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.98, indicating that there is no significant autocorrelation in the residuals

Table 4

Results of Predicting Speech Anxiety Based on Social Intelligence and Resilience among Students

Predictor variable	Standardized Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	SE	Beta	Beta		
Constant	7.29	71.238	4.33	0.001	-
Social intelligence	0.09	-0.48	-3.33	0.001	-0.36
Resilience	0.10	-0.41	-3.10	0.001	-0.29

The results of Table 4 show that social intelligence and resilience are associated with a reduction in speech anxiety. Therefore, it can be stated that about 35 percent of the variance in speech anxiety is explained by the variables of emotional intelligence and resilience.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study indicated a significant negative relationship between social intelligence, resilience, and speech anxiety among students; in other words, as levels of social intelligence and resilience increase, the level of speech anxiety in students decreases. This finding can be explained by the nature of public speaking situations and the cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal mechanisms effective in these contexts. Public speaking is considered one of the social evaluative situations in which an individual is exposed to the judgment and evaluation of others, which can facilitate the emergence of fear of negative evaluation and, consequently, anxiety. In such circumstances, individuals with higher social intelligence possess a greater ability to perceive social cues, interpret the reactions and behaviors of others, and regulate their own behavior in social interactions. These individuals can process the verbal and non-verbal feedback of the audience more realistically and avoid exaggerated or negative interpretations regarding others' judgments. Consequently, their sense of social threat is reduced, allowing them to appear in speaking situations with greater confidence and a sense of control (Brown et al., 2019; Katou et al., 2021; Sanwal, 2024).

The findings of this study regarding the relationship between social intelligence and speech anxiety are consistent with the results of several previous studies. For instance, Esmailzadeh Ashini et al. (2022) demonstrated a significant relationship between social intelligence and speech anxiety in students, noting that individuals with higher social skills experience less anxiety in speaking situations. Similarly, Wang and Zhang (2025) reported that components related to emotional and social intelligence play a crucial role in reducing social anxiety and improving individual performance in communicative situations. Ramos-Galarza et al. (2024) also stated that individuals with higher social and interpersonal abilities experience a greater sense of control and lower levels of anxiety in social evaluative situations, such as presentations or public speaking. However, some studies have reported divergent results. For example, McWilliam et al. (2023) and Lestiono and Lee (2024), in their reviews of existing research, pointed out that in addition to individual traits like social skills, speech anxiety also depends on situational factors

such as previous speaking experience, presentation preparedness, and presentation skills training. Therefore, under certain conditions, even individuals with adequate social abilities may still experience significant anxiety in speaking situations if they lack sufficient experience or preparation.

On the other hand, the negative relationship between resilience and speech anxiety can be explained by the role of resilience in adapting to stressful situations and emotion regulation. Resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope effectively with psychological pressures, restore psychological equilibrium, and maintain optimal functioning under difficult conditions. Students with higher resilience utilize more adaptive coping strategies when facing evaluative situations, such as public speaking, and possess a greater ability to manage negative emotions such as fear, worry, and tension. These individuals typically perceive difficult situations not as threats to their self-concept or self-esteem, but rather as manageable challenges; this positive cognitive appraisal leads to a reduction in the intensity of anxiety reactions (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Li et al., 2020). In fact, resilience can reduce the intensity of anxiety caused by public speaking through the enhancement of emotion regulation, the reduction of rumination, and an increased sense of control over the situation.

The findings of this section of the study are also consistent with several previous studies. For instance, Abulfaraj et al. (2024) showed that resilience enhancement programs in students lead to a significant reduction in anxiety, stress, and mental health problems. Additionally, Ramos-Galarza et al. (2024) reported that students with higher levels of resilience experience less psychological pressure in social and communicative situations and demonstrate better performance. Conversely, some studies have indicated that the relationship between resilience and anxiety may be influenced by mediating variables such as social support, self-efficacy, and coping skills; specifically, if these psychological resources are low, the protective effect of resilience may diminish (Li et al., 2020). This may account for the discrepancies observed in the results of some studies.

5. Conclusion

In general, the results of the present study demonstrate that social intelligence and resilience, as two vital psychological resources, can play a protective role against speech anxiety. Students who possess a greater ability to perceive social situations, establish effective communication with others, and adapt to stressful conditions are likely to feel more control and confidence in speaking situations, thereby experiencing lower levels of anxiety. Therefore, focusing on strengthening social skills and enhancing resilience within university educational programs and psychological interventions can assist in reducing speech anxiety and improving the academic and communicative performance of students.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest

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