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### **EFL Students' Attitudes Toward Online Learning in Speaking Classes: A Case Study of Semester VI Students at The Faculty of Languages and Arts**

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#### **ABSTRAK**

This study investigates EFL students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes among Semester sixth students at the Faculty of Languages and Arts. The research focuses on students' cognitive beliefs, affective feelings, and behavioral responses toward the implementation of online learning platforms in speaking activities. The study also explores the factors influencing students' attitudes and examines how these attitudes relate to their speaking participation and confidence. This research employed a qualitative case study design. The participants were sixth-semester students from the English and Literature Department at the Faculty of Languages and Arts. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The collected data were analyzed descriptively by identifying students' perceptions, emotional experiences, and participation in online speaking classes. The findings revealed that most students showed positive attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes. Students believed that online learning provided flexibility, easier access to learning materials, and a more comfortable environment for practicing speaking skills. Many students also reported feeling less nervous and more confident when speaking through online platforms because they did not face direct classroom pressure. However, several challenges were still found, such as unstable internet connections, limited interaction, technical problems, and difficulties in maintaining active participation during online learning. Despite these obstacles, online learning was considered helpful in supporting students' speaking confidence and engagement in speaking activities. The study concludes that students' attitudes play an important role in determining the effectiveness of online learning in speaking classes. Positive attitudes can encourage greater participation and improve students' confidence in speaking English.

Keywords: Attitudes, Online Learning, Speaking confidence

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed educational practices, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. In recent years, online learning has become one of the most widely implemented learning systems because it allows teaching and learning activities to be conducted flexibly through digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and other online applications. The integration of technology into language learning has changed the way students interact, communicate, and

participate in speaking activities. In speaking classes, students are no longer required to interact directly in physical classrooms, but instead engage in virtual communication environments that involve different emotional, psychological, and behavioral experiences. This transformation has made online learning an important issue in EFL education, especially in relation to students' speaking performance and participation.

Speaking skill is considered one of the most essential yet difficult skills in EFL learning because it requires students to produce language spontaneously while simultaneously managing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. In addition to linguistic competence, speaking performance is also strongly influenced by psychological factors such as anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Students often experience nervousness, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of confidence when speaking English, particularly in classroom situations where they are directly observed by teachers and peers. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985), emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence play a crucial role in language acquisition because they determine whether language input can be effectively processed by learners. Learners with low anxiety and high confidence tend to participate more actively in communication activities, while learners with high anxiety often avoid speaking and experience difficulties expressing ideas fluently.

In online learning contexts, students' attitudes toward learning become increasingly important because learning activities are conducted through digital interaction without direct face-to-face communication. Students' attitudes influence how they perceive online learning environments, respond to speaking activities, and participate during classroom interaction. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) explain that attitudes consist of three interconnected components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. The cognitive component relates to students' beliefs and perceptions toward learning, the affective component refers to emotional responses such as anxiety or confidence, while the behavioral component reflects students' actions and participation during learning activities. Therefore, students' attitudes toward online speaking classes cannot be understood merely from one perspective, but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon involving beliefs, emotions, and behavioral responses simultaneously.

Several previous studies have investigated online speaking learning, speaking anxiety, confidence, and students' perceptions toward technology-assisted language learning. Abrar et al. (2024) found that EFL students experienced various challenges in online speaking classes, including technological problems, lack of confidence, limited interaction, anxiety, and difficulties in expressing ideas during speaking activities. Similarly, Elisathusilawani (2023) revealed that students frequently faced speaking difficulties due to fear of making mistakes, pronunciation problems, limited vocabulary, and low self-confidence, which negatively affected their speaking performance. Daflizar (2024) also reported that speaking anxiety significantly influenced students' speaking ability and willingness to communicate in English because emotionally anxious learners tended to avoid speaking activities.

On the other hand, several studies demonstrated that technology-assisted learning environments could positively influence students' speaking confidence. Suhardi et al. (2024) found that digital learning platforms created a more relaxed learning atmosphere that helped students feel more comfortable and confident during speaking activities. Likewise, Alsalem (2024) explained that online learning tools and digital communication environments reduced students' anxiety and provided more flexible opportunities for speaking practice. These findings indicate that online learning environments may simultaneously create both positive and negative impacts on students' speaking experiences depending on emotional conditions, learning environments, and technological factors.

Although numerous studies have discussed speaking anxiety, technology-assisted learning, and speaking performance in EFL contexts, previous studies mainly focused on students' speaking challenges, technological effectiveness, or perceptions toward digital tools separately. Limited attention has been given specifically to students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes from cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives simultaneously. In addition, previous studies rarely explored why students feel more confident speaking English during online learning and how emotional comfort, reduced social pressure, and virtual learning environments influence students' speaking behavior in EFL contexts. Most studies also focused on general online learning experiences rather than specifically examining students' attitudes in online speaking classes within Indonesian higher education settings. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to understand how students perceive online speaking learning environments and how these environments influence their confidence and participation during speaking activities.

This study attempts to fill the gap by investigating students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes and exploring the reasons why students feel more confident speaking English during online learning activities among sixth-semester students at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. This research applies Eagly and Chaiken's Tripartite Attitude Model to analyze students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes, while Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is used to examine emotional factors influencing students' speaking confidence during online learning. Unlike previous studies that primarily discussed speaking anxiety or technology use separately, this research integrates students' attitudes, emotional factors, and speaking confidence within one comprehensive discussion in online EFL speaking environments.

This study lies in its multidimensional analysis of students' attitudes toward online speaking classes in Indonesian EFL higher education contexts. This study not only examines students' emotional responses toward online learning, but also explores how cognitive beliefs, affective conditions, and behavioral participation interact in shaping students' confidence during online speaking activities. Furthermore, this study provides deeper discussion regarding how online learning environments reduce social pressure, influence emotional comfort, and affect students' willingness to communicate in English. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of EFL speaking and online learning research, particularly regarding attitudes and affective factors in language learning. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide useful insights for lecturers, teachers, and educational institutions in designing more supportive, interactive, and psychologically comfortable online speaking learning environments.

This study employed a qualitative case study design involving sixth-semester students at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. The data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore students' attitudes and speaking experiences during online learning activities. Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this study is to analyze students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes and to investigate the reasons why students feel more confident speaking English during online learning activities.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to investigate EFL students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes among sixth-semester students at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore and understand students' attitudes, experiences, and perspectives in depth within a real-life educational context, rather than to measure or quantify variables. This approach is appropriate for examining complex psychological constructs such as attitude, which cannot be fully captured through

numerical data alone. Within the qualitative framework, a case study design was applied following Creswell and Poth (2018), who define a case study as a qualitative approach that involves exploring a bounded system through detailed and in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information. Similarly, Yin (2018) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. The bounded system in this study refers specifically to sixth-semester students of the English and Literature Department at the Faculty of Languages and Arts who had direct experience with online learning in speaking classes, making them the most relevant and informative participants for the focus of this investigation.

The population of this study consisted of sixth-semester students from the English and Literature Department at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. Purposive sampling was employed as the sampling technique, in which participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research focus namely, students who had experienced online learning in speaking classes and were therefore able to provide meaningful and informed responses about their attitudes and experiences. A total of 25 students participated in the study. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative case study research because it allows the researcher to select information-rich participants who can speak directly to the phenomenon under investigation, rather than selecting participants randomly without regard for their relevance to the research questions. This sampling approach is appropriate given the study's focus on depth of understanding rather than statistical representativeness.

Data were collected through two main instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire served as the primary instrument and consisted of closed-ended items using a four-point Likert scale with response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire items were organized based on the three components of attitude proposed by Eagly and Chaiken (1993) cognitive, affective, and behavioral and were designed to capture students' beliefs about online learning effectiveness, their emotional responses during online speaking activities, and their participation patterns in virtual speaking classes. The questionnaire was distributed to all 25 participants and collected responses efficiently, allowing the researcher to identify general patterns and tendencies in students' attitudes across the sample. The semi-structured interview guide served as the supporting instrument and consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to elicit deeper and more detailed information about students' attitudes, feelings, and experiences in online speaking classes. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow the researcher to follow a set of predetermined questions while maintaining the flexibility to explore responses in greater depth, which is particularly valuable when investigating subjective experiences such as confidence, anxiety, and motivation in language learning. Interviews were conducted with selected participants and recorded for accuracy, then transcribed for analysis. The use of both instruments enabled triangulation of data sources, which strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by allowing the researcher to cross-check and verify responses across different data collection methods.

Data collection was conducted during the academic semester at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms to ensure accessibility and efficiency, while interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through online communication platforms depending on participant availability. The interview sessions were conducted in a relaxed and informal manner to encourage participants to respond openly and honestly, minimizing the risk of socially desirable responses. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen to thirty minutes, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of

their responses prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive analysis, in which the researcher calculated the percentage of responses for each item to identify the general tendency of students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, in which the researcher organized and categorized responses according to the three attitude components cognitive, affective, and behavioral and identified recurring patterns and themes across participants' responses.

The analysis followed an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed in advance. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher employed data triangulation by comparing and cross-referencing responses from both the questionnaire and the interview, which allowed for a more complete and nuanced understanding of students' attitudes. Member checking was also applied informally during the interview process, as the researcher paraphrased and confirmed participants' responses to ensure accurate understanding. The combination of descriptive quantitative analysis from the questionnaire and thematic qualitative analysis from the interviews provided a comprehensive and complementary picture of students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes. The scope of this study is limited to sixth-semester students at a single faculty within one university, and the findings are therefore most directly applicable to similar EFL university contexts in Indonesia. The reliance on self-reported data represents a methodological limitation, as participants' responses may not fully reflect their actual attitudes and behaviors in online learning environments.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study investigated two research problems: the attitudes of sixth-semester EFL students at the Faculty of Languages and Arts toward online learning in speaking classes, and the reasons why students feel more confident when speaking during online learning. Data were collected from 25 students through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, analyzed using Eagly and Chaiken's (1993) Tripartite Attitude Model and Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis.

The findings revealed that most students demonstrated generally positive attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes, though their responses were complex and varied across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This finding is significant because it confirms that students' psychological orientation toward the learning environment plays a decisive role in shaping their willingness to communicate in a foreign language — a factor that has often been underexplored in studies focused primarily on technical or pedagogical aspects of online EFL instruction. From the cognitive dimension, most students acknowledged that online learning provided flexibility and a more comfortable environment for speaking practice, believing that digital platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet were helpful in supporting speaking activities.

However, some students simultaneously expressed doubt about the effectiveness of online learning in developing speaking comprehension and fluency, perceiving face-to-face instruction as clearer and more focused. This mixed cognitive pattern is consistent with Rahmatadilla and Tiarina (2023), who found that students acknowledged the convenience of digital resources while questioning online learning's capacity to develop spontaneous communication skills, and with Fadilla et al. (2023), who reported that students' cognitive evaluations depended heavily on interaction quality and technological reliability. An alternative explanation for the mixed cognitive attitudes may relate to students' prior

learning experiences those accustomed to traditional classroom instruction may evaluate online learning against face-to-face standards,

which could account for the perception that comprehension is reduced in virtual settings rather than reflecting an inherent limitation of online learning itself. From the affective dimension, most students reported feeling less anxious and more relaxed during online speaking activities because they were not directly observed by classmates. From the behavioral dimension, while many students actively responded to questions, a considerable number tended to remain silent and sought clarification privately from peers, indicating that positive beliefs and emotional comfort do not automatically translate into consistent active participation, particularly when technical barriers or fear of negative evaluation remain present. Table 1 presents the qualitative interview responses illustrating students' attitudes across all three components.

Table 1. Students' Attitudes Toward Online Learning in Speaking Classes

Components of Attitude	Responses	Key Points
<b>Cognitive Component</b>	"Menurut saya kurang, karena kurang fokus. Lebih fokus belajar secara offline." ("In my opinion, online learning is less effective because I cannot focus well. I am more focused during offline learning.") DP	Online learning is perceived as less effective due to distractions
	"Ya merasa terbantu karena kita tidak melihat teman-teman secara langsung jadinya idenya ngalir." ("Yes, it helps because we do not directly see our classmates, so the ideas flow more easily.") ME	Online learning helps students express ideas more comfortably
<b>Affective Component</b>	"Ya, karena saya tidak melihat banyak orang." ("Yes, because I do not see many people.") DNS	Students feel more comfortable in online classes
	"Tidak, karena tidak banyak yang melihat." ("I do not feel shy because not many people are watching.") Dnd	Students feel less anxious in online classes
	"Malu, takut dikoreksi grammar." ("I feel shy because I am afraid my grammar will be corrected.") ME	Fear of making mistakes still appears in online learning
<b>Behavioral Component</b>	"Hal yang membuat saya stres terutama jaringan nge-lag." ("What makes me stressed is unstable internet connection.") DP	Technical problems influence students' emotions
	"Kalau aku ditanya pas offline agar lebih jelas." ("I prefer asking directly in offline classes to get clearer explanations.") DP	Students seek clarification when facing difficulties
	"Diam aja, paling nanya sama teman biar clear." ("I usually stay silent and ask my friend for clarification.") ME	Passive participation during online discussion
	"Membuka Google dan AI tools yang bisa mengembangkan ide saya." ("I	Students use digital tools to support speaking activities

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use Google and AI tools to develop my ideas.") DNS

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Regarding the second research problem, the findings directly address why students feel more confident when speaking during online learning. Most students reported feeling less anxious, more relaxed, and more willing to speak English when they were not directly observed by classmates in a physical classroom setting. These responses are well explained by Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which holds that reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence lower the affective filter, enabling learners to produce language more freely and participate more actively in communication tasks. The virtual environment, by removing the immediate social gaze of peers, appears to naturally lower this filter and create emotional conditions that support speaking engagement.

This is consistent with Suhardi et al. (2024), who reported that technology-assisted speaking activities created a more relaxed atmosphere that increased students' confidence, and with Alsalem (2024), who found that digital tools helped reduce speaking anxiety by offering a more flexible and supportive environment for oral practice. Nevertheless, a high affective filter was still present in several students due to persistent fear of grammatical correction and technical disruptions such as unstable internet connections, which increased frustration and reduced concentration during speaking activities. This suggests that while online learning can lower emotional barriers for many students, individual psychological factors and environmental conditions continue to mediate the relationship between the learning platform and speaking confidence. Table 2 presents the interview responses that categorize the specific emotional and situational factors influencing students' speaking confidence during online learning.

Table 2. Reasons Why Students Feel More Confident During Online Speaking Learning

<b>Components</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Reduced anxiety	" <i>Ya merasa terbantu karena kita tidak melihat teman-teman secara langsung jadinya idenya ngalir.</i> " ("Yes, it helps because we do not directly see our classmates, so the ideas flow more easily.") ME	Online learning reduces anxiety and allows ideas to flow more freely
Less social pressure	" <i>Tidak, karena tidak banyak yang melihat.</i> " ("I do not feel shy because not many people are watching.") DK	Online learning reduces social pressure and embarrassment
Comfortable environment	" <i>Ya, karena saya tidak melihat banyak orang.</i> " ("Yes, because I do not see many people.") DN	Students feel more comfortable in a less crowded environment
Fear of mistakes	" <i>Malu, takut dikoreksi grammar.</i> " ("I feel shy because I am afraid my grammar will be corrected.") ME	Fear of mistakes still affects confidence (high affective filter)
Technical problems	" <i>Hal yang membuat saya stres terutama jaringan nge-lag.</i> " ("What makes me stressed is unstable internet connection.") DK	Technical problems increase stress and reduce confidence

These findings carry important implications for English lecturers, course designers, and students at the university level. For lecturers, since the affective dimension proved to be the most influential factor in shaping students' speaking confidence during online learning,

instructional strategies that intentionally reduce social pressure are strongly recommended. Activities such as small breakout room discussions, recorded speaking tasks submitted asynchronously, and low-stakes oral exercises can help create a less intimidating environment that encourages more students to participate actively. Lecturers are also encouraged to provide consistent constructive feedback rather than immediate correction during speaking activities, as fear of grammatical correction was identified as a persistent internal barrier even within virtual settings. For students, these findings suggest that developing awareness of their own emotional responses toward online speaking activities can help them manage anxiety more effectively and engage more confidently in communication tasks. Students are also encouraged to practice speaking regularly outside of class hours in order to build confidence gradually over time.

For institutions and course designers, ensuring stable and accessible technological infrastructure is equally important, as technical disruptions were found to significantly increase emotional stress and reduce participation during online speaking sessions. Designing online speaking courses that incorporate both synchronous and asynchronous speaking opportunities may better accommodate the varying emotional readiness levels of students. This study acknowledges several limitations that should be considered when interpreting these findings. The sample was drawn from a single faculty with only 25 participants, which limits the generalizability of the results to broader EFL university populations. The reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires and interviews may also be subject to social desirability bias. Future research is encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate direct classroom observation, and adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to capture how students' attitudes and speaking confidence develop over time in online learning environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

EFL students' attitudes toward online learning in speaking classes are multidimensional and deeply connected to the emotional conditions that virtual learning environments create. The findings of this study establish that among the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of attitude, the affective dimension carries the greatest weight in determining how willingly and confidently students engage in online speaking activities. When students are freed from the direct social observation of their peers, their anxiety decreases, their willingness to communicate increases, and their ideas flow more naturally conditions that align precisely with what Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis identifies as essential for effective language production. This relationship between emotional comfort and speaking engagement is not incidental; it is a structural feature of online learning environments that educators must recognize and deliberately cultivate rather than leave to chance.

What makes these findings particularly relevant is that they challenge a common assumption in discussions of online EFL instruction that improving technological infrastructure and content delivery is sufficient to improve student outcomes. The evidence from this study suggests otherwise. Students who had access to functioning platforms and structured materials still withdrew from participation when their internal psychological barriers, particularly fear of grammatical correction and fear of negative evaluation, remained unaddressed. This means that the effectiveness of online speaking instruction depends as much on how emotionally supported students feel as on the quality of the tools they use. In this respect, the present findings extend and sharpen the conclusions of Suhardi et al. (2024), Alsalem (2024), and Abrar et al. (2024), moving beyond the observation that online learning creates both opportunities and challenges toward a clearer understanding of

which factor the affective one most directly governs student participation and confidence in virtual speaking contexts.

The broader significance of this study lies in its implications for how universities in Indonesia and similar EFL contexts approach the design of online speaking courses. Treating emotional readiness as a peripheral concern rather than a central instructional variable risks producing online speaking environments where students are present but not genuinely engaged. Incorporating low-stakes speaking tasks, reducing the pressure of immediate correction, and building in opportunities for students to speak without direct peer observation are not merely pedagogical preferences they are evidence-based strategies grounded in what this study's findings reveal about the conditions under which EFL students actually develop speaking confidence. As online and hybrid learning continues to shape higher education, understanding the affective foundations of student participation becomes not just academically valuable but practically necessary for any institution committed to developing genuinely communicative language learners.

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