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Najah Adnin Mohd Naser, Ilham Alia Mat Isa

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## Public Speaking Anxiety in Oral Presentation Class among Undergraduates

Najah Adnin Mohd Naser<sup>1</sup>, Ilham Alia Mat Isa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, <sup>2</sup>The Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan

Email: najahadnin@gmail.com, ilhamalia@uitm.edu.my

### Abstract

English speaking skill is deemed as an essential skill required by every employer globally. Locally, employers frequently mentioned that they chose not to offer employment to candidates because of their incapability to communicate well, especially in the English language. One of the reasons is due to the level of speaking anxiety experienced by second language learners. Hence, this quantitative study aimed to identify the level of public speaking anxiety and the correlation between students' public speaking anxiety in oral presentation class and English-speaking classroom performance among UiTM Shah Alam undergraduates. 150 students from UiTM Shah Alam were selected randomly for this study. Items from the Public speaking classroom anxiety scale (PSCAS) questionnaire by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) were adapted to measure students' level of anxiety in speaking English. Inferential statistics (Pearson correlation) was used to analyse the correlation between students' public speaking anxiety in oral presentation class and English-speaking classroom performance. The findings showed that majority of respondents experienced a moderate level of anxiety. However, it is prevalent that despite having good academic results, most respondents had speaking anxiety during public speaking presentations. The findings of this study were consistent with prior studies conducted in the same area of language skill, and it is hoped that this may provide insights into developing speaking strategies to overcome speaking anxiety.

**Keywords:** Public Speaking Anxiety, Oral Presentation, English as Second Language (ESL) Learners

### Introduction

The unemployment issue has become a concern among Malaysian graduates. The issue was severe as it leaves a huge concern among the education planners (D' Silva, 2020). The unemployment problem cannot be considered as a minor issue as the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) discovered that 3.2% of the total 5.29 million graduates in 2019 were unemployed (Goh, 2020). If it involves the future of next generation, this issue cannot be disregarded. In addition, the current COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation worse. Many companies are forced to close or downsize, creating lesser job opportunities for the undergraduates to survive in the job searching battle. As the competition increases,

undergraduates need to find an excellent strategy to make themselves more outstanding than the rest. One of the strategies is to master the English language.

As speaking is seen as an essential skill in 4 branches of the English language (speaking, listening, reading and writing skills), learning to acquire it will benefit the learners to plan their future careers and lives (Sitti Kurniawanti, 2017). UiTM is one of the universities that use the English language as a medium of instruction in the classroom. According to pro-chancellor Arshad Ayub, the initiative to emphasize the English language in all fields of study has made UiTM graduates more marketable ("UiTM Graduates Preferred", 2018). However, many graduates still feel anxious to communicate in English (Sim et al., 2020). This is due to the anxiety in speaking English as a second language. Second language learners in tertiary education often experience speaking anxiety which subsequently affects their speaking achievement both in formal classroom and outside the classroom (Ahmed et al., 2017; Elaldi, 2016, Mohammad et al., 2016, Saranraj & Meenakshi, 2016, Hasrul et al., 2013 as cited in Badrasawi et al., 2020). Hence, this study aimed to explore the level of public speaking anxiety and the correlation between students' public speaking anxiety and their performance in an oral presentation class to better enhance students' performance in speaking the second language, English.

## Literature Review

### Speaking Anxiety and Second Language Learning

Horwitz et al., (1986) interpret anxiety as a personal emotion of pressure, hesitation, tension and concern with the involuntary stimulation of nervous system (as cited in Toubot et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Hilgard et al., (1971) mentioned that anxiety was created by our mental due to nervousness and unknown fear that is only indirectly related with an object (as cited in Asif, 2017). For instance, anxiety can occur when there is a triggering point like a situation, object or pressure. Meanwhile, Eric R. Kandel (1983) describes other meanings of anxiety as the common natural reaction either to danger – to one's person, attitudes, or confidence – or to the lack of comfort and security imply by people or objects (as cited in Vikström, 2019). Therefore, based on the previous definitions given, anxiety is a psychological effect experienced by someone in response to a threat or any types of triggering factors. As for this current study, it aimed to discover anxiety experienced by second language learners when speaking in English in classroom setting.

In the early days, studies about second language learning were often related to anxiety. Horwitz et al (1986) mentioned since the early 1970s, the concept of language anxiety has been established by several researchers in the field of foreign language education (as cited in Rafada & Madini, 2017). The psycho-pedagogical aspect defines language anxiety as the emotion of pressure and angst specifically related with second language settings, including speaking, listening and learning (Horwitz et al., 1986 as cited in Tsymbal, 2017). Since anxiety is significant to second language study, it can either influence the learners positively or negatively.

Speaking anxiety is often associated with English second language learners as it is difficult to master especially for those who don't speak English as their mother tongue. Shumin (2002) describes that speaking skill, is a perplexing language skill to acquire because it involved linguistic, sociolinguistic, and rhetorical competencies (as cited in Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021). According to speech therapist Margaretha Lanerfeldt, speaking anxiety significantly impacts one's self-esteem because it frequently leads to feelings of failure when one cannot speak up and demonstrate their understanding (as cited in Basic, 2011).

Previous studies offered various factors contributing to the speaking anxiety among the second language learners. One of the studies, by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) states that there are four factors that caused public speaking anxiety namely communicative apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and comfort in speaking English.

### **Speaking Anxiety and Students Performance**

Speaking anxiety is frequently associated with academic achievement. Most previous studies found that speaking anxiety can influence student performance negatively. Experts have looked into many elements of the phenomena and discovered evidence of anxiety's detrimental impact on L2 oral performance (Phillips, 1992 as cited in Ozdemir & Papi, 2021). Unquestionably, there are continuous debates on the significance of speaking anxiety and students' performance. Sim et al., (2020) and Debrelil and Demirkan (2016) found that the higher the proficiency level, the more anxious the learners. However, Tridinanti's (2018) study shows different results in which she found no significant association between speaking anxiety and student performance. Despite dissimilar findings recorded, it is vital for the instructors to be aware on their students' speaking anxiety and further aid those facing anxiety in speaking to excel in mastering the language and perform well in their language class.

### **Methods**

Public Speaking Classroom Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) questionnaire developed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) was used in this study. The questionnaire consists of two parts which are the demographic questions and PSCAS items which comprises of 17 closed-ended statements that use a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'undecided', 'agree' to 'strongly agree'. Previous studies had used the same instrument in gauging the level of English public speaking classroom anxiety (i.e., Sim et al., 2020; Budi, 2018; Sitti Kurniawanti, 2017). The questionnaires were distributed in Google form through the social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram to 150 UiTM Shah Alam students randomly. They were asked to answer the PSCAS items along with their grade obtained in English for oral presentation subject (ELC590). The data were analyzed to identify the level of public speaking anxiety and the correlation between students' public speaking anxiety in oral presentation class and English-speaking classroom performance.

During the data collection period, Malaysia was having a lockdown from the end of 2020 and continuing until 2021. To conduct the research on the ground was ineffective and inefficient. Thus, this study was conducted through the online platforms as an alternative to progress the study. In some circumstances, moving away from the physical realm and into a digital reality was the only way to continue with our original study goals during the epidemics (Howlett, 2021).

Table 1: Gender and Age of the Respondents

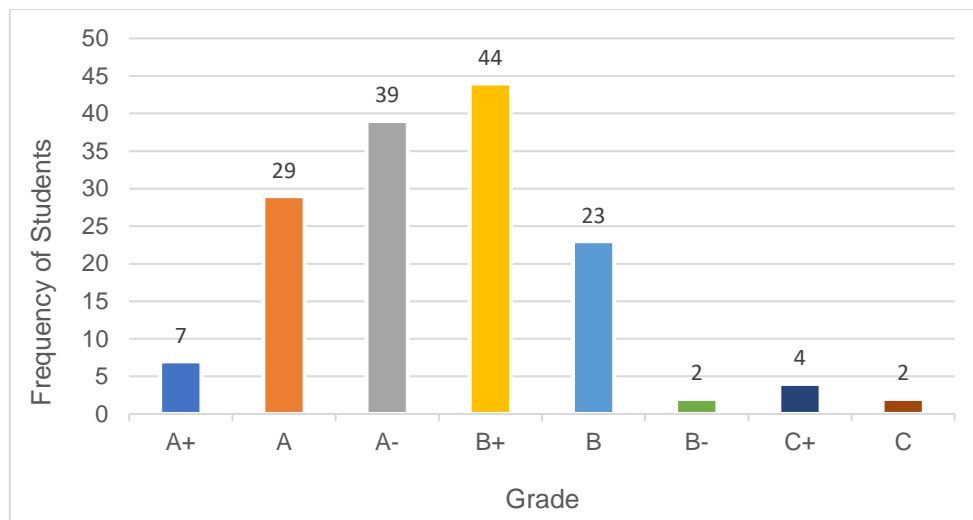
Demographic background	Frequency		Percentage
	n	f	%
	n	150	100
Gender			
Male		34	22.7
Female		116	77.3
Age			
18-24 years old		145	96.7
25-34 years old		5	3.3

Table 1 shows the gender and age of the respondents while Table 2 depicts the number of participants from each faculty. Majority of respondents were from the Academy of Language Study and the least from Faculty of Civil Engineering. All respondents have completed the English for Oral Presentation subject (ELC590), wherein they have to deliver informative and persuasive speech in public (in class) and further graded by their instructors.

Table 2: Participants Faculties

Faculties	Frequency	Percentage
n	150	100
Academy of Language Study	41	27.3
Applied Sciences	38	25.3
Computer and Mathematical Sciences	22	14.7
Mechanical Engineering	11	7.3
Chemical Engineering	11	7.3
Business and Management	6	4.0
Architecture, Planning and Surveying	5	3.3
Communication and Media Study	4	2.7
Electrical Engineering	4	2.7
Sports Science and Recreation	3	2.0
Art and Design	2	1.3
Civil Engineering	2	1.3
Academy of Contemporary Islamic Study	1	0.7

Figure 1: Grade Performance Analysis



Using Descriptive Statistics in SPSS, it can be seen in Figure 1 that most respondents perform well in their English for Oral Presentation Subject. Majority attained B+ (44 students) while few students needed room for improvement, including 2 persons who got B, 4 students with C+ and 2 students who acquired C. Amazingly, 7 students scored excellent by getting A+. In analysing the level of anxiety, the data obtained were calculated based on the procedures suggested by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012):

1. Totalling the score based on the response category.
  - a. Strongly Agree (Score 5)
  - b. Agree (Score 4)
  - c. Undecided (Score 3)
  - d. Disagree (Score 2)
  - e. Strongly Disagree (Score 1)

$$\text{Score} = n1 + n2 + n3 + \dots + n17$$

Where:  $n1, n2, n3, \text{ etc.}$  means score number 1, score number 2, score number 3, and so on until score number 17.

2. The maximum total multiplied scores of a PSCAS were 85 and then subtracted by 17 statements with the scale as follows:
  - a. Scores higher than 68 as high anxiety
  - b. Scores between 68-51 as medium anxiety
  - c. Scores lower than 51 as low anxiety.

Furthermore, in identifying the correlation between students' public speaking anxiety and their performance in an oral presentation class, the Pearson Correlation using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized in gauging the correlation between students' public speaking anxiety in oral presentation class and English-speaking classroom performance. SPSS were selected for this study because it can measure descriptive (frequencies) and bivariate (correlation) statistics.

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Value

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
0.851	0.835	17

In terms of reliability, Cronbach's alpha is utilised to show that tests and scales that have been created or adapted for research projects are appropriate (Taber, 2017). Referring to Table 3 above, Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.851. Beyond 0.7, alpha values are generally regarded as acceptable and satisfactory, above 0.8, as fairly good, and above 0.9, indicating exceptional internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951 as cited in Mohajan, 2017). Thus, based on the result, this current research was considered reliable and relatively good as the alpha value was above 0.8. Prior to the collection of data, the Universiti Teknologi MARA Research Ethics Committee granted approval (REC/02/2021 (UG/MR/78) for this research to be conducted. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all responses were treated in the strictest confidence

## Findings

### Level of Public Speaking Anxiety among UiTM Shah Alam Undergraduates

Methods established by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) were used to calculate the data in attaining the level of anxiety among the respondents. Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of the level of anxiety experienced by students.

*Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of Speaking Anxiety Level among UiTM Shah Alam Undergraduates*

Speaking anxiety level	Scores	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	n	150	100
High	>68	10	6.66
Medium	68-51	82	54.67
Low	<51	58	38.67

Based on Table 4, 38.67% of students experienced low anxiety level. It means that after totalling the PSCAS items, 58 learners obtained scores lower than 51. Meanwhile, medium anxiety levels have the highest percentage, which is 54.67%. It represents 82 (54.67%) students who scored between 68-51. The lowest rate falls into the category of high anxiety level which is 6.67%. Surprisingly, only 10 students scored higher than 68. Thus, it can be concluded that majority of UiTM Shah Alam undergraduates experienced a medium level of speaking anxiety. The overall analysis of percentage and means in PSCAS items were manifested in Table 5.

Table 5: Overall Percentage and Means of PSCAS Items

PSCAS Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean M
	Percentage (%)					
<b>Factor 1: Fear of Negative Evaluation</b>						
6. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me while I am speaking English.	18.0	24.7	18.7	21.3	17.3	2.95
9. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on.	7.3	4.7	10.7	54.7	22.7	3.81
14. I feel anxious while I am waiting to speak English.	8.7	20.0	17.3	42.7	11.3	3.28
13. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am speaking English.	11.3	27.3	18.7	34.0	8.7	3.01
16. I have trouble to coordinate my movements while I am speaking English.	12.0	40.7	20.0	20.0	7.3	2.70
11. It embarrasses me to volunteer to go out first to speak English	14.7	14.0	26.0	32.0	13.3	3.15
<b>Factor 2: Comfort in Speaking English</b>						
4. I feel confident while I am speaking English.	5.3	16.0	33.3	36.0	9.3	3.28
8. I have no fear of speaking English.	12.0	24.7	22.0	31.3	10.0	3.03
10. I feel relaxed while I am speaking English.	6.7	21.3	36.0	31.3	4.7	3.06
12. I face the prospect of speaking English with confidence.	7.3	13.3	36.7	38.7	4.0	3.19
<b>Factor 3: Test Anxiety</b>						
1. I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English.	9.2	30.0	22.7	30.7	7.3	2.97
7. I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance.	20.0	26.0	18.7	28.7	6.7	2.76
17. Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about speaking English.	7.3	22.0	18.0	30.7	22.0	3.38
<b>Factor 4: Communication Apprehension</b>						
2. I start to panic when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance.	12.0	18.7	12.0	33.3	24.0	3.39



3. In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	8.7	17.3	16.7	39.3	18.0	3.40
5. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English.	8.7	25.3	19.3	38.7	8.0	3.12
15. I dislike using my voice and body expressively while I am speaking English.	14.7	30.7	22.7	22.0	10.0	2.82
Overall Mean for Public Speaking Classroom Anxiety Scale						M=3.14

In Table 5, each of 17 items in PSCAS was calculated and converted into percentages according to the Likert-scale. Furthermore, the data were converted into means (M) to determine the total answers and compare each item. According to Yaikhong and Usaha (2012), mean scores which fall within the interval of 3-4 were categorized as medium anxiety level, below 3 as low anxiety level, and above 4 as high anxiety level. The overall mean for Public speaking classroom anxiety scale is 3.14. Hence, the respondents experienced moderate level of anxiety.

*Table 6: Public Speaking Anxiety Scale Factors*

Public Speaking Anxiety Factor	Mean
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.15
Comfort in Speaking English	3.14
Test Anxiety	3.04
Communication Apprehension	3.18

It is interesting to note that aside of fulfilling the aims, the factors contributing to speaking anxiety may be determined too by utilising PSCAS. According to Yaikhong and Usaha (2012), there are four factors of speaking anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, comfort in speaking English, test anxiety, and communication apprehension. Further analysis of the four major factors of PSCAS is shown in Table 6. The table demonstrated that communication apprehension ranked the highest (M=3.18), followed by fear of negative evaluation (M=3.15), comfort in speaking English (M=3.14) and test anxiety (M=3.04).

Based on the items, the communication apprehension (M=3.18) factor gives the meaning of students' anticipated anxious behaviors in speaking English. This includes the feeling of nervousness and panicking that can lead to mental blockage when they have to speak in English.

Fear of negative evaluation on the other hand ranked second (M=3.15). This factor is related to the feeling of anxiousness from being less competent than the others. The item describes the situation that students feel afraid to volunteer first to speak in English. This feeling leads to a change in bodily reaction when speaking in English including an increase in heartbeat, body feels tense and rigid and trouble coordinating the movement.

Furthermore, the factor of comfort in speaking English ranked third (M=3.14). This factor describes that students feel assured and less pressured to communicate in English. It may be derived from the comfortable classroom environment with supportive lecturers and

peers. Moreover, it is merely because of students' level of confidence in speaking the English language. Finally, the factor of test anxiety ranked last ( $M=3.04$ ) compared to the other three factors. This factor represents that students feel fear of inadequate performance in speaking English. It led to feeling unsure and anxious even when the students had made their preparation in advance.

The findings show that majority of students encountered a medium level of anxiety were similar to previous research done by Faizah and Tuan (2021), Sim et al. (2020), Hidayoza et al. (2019) and Sitti Kurniawanti (2017). In addition, Melouah (2013) expressed the reason for moderate level of speaking anxiety among students due to low proficiency in speaking English (as cited in Sugiyati and Indriani, 2021). Thus, an average level of speaking anxiety can act as a motivational factor for the learners' to further improve their proficiency.

### Correlation between Public Speaking Anxiety and Classroom Performance

Table 7: Correlations between Public Speaking Anxiety and English for Oral Presentation Results

		Public Speaking Anxiety	English for Oral Presentation Results
Public Speaking Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.363**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
English For Oral Presentation Results	Pearson Correlation	.363**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

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

To investigate the second research aim, Pearson Correlation using SPSS was used to identify the correlation between public speaking anxiety and English for Oral Presentation results. Based on Table 7, it can be concluded that there is a significant correlation between public speaking anxiety and learners' performance. The table displays the relationship between UiTM Shah Alam students' public speaking anxiety in the classroom and English for oral presentation classroom performance. Pearson correlation analysis in Table 7 stated that there was a moderate correlation between public speaking anxiety and student performance ( $r=.363$ ),  $p<0.01$ . The p-value is 0.000 and less than 0.01. Hence, the value is statistically significant. It can be concluded that there is a significant correlation between public speaking anxiety in the classroom and English for oral presentation classroom performance.

This finding is similar to previous research conducted by Sim et al., (2020) and Debreli and Demirkan, (2016) that found a significant positive correlation between the two variables. It means that students with a high level of anxiety obtained higher performance in oral presentation class.

Surprisingly, studies by Quinto & Macayan (2019) and Sutarsyah (2017) show a significant negative correlation between speaking anxiety and learners' performance.

Students with lower speaking anxiety have higher speaking performance scores than learners with a high level of anxiety. Meanwhile, a different ball game, Tridinanti (2018), in her research, found no significant correlation between speaking anxiety and learners' performance.

In short, it is clear that majority of the undergraduates have a medium degree of public speaking anxiety in oral presentation class and there is a significant correlation between public speaking anxiety and learners' performance.

### Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that anxiety has become a learning phenomenon that frequently related to second language learners. It was found that majority of the respondents faced moderate level of anxiety in their oral presentation class. Moreover, since speaking anxiety is proven to affect learners' performance significantly, practical strategies to combat speaking anxiety should be established. Comfortable learning environment and teacher's role are crucial to enable the learners to engage in learning sessions fully. Teachers must create a non-threatening learning environment for learners so that they feel comfortable speaking English. Furthermore, findings of the current study will be beneficial for educators to plan strategies to combat speaking anxiety at classroom level. After all, knowing the students' requirements allows the teacher/lecturer to select the best teaching material which can result in more systematic and productive learning process.

Thus, the current research findings will give an insight to learners about speaking anxiety to come out with effective learning strategy. Recognizing anxiety level can motivate the learners to improve their self-confidence and overcome the fear of second language learning. The findings can become references for scholars and educational institutions to further understand about speaking anxiety among second language learners in tertiary education. It is hoped that this study can act as a reference to further uphold the quality of education in Malaysia.

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