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PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG JORDANIAN EFL LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

[1]Mohd Hilmi Hamzah & [2]Alaa Abdullah Alsaleem
School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy,
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia

[1]Corresponding author: hilmihamzah@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The current study seeks to determine the association between attitude and public speaking anxiety in the context of learning English by using a correlational research approach. A non-probability sampling approach was utilised to recruit the participants. Among four government universities in Malaysia, 191 Jordanian postgraduate students (PhD candidates) were chosen. The following two surveys were used to gather the data: (a) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS); and (b) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). A correlational analysis was performed using Smart PLS 3.0 to test the hypotheses. The results show that attitude is substantially associated with English public speaking anxiety. It appears that among PhD students in Jordan, there is a strong negative association between attitude and public speaking anxiety in English. The findings have potential implications on language motivation and classroom instruction in foreign language settings.

Keywords: English language learning, attitude, anxiety, public speaking, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning is usually associated with attitude, anxiety and motivation. These affective factors have been recognised as critical aspects that influence students' performance in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research on EFL has proven that there are numerous significant variables that can affect how well people learn foreign languages. For instance, according to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), anxiety can seriously hinder one's ability to learn a foreign language. Anxiety is characterised as sentiments, self-beliefs, self-perceptions, and behaviours associated with language learning, as defined by Horwitz et al. (1986). Anxiety can

also include nervousness related to other language abilities, like reading, writing, listening, and speaking (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

According to several sources (Alghorbany & Hamzah, 2020; Qurnia & Marlina, 2020), one of the most important elements that contribute to language anxiety is attitude. As asserted by Richards and Schmidt (2002), EFL learners may have different attitudes towards other languages besides their mother tongue. The attitudes towards a language, either positive or negative, might be related to the perceived difficulty, importance, elegance, and status of a language. Besides, attitudes for a language may also indicate learners' feelings about specific community members who use the language. Critically for the current study, the attitude of Jordanian learners towards the English language can potentially affect their EFL learning process in Jordan and also abroad including Malaysia, the location of the current research project.

In the context of Arab EFL learners, there are several issues when they attempt to speak in English. In most Arab nations, the opportunities to learn English through authentic communication in this language are extremely rare (Rabab'ah, 2003). Alrabai (2014), Alrashidi and Phan (2015), Al-Seghayer (2014), Mahboob and Elyas (2014), and other earlier studies in the context of Arab EFL learners found that most Arab learners were less motivated to gain the essential language skills needed to speak effectively in the classroom. One needs to practise public speaking and have a strong academic record to be a good language learner (Amiri & Puteh, 2018). However, issues concerning low language proficiency, unwillingness to speak, and speaking anxiety have caused learners' incapability in practising the language orally. These issues lead to learners' embarrassment because they are unable to convey simple messages to their peers and instructors (Taly & Paramasivam, 2020). As a result, they are unable to deliver an effective oral presentation as they face continuous issues in language fluency and self-confidence (Alsaleem & Hamzah, 2022; Cameron, 2001; Coates, 2007; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Taly & Paramasivam, 2020).

In order to master various skills in the academia, learners should be able to master the art of oral presentations (Jordan, 1997). Particularly in universities, public speaking, a sort of oral presentation, has become a crucial component of language learning. Being able to speak in the public will enable learners to be more prepared in the business or corporate world (Utami, 2019). Public speaking involves a systematic act of connection with a particular group of community that informs, inspires, encourages, educates, or entertains those who listen.

In most universities, public speaking is one the most common platforms that can showcase students' ability to connect with the audience. It is regarded as a co-curricular activity in many educational institutions. An academic presentation is an important event in the course of study of a postgraduate student. Oral presentations during important events, such as a proposal defence, a viva voce, and a conference, rely heavily on the students' public speaking skills (Alsaleem & Hamzah, 2022). During academic presentations, EFL learners, particularly PhD students, often encounter problems, especially in verbal communication. For example, Morita (2000) claims that language learners may encounter psychological problems during academic presentations, such as nervous breakdown and insecure feelings.

Problem Statement

Speaking in English is challenging for some Jordanian postgraduate students who study abroad because they are not interested in speaking the language. As they struggle to comprehend and pronounce some English words, they become more anxious and apprehensive. They feel humiliated because they have to struggle with utilising English in everyday discussions as EFL

learners (Hadjah & Hamzah, 2022). Jordanian students also find it difficult to talk in English because of their foreign accents. According to Aprialita (2018), their anxiousness and lack of confidence in their ability to speak English may be the causes for this circumstance. Because English and Arabic have different consonant inventories, Jordanian postgraduate students who are learning English as a foreign language have frequently experienced language difficulties. This is due to the norms in which Arabic is heavily used in early education in primary, secondary, and undergraduate programmes in the Middle East (Al-Khasawneh & Al-Omari, 2015). As a result, pursuing postgraduate studies in countries where English is widely used, such as Australia, New Zealand, or Malaysia, will potentially cause some challenges in language use, particularly public speaking. Almatarneh et al. (2018) claim that Arab EFL learners usually struggle to adapt in an academic life that is not similar to their home countries.

Learning English becomes obligatory for Jordanians whenever they make the decision to pursue higher education elsewhere, in keeping with the requirement to communicate in English, which is the global medium of communication (Ahmad et al., 2017). As expected, this scenario prompts language difficulties for most Jordanian postgraduate students (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). This situation will hinder the process of learning English, leading to language anxiety (Abrar et al., 2018). According to Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018), speaking in English is one of the most difficult skills for most Arab EFL students. The anxiety of communicating in English for Jordanian can also be due to their inability to articulate certain sounds in English, such as /ʧ/ and /p/ (Hadjah & Hamzah, 2022; Hamzah & El-Weshahi, 2018; Hamzah et al., 2020a; Hamzah et al., 2020b). Naturally, there is a negative language transfer between Arabic and English, making their speech somehow unintelligible (Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2014; Aprialita, 2018).

An effective speaker delivers a speech smoothly. In order to attain good speaking skills, a learner needs confidence and motivation. They should plan their oral presentations carefully and be well-versed about the topic. They would appear disorganised if they are well-prepared. EFL Arab learners, particularly Jordanian postgraduate students, face some difficulties in public speaking and interacting with others (Asmar, 2009; Zrekat et al., 2016). They have difficulties in mastering the four English skills, especially oral communication skills (Zrekat et al., 2016). These skills are critical in academic events that require oral presentations such as proposal defense, viva voce, and conference presentations (Alghail & Mahfoodh, 2019). Although some Jordanian learners could speak in English, they are unable to fully express themselves publicly according to their intention. This situation can be connected to students' speaking anxiety (Nurlaili, 2016). Since most Jordanian learners are unable to deliver public speaking in English, they will develop anxiety and shyness. As a result, their motivation will decrease, leading to a higher level of anxiety (Asmar, 2009; Huwari & Aziz, 2011).

Studies on the fear of public speaking have already been conducted in Arab nations like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Iraq. However, there is a lack of similar studies in the Jordanian context (Batiha et al., 2016). There have been some studies conducted at the undergraduate level, but the findings are extremely limited (Asassfeh et al., 2011; Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2014). This warrants further investigations on public speaking anxiety in the English medium among Jordanian PhD students, particularly in Malaysian universities that are highly sought after among Arab students. Because of this, the current study aims to fill the knowledge gap in the field of English as a foreign language, especially in the area of English public speaking anxiety.

It is also crucial to explore the possible factors that lead to speaking anxiety. The most important factor that has been found to cause a higher level of speaking anxiety is negative attitudes (Abrar

et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there is a lack of research in psychological and sociological factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety (Taly & Paramasivam, 2020). Huwari (2014) conducted a study to address public speaking issues among local students in Jordan. Thus, an investigation on Jordanian students' attitudes when studying abroad seems necessary, given the rising number of Arab students in countries like Malaysia. In this context, Huwari and Al-Shboul (2015) examined Jordanian PhD students' attitudes at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) towards writing apprehension. They claimed that most studies were conducted from the perspective of undergraduate students, whereas their work focused on postgraduate students who faced some issues in writing skills.

Besides, Huwari and Al-Shboul (2015) claimed that there are limited studies that examine language skills such as writing and speaking, which might potentially cause language anxiety for EFL or English as a second language (ESL) Arab learners. There is also a lack of scientific studies on Jordanian postgraduate students who continue their education abroad. The current study's goal is to learn how Jordanian PhD students studying in Malaysia view their anxiety of speaking in front of an audience., in light of the findings of Huwari and Al-Shboul (2015).

Research Question

The research question of the current study is as follows:

How much does attitude influence Jordanian EFL students' concern about public speaking?

Hypothesis

The present study seeks to examine the following hypothesis:

With Jordanian EFL students, anxiety over public speaking shows a negative correlation with attitude.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a considerable number of studies that investigate public speaking anxiety and its associated variables (e.g., Amiri & Puteh, 2018; Elmenfi & Gaibani, 2016; Hayaramae, 2016; Netta et al., 2020; Phinyadechasin, 2015; Pontillas, 2020; Qurnia & Marlina, 2020; Raja, 2017; Viwattanabunchong, 2017). Phinyadechasin (2015) claimed that among the factors that contribute to language anxiety in students are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and negative feedback. Nevertheless, many language learners prefer to be trained in English in order to boost their confidence when speaking in public.

Hayaramae (2016) examined public speaking anxiety among students and scrutinised some practical ways to handle the anxiety. The findings revealed that physical and psychological factors were both vital and distinct. When the students did not properly plan their speeches, they became frightened and anxious. Additionally, pupils had some difficulties in managing their anxiety during a public speech. However, by choosing interesting subjects, the students might practically conquer their anxiety. At Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Elmenfi and Gaibani (2016) conducted a study on how age affects English language learners' concern about public speaking. The results showed that age variations significantly worsen English language learners' anxiety about public speaking.

Raja (2017) investigated the degrees and root causes of public speaking anxiety among fifty Pakistani undergraduate students. The results showed that most students feared public speaking. However, it was shown that practices and rehearsals could overcome public speaking anxieties. Meanwhile, Viwattanabunchong (2017) scrutinised the anxiety level among EFL students at four phases (performance, pre-performance, preparation, and pre-preparation) and identified the causes that lead to speaking anxiety in the public setting at each phase. The results showed that most students exhibited a noticeable degree of fear about public speaking. The performance stage was the time when anxiety was at its peak, whereas pre-preparation, preparation, and pre-performance were the stages when anxiety was at its moderate peak. Besides, it was discovered that there were three critical variables that influenced public speaking anxiety in the four phases, which were English oral proficiency, personality, and subject familiarity.

Traditionally, oral communication apprehension (OCA) refers to the level of anxiety that is triggered from real communication between individuals (McCroskey, 1977). OCA is considered as the main factor that inhibits the development of effective oral communication skills and affects one's willingness to communicate. In this connection, Amiri and Puteh (2018) investigated OCA and PhD students' experiences when delivering oral presentations in academic settings. The results revealed that PhD students experienced OCA when interacting with the review panel, despite having a considerable number of experiences as educators in the classroom. Some of the obstacles that caused OCA among PhD students are linguistic competence, destructive comments from the panelists, and communication competence during oral presentations. It appears that PhD students experience anxieties in public speaking, with the circumstances listed above further increasing the level of their OCA.

In a different study, Qurnia and Marlina (2020) looked at the degree of speech anxiety experienced by EFL students during a public speaking lesson at the Universitas Negeri Padang in Indonesia. The results revealed that, despite their readiness to speak in front of an audience, the students lacked confidence in their communication, which may have been a result of their moderate degree of speaking anxiety. Meanwhile, Pontillas (2020) attempted to assist the Camarines Sur Polytechnic College students in their oral communication via method called 'Popsispeak' so that they might control their anxiety and enhance their public speaking skills. The approach proved effective in assisting students in honing their oral communication abilities and reducing their public speaking anxiety.

Similarly, Netta et al. (2020) investigated students' anxiety-coping strategies in an English public speaking class using a qualitative method. The study involved two juniors from Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh.. The results revealed that the students employed a variety of strategies to get over their speech anxieties using sufficient preparation and practice, as well as speaking with hand and body motions. According to the study, teachers should encourage EFL students to utilise comparable strategies to conquer their public speaking anxiety.

Many researchers highlighted the link between attitude and language anxiety (Chang 2018; Hussain, 2018; Hussain et al., 2011; Zefran, 2015). Hussain (2018) researched public high school students who were worried about learning a foreign language, focusing on six provinces of Punjab, Pakistan. The results revealed a significant difference in language anxiety between male and female students. The findings also revealed a substantial inverse relationship between students' perspectives on learning a foreign language and their degree of language anxiety, with female participants demonstrating less anxiety than their male counterpart. Anxiety and the feelings about the English language have a similar inverse relationship, as indicated by Hussain et al. (2011).

They observed that students in rural areas were more anxious and had a poorer attitude towards the English language. In contrast, Büyükkarcı (2016) revealed no significant correlation between anxiety and students' attitudes. More accurately, having higher attitudes toward English did not reduce the levels of stress among students.

Imron and Hantari (2019) examined what students thought of public speaking classes and the possible reasons why they could feel anxious when giving an impromptu speech. Their qualitative study was based on a detailed semi-structured interview with 23 students from the Tidar Islamic Boarding School in Magelang, Central Java. In order to gauge their concern towards oral presentations, the students were also given the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire. The findings showed that the students' perceptions towards the public speaking class are favourable. In addition to their limited vocabulary and lack of confidence, their unfamiliarity with English, especially in public, is another possible source of nervousness.

Tekşan et al. (2019) looked at how middle school students' attitudes, speech anxiety, and speaking skills were related to one another. They also identified the causes of the students' speaking anxiety, the circumstances where it had been examined, and the teachers' advice. The mixed-methods approach was used in the analysis as it allowed a more in-depth perspective of the issue. The data collection instruments included different forms of personal information, speech anxiety and skill attitudes scores, and interview formats. The findings showed that the students' attitudes and their speaking anxiety had a significant inverse relationship. The teachers also concurred that the students' lack of confidence and fear of mockery were the main contributors to their speaking anxiety while speaking in front of a group.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative methodology was adopted in the current investigation. A correlational design also was used in line with the investigation's objective.

Sampling

The population involved in the current study was Jordanian EFL learners (PhD students) totalling up to 650 individuals studying at four universities in Malaysia. The universities included Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table was used to establish the sample size for this study. The ideal number of 242 was the recommended sample size for a population of 650 people. As a result, 242 respondents were chosen for the study. Jordanian PhD students completed and returned 212 of the 300 questions online. However, 21 of the 212 copies were rejected since many of them were incomplete as a result of certain participants' unwillingness to cooperate. Overall, the survey produced 191 valid copies.

Instruments

The current study used a survey containing several scales adapted from Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) version 2004 (Gardner et al., 1985) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986). Gardner et al. (1985) created the AMTB test which consists of five structures: instrumentality, integrativeness, motivation, language anxiety, and attitudes

towards the learning setting. Gardner's (2004) original six-point Likert scale structure, which ranged from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' was adapted. In this study, the five-point Likert scale format was used. Despite having 104 items in the original questionnaire, this study only used eight of them (Table 3.1). In order to fit the sample characteristics and the context of the current investigation, the researcher modified certain items from Gardner's (2004) AMTB.

This study's primary area of interest is students' attitudes towards the language, and the AMTB components that were modified for this purpose only featured one measurement (instead of 12 measurements). Therefore, the current study covered the following scale representing the Jordanian English learners' attitude towards a foreign language: Attitudes towards learning English.

The following Gardner et al.'s (1985) AMTB components were not included in this study: (1) English classroom anxiety; (2) English teacher assessment; (3) English curriculum assessment; (4) English use anxiety; (5) Parental encouragement; (6) Interest in foreign languages; (7) Motivational intensity; (8) Attitudes towards English-speaking people; (9) Degree of integrativeness; (10) Degree of instrumentality; and (11) Desire to learn the language. Therefore, the statistical procedure only included one scale.

A total of 18 out of 33 items were chosen for the FLCAS analysis that was first developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The questions were adapted to suit the sample characteristics and context of the current study. A five-point Likert scale was used, with the options ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' (1) to 'Strongly Agree' (5). The purpose of the questionnaire was to learn how anxious the students were when speaking English in front of others.

RESULTS

Data analysis was mostly conducted to fulfil the requirement for using the PLS-SEM. The PLS-SEM measurement model as well as the structural model were evaluated.

Measurement Model Assessment

The validity and reliability of the construct were assessed using the measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). The model had a high-level structure and was reflective. The model was evaluated using the repeated index approach (Becker et al., 2012). While validity was evaluated using convergence validity (AVE) and discriminant validity, indicator reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The CR value is 0.976 (Attitude) and 0.989 (English Public Speaking Anxiety), as indicated in Table 1. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, the Cronbach's alpha value is 0.972 for attitude and 0.988 for public speaking anxiety.

Table 1

The Constructs' Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude	0.972	0.972	0.976	0.836
English Public Speaking Anxiety	0.988	0.989	0.989	0.835

Table 2

Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Attitude	English Public Speaking Anxiety
Attitude	0.915	
English Public Speaking Anxiety	0.813	0.914

Figure 1

PLS Algorithm
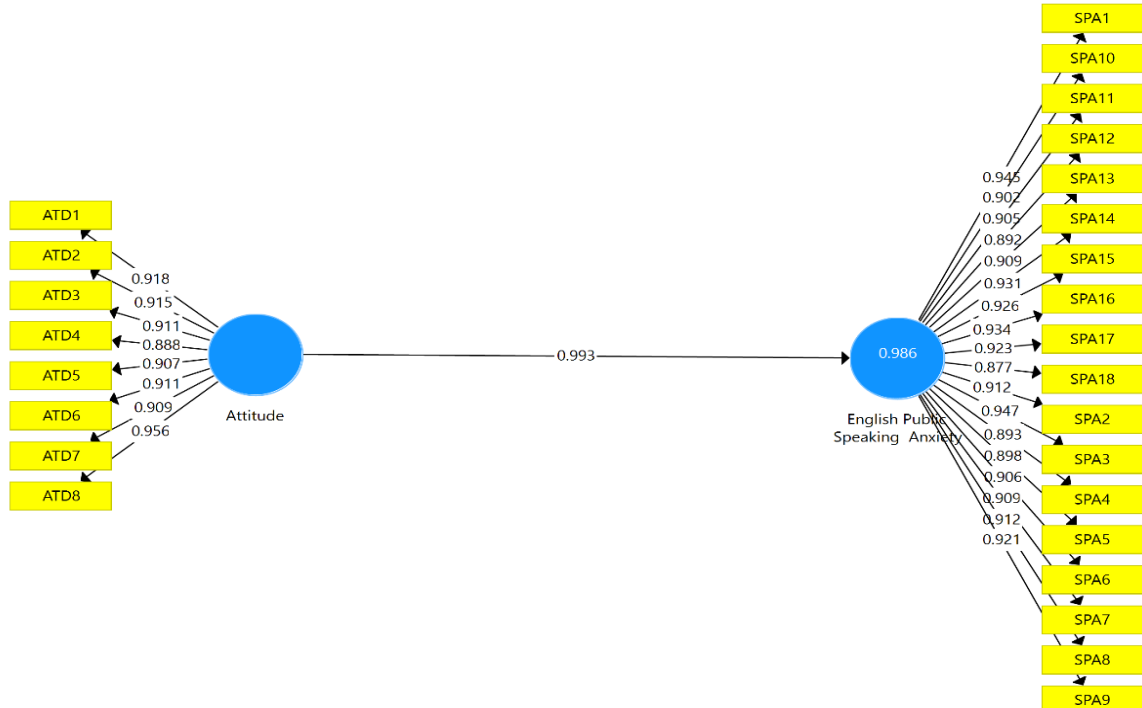
The AVE-evaluated convergent-validity results for attitude and English public speaking anxiety are shown in Table 1 with values of 0.836 and 0.835, respectively. Using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, the current model's discriminant validity was evaluated (Hair et al., 2010). It can be

observed that the correlation of all reflection structures (off-diagonal) is lower than the square root of AVE (diagonal) (see Table 2).

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was used to examine reliability and validity in the measurement model. The structural model examined the path coefficient (hypothesis test), the determination coefficient (R2 value), and the effect size (2). As shown in Figure 1, attitude accounts for 65.8% of the variance in endogenous variables (such as English Public Speaking Anxiety) according to the coefficient of determination (R2 value) for this study. The Smart-PLS was used to determine the route coefficient (hypothesis test). To determine if the hypothesis is significant or not, the p-value and *t*-test were analysed using a two-tailed test with a significance level of 1%. Table 3 and Figure 2 demonstrate that attitude had a considerable impact on English public speaking anxiety (β = -0.993, t = 15.22, p <0.01). Therefore, the hypothesis of the study was supported.

After the hypothesis was verified, the effect sizes of the exogenous factors were examined. As revealed in Table 4, English public speaking anxiety explained for the endogenous variable (SME performance). The fact that the impact size (f2) is 0.683 showed that the exogenous variable's effect size was significant.

Table 3

Results of Direct Hypothesis Testing

	Beta	Standard Deviation	*t* Statistics	*p* Value
Attitude -> English Public Speaking Anxiety	-0.993	0.001	15.22	0.000*

Table 4

Effect Size

Exogenous Construct	f2	Effect Size
English Public Speaking Anxiety	0.683	Large

Figure 2

PLS bootstrapping for direct hypothesis testing
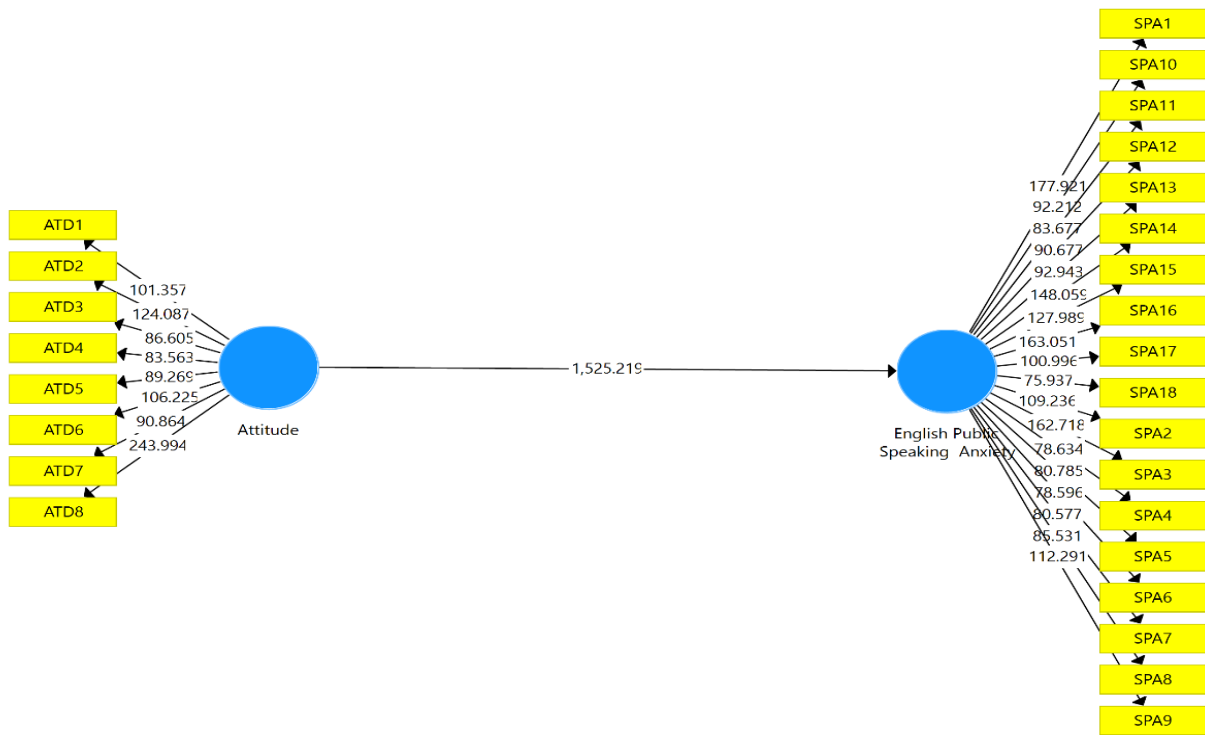
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the role attitude plays in Jordanian PhD students' anxiety related to public speaking in the English language. Attitude has been shown to significantly affect English public speaking anxiety, as revealed in empirical findings. The findings of this study also suggest that attitude significantly influences anxiety about public speaking in English. To be more specific, a substantial inverse association was found between one's attitude and their level of fear when it came to public speaking in English, with a t-value of 15.22 and a β value of –0.993. Otherwise put, this finding demonstrates that Jordanian PhD students' attitudes have a negative impact on their English public speaking anxiety. These results affirmed the results of past researchers (e.g., Abu-ghararah, 2014; Gardner et al., 1985; Krashen, 1982; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Phillips, 1992) who claim that learners with positive attitudes have lower levels of anxiety, while students with negative attitudes are more anxious. By examining the connection between attitude and English public speaking anxiety, the study's objective has already been entirely met.

The present study's findings concur with those of earlier researchers (Abrar et al., 2018; Aliakbari & Gheitasi, 2016; Hussain, 2018; Hussain et al., 2011; Krashen, 1982; Soleimenova, 2013). On the contrary, this study's outcomes contradict with the findings of Büyükkarcı (2016), which reveal no significant correlation between anxiety and students' attitudes. More accurately, having higher attitudes toward English does not reduce the levels of stress among students.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the current study is to examine the connection between attitude and anxiety related to public speaking in English. Results show that attitude is strongly and negatively connected with anxiety about speaking in public in English. In essence, the results indicate that Jordanian PhD students' attitude negatively affect their anxiety about public speaking in English. This finding can be explained based on the negative experiences among EFL learners in Jordan in the past and the possibility that these experiences increase their anxiety when speaking in English.

The methodological approach taken in this study is purely quantitative. It is recommended that future research be conducted using a qualitative or mixed-methods approach to understand the topic being studied from all angles. Future studies ought to focus on conducting interviews to look into the connections between the variables included in the current study. Also, only Jordanian PhD students who studied overseas were included in this study. It is advised that future research be carried out among Jordanian PhD students who are studying there as well as undergraduate students who are studying in Jordan and elsewhere.

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