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Fear of Oral Presentation: Trait or State Anxiety?

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Abstract

Communication helps people understand one another and helps to remove misunderstandings. Communication bridges the gap between people to transfer information. Communication can be formal or informal. An oral presentation is one form of communication that people do to get their message across. Some are natural-born speakers, while others need help to become better at communication. There are many reasons why people fear public speaking. Some presenters have low self-esteem and feel that their lack of grammar skills will get in the way. Some are apprehensive about presenting in front of an audience because they feel inadequate in terms of knowledge. They are afraid that their message will not get conveyed or they will get misunderstood. While these types of fear can be true, some manage to overcome the fear, while some remain apprehensive. This quantitative research is done to investigate the prevalence of oral presentation among learners of English as a second language. The instrument used is a survey. 56 respondents were purposively chosen to answer the survey. The survey has three main sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has eight items on External factors and Section C includes seven items on internal factors. Findings in this study show that presenters feared oral presentations from internal and external factors. Generally, speakers' feeling of inadequacy has added to their fear of oral presentation. Findings have interesting pedagogical implications for the teaching and learning of oral presentations.

Keywords: Communication, Oral Presentation, Trait Anxiety, State Anxiety, Public Speaking

Introduction

Background of Study

Communication helps people understand one another and helps to remove misunderstandings. It bridges the gap between people to transfer information. It can either be formal or informal. Oral presentation is one form of communication that people do to get their message across. Some are natural born speakers, while others need help to become

better at communication. Nikitina (2011) said that the ability to communicate well has many benefits. Firstly, communication skills open up opportunities for career advancement. In business settings, good communication skills attract the right customers to the business. Nevertheless, there are many who fear communication. For many, the fear is there even if they present a planned or unplanned oral presentation.

There are many reasons for communication fear. McCroskey (1977) classified fear into four types of apprehension such as trait-like apprehension, generalised-context apprehension, person-group apprehension, and situational apprehension. Trait-like apprehension is based on a person's personality type. General context is one step further than trait-like apprehension. It is more geared towards communication in a given type of context. Person-group apprehension is when a person has a fear in communicating in groups. Finally, some people only have communication in some situations and not others.

Fear of communication can escalate to fear of oral presentation to many people. Oral presentations are sometimes referred to as public speaking and it refers to the condition when a person (or a group of persons) presents in front of an audience. This occurs especially when they have to face a crowd to communicate. According to Gieve (2021), fear of oral presentation for students at institutions of learning can influence the students' feelings towards public speaking experience in the future. What causes oral presentation fear? The objective of this study is to:

- explore the causes of oral presentation fear.

Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How does trait anxiety influence communication?
- How does state anxiety influence communication?

Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

This section discusses issues of fear of public speaking, past studies related to fear of oral presentation, and also the conceptual framework of the study.

1.2 Fear of Public Speaking

There are many reasons why people fear public speaking. According to Rahmat, Shahabani, & Ibrahim (2020), some presenters have low self-esteem and feel that their lack of grammar skills will get in the way. Some are apprehensive about presenting in front of an audience because they feel adequate in terms of knowledge. They are afraid that their message will not get conveyed or they will get misunderstood. While these types of fear can be true, some manage to overcome the fear while some remain apprehensive.

Grieve (2021) found six themes related to fear of oral presentation. With reference to Figure 1, firstly, fear began because the presenters are afraid of being judged. Sometimes the audience can be quite harsh in their judgement and that judgement can affect the presenters in ways that the audience may not anticipate. Fear can be accompanied by physical symptoms beginning with the obvious ones such as stammering when they speak, blurred speech, and many more. Some subtle symptoms can be hidden but can affect the presentation nevertheless. Sometimes, some presenters may not be given enough preparation time and they are asked to present even though they are uncertain about the topic. Some people's fear of oral presentation dates back to when they were in the previous institution of learning and that fear carries on in their future oral presentation experiences. The (lack of) practice and

preparation can create added fear in many presenters. Hence more practical support is needed to allow presenters to have a positive experience in their oral presentation experience, failing which the presenters would worry about getting a poor judgement and the cycle continues.

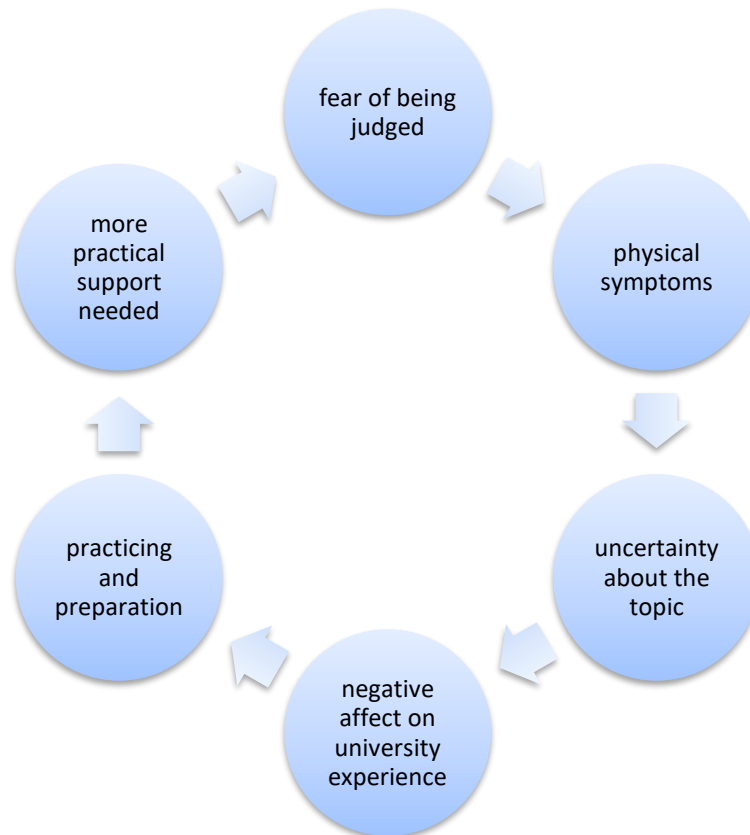


Figure 1: Six themes related to fear of oral presentation (source: Grieve, 2021)

Rahmat (2019) reported two main reasons for fear in oral presentation. With reference to Figure 2, fear in oral presentation can be traced to the presenter having traits and a state anxiety. Trait anxiety among presenters is internally caused. This means the individual characteristics of the person add worry to the person. Next, state anxiety can be caused by (a) external environment or even (b) evaluation by others on him/her. An external environment like noise during the presentation, or technical glitch can add to the person's fear. In addition to that, some fear the negative evaluation they may get from the presentation. This can happen when the presenter has had a previous negative evaluation before.

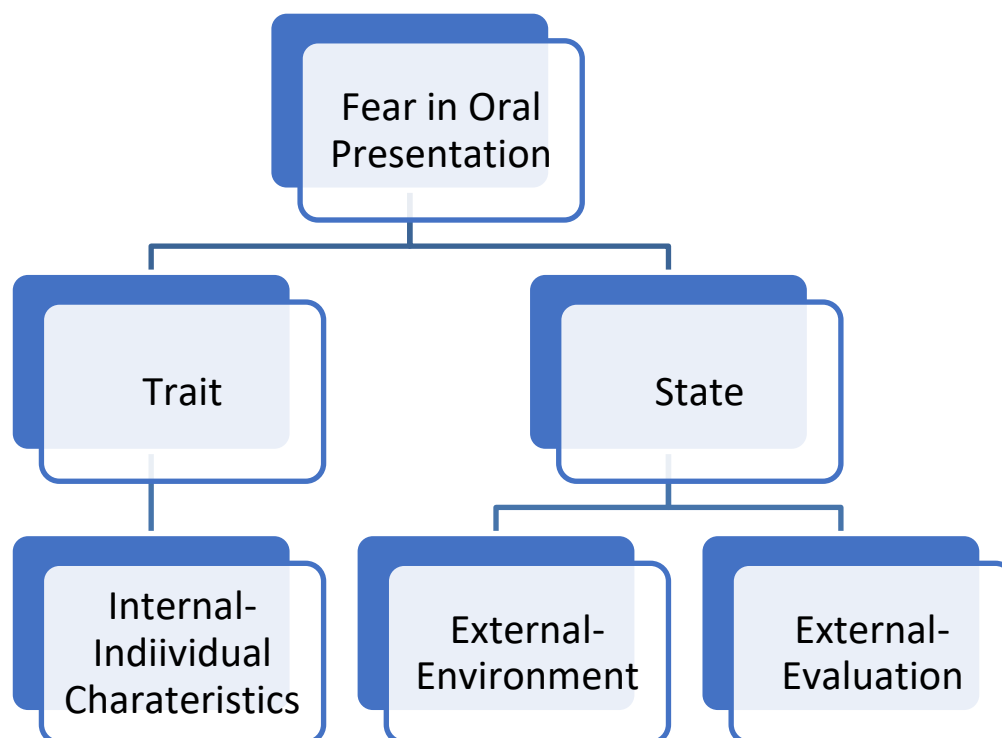


Figure 2: Fear of Oral Presentation (source: Rahmat, 2019)

1.3 Past Studies

Fear of oral presentation is real for many presenters and many researchers have investigated the causes.

The qualitative study by Grieve (2021) was conducted with two main objectives. Firstly, it was done to investigate the fear experienced by presenters and also the strategies used by these presenters. The second objective is to determine whether their fear influenced their experience of higher education. Four open-ended survey questions were used to collect the data from 46 undergraduate and post-graduate students. Thematic analysis was used to identify six themes, namely: fear of being judged, physical symptoms, uncertainty about the topic, negative effect on university experience, practice and preparation, and more practical support needed. Findings revealed that specific fears of public speaking lead to an overall negative effect on their higher education experience.

The study by Gufriyansyah and Khairani (2019) explored the level of public speaking anxiety of students. 97 students participated in this study. Data was from PRPSA (Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety). Findings revealed that 47.4% of students had low public speaking anxiety, 48.5% in the moderate category of public speaking anxiety, and only 4.1% in the high category of public speaking anxiety. Results showed that there was a difference in public speaking anxiety based on the listener's characteristics on students. The students who spoke in front of the listeners with higher educational levels were more anxious than those who spoke in front of the listeners with lower educational levels. This study concluded that the audience is one of the major causes of the fear.

Another study on fear of public speaking was carried out by Marinho, et al (2019). The purpose of this cross-sectional and analytic study was to identify the prevalence of fear of

public speaking. The study was also to identify the association of public speaking with sociodemographic variables, self-perception of voice, speech, and oral communication skills in public. The instrument used was a questionnaire. 1,124 students responded to the questionnaire. Findings showed that there is a prevalence of fear of public speaking among undergraduate students. Findings also revealed that there was an association of the fear of speaking with the vocal self-perception, with the ability to capture and keep the listener's attention and to influence another with their communication. Individuals who performed better at oral presentations actually reported having higher anxiety compared to those who did not perform so well in their oral presentations.

The quantitative study by Soomro, et al (2019) investigated factors that affect oral presentation skills of undergraduates of English. The instrument used is a survey about factors affecting oral communication skills. Respondents were students from a public university. The findings revealed that oral presentation skills is the most problematic skill for engineering undergraduates.

Finally, a study by Raja (2017) was done to find out the reasons behind the anxiety level of undergraduates in a public speaking class. The study also recommended strategies to overcome the fear. This quantitative study was led on a sample of 50 students using convenience sampling. Findings showed that students who fear public speaking can perform well if they use certain strategies. It also revealed that exposure to a virtual environment can facilitate students' confidence and enable them to face the audience irrespective of the size.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The concept of this study is taken from (Spielberger, 1966; Endler, 1980). According to Spielberger (1966) there are two kinds of anxieties; state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety is the emotional state or condition of the person. Meanwhile, trait anxiety refers to a general tendency to respond with anxiety to the perceived threats in the environment. Endler (1980) on the other hand, presented two causes of fear of oral presentation; internal and external causes. Internal causes refer to the presenter's nervousness, insufficient preparation, lack of presentation abilities. Some presenters may have low self-esteem about their physical appearance and this too adds fear. Some may feel they are not as good as other presenters. Some may forget their words; while some fear a large audience. Next, external causes refer to the presenter's environment that can add on to the presenters' apprehension. They may worry about their marks. Some fear the size of the audience, while some fear the venue of the presentation. Spielberger's (1966) types of anxiety are combined with Endler's (1980) categories to form the conceptual framework of this study (Figure 3). The fear begins with the trait anxiety already present in some presenters and escalates with the state anxiety.

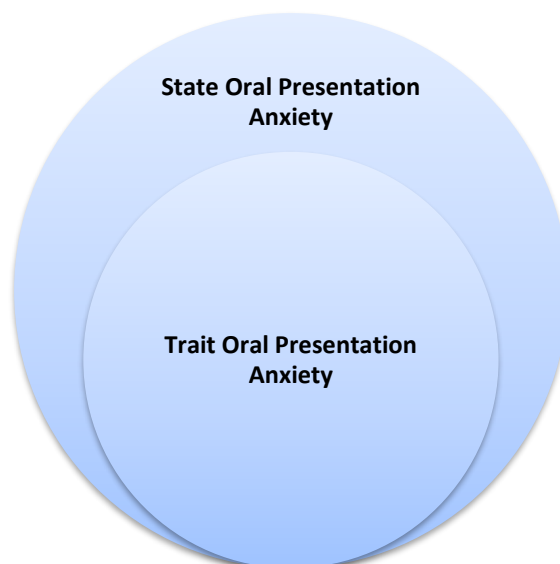


Figure 3- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Trait or State Oral Presentation Anxiety

Methodology

This quantitative research is done to investigate the prevalence of oral presentation among learners of English as a second language. The instrument used is a survey adapted from Endler (1980). 56 respondents were purposively chosen to answer the survey. The survey has three main sections. With reference to Table 1, Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 8 items on External factors and whereas Section C has 7 items of internal factors.

Table 1-Distribution of Items in Survey

SECTION	Factors	No of Items
A	External Factors	8
B	Internal factors	7
		15

Table 2- Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.857	15

Table 2 presents the reliability statistics for the instrument. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .857 thus showing a high internal reliability of the instrument used. Data is collected online via Google form. Data is then analysed using SPSS version 26. Analysed data is presented in the form of percentages and mean scores to answer the 2 research questions.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

56 participants responded to the survey. The findings for the demographic profile are presented below.

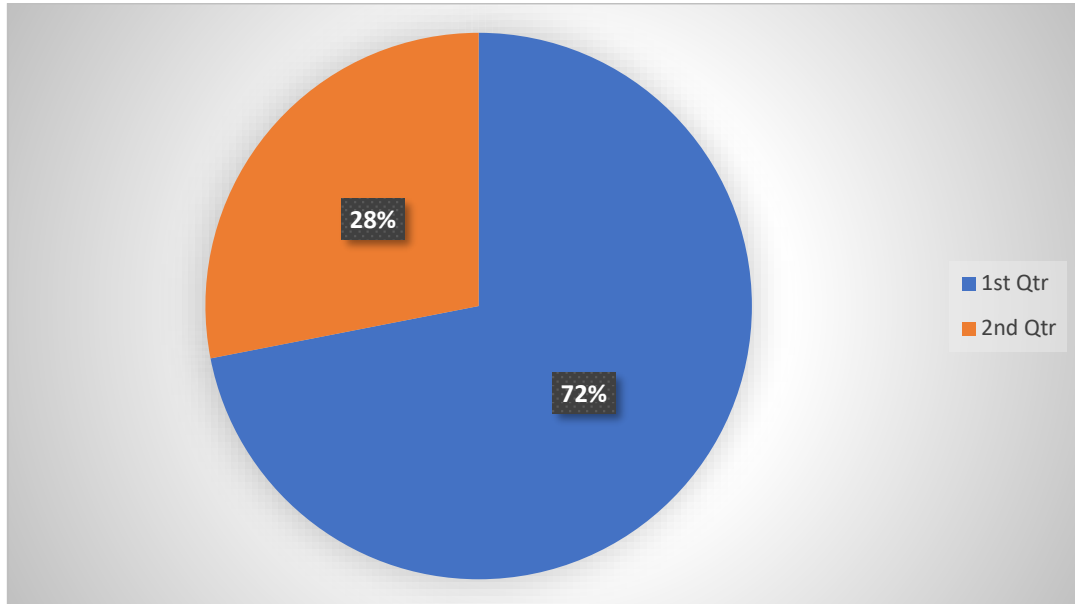


Figure 4-Percentage for Gender

Figure 4 presents the percentage for gender. 57% are male while 43% are female.

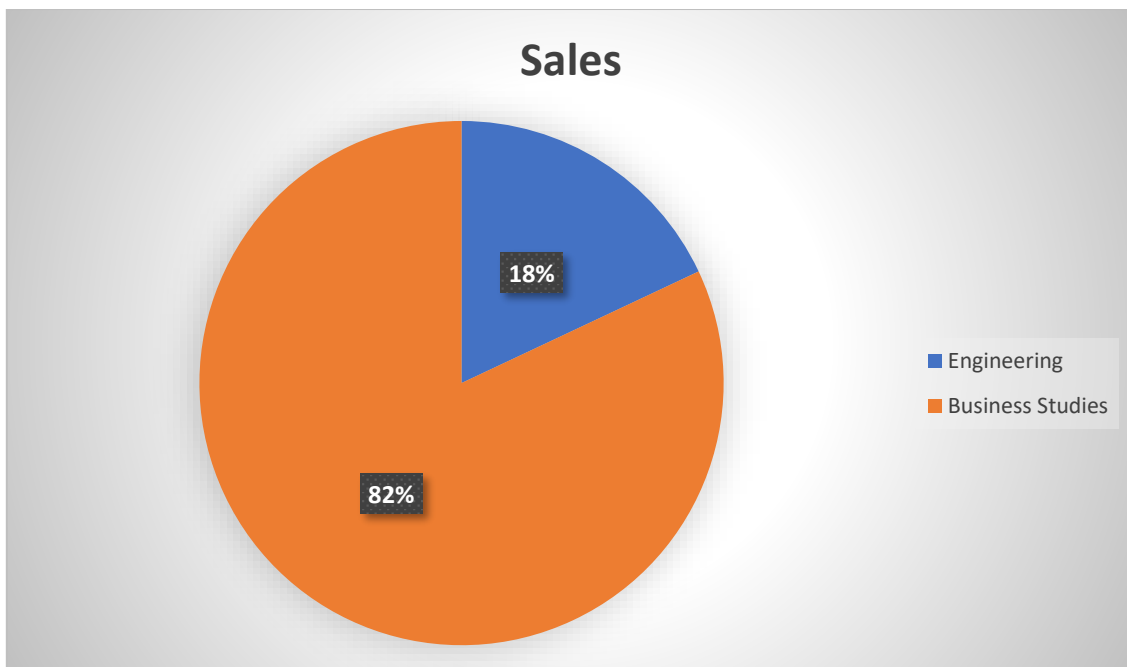


Figure 5- Percentage for Course

With reference to Figure 5, 18% of the respondents are from the engineering courses and 82% are from business studies.

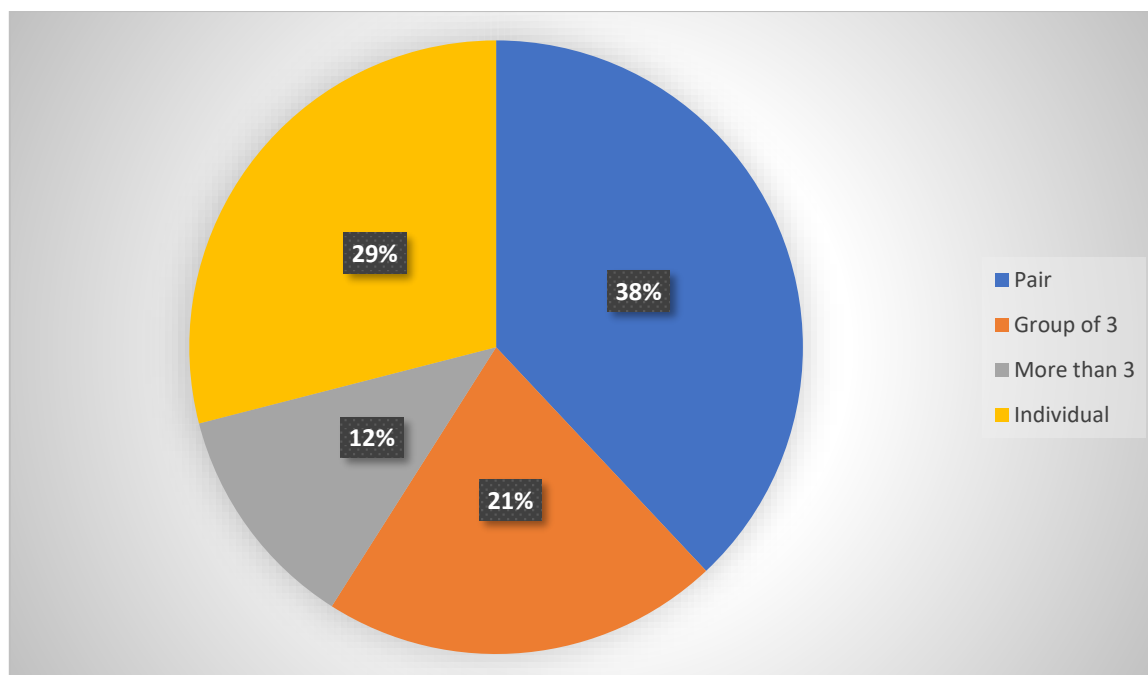


Figure 6- Percentage for Highest Academic level

With reference to Figure 6, 38% preferred to work in pairs. 21% preferred to work in groups of 3. 12% liked groups with more than 12. Finally, 29% liked to work alone.

1.5 Findings for Trait Oral Presentation Anxiety

This section presents data to answer the first research question: How does trait anxiety influence communication?

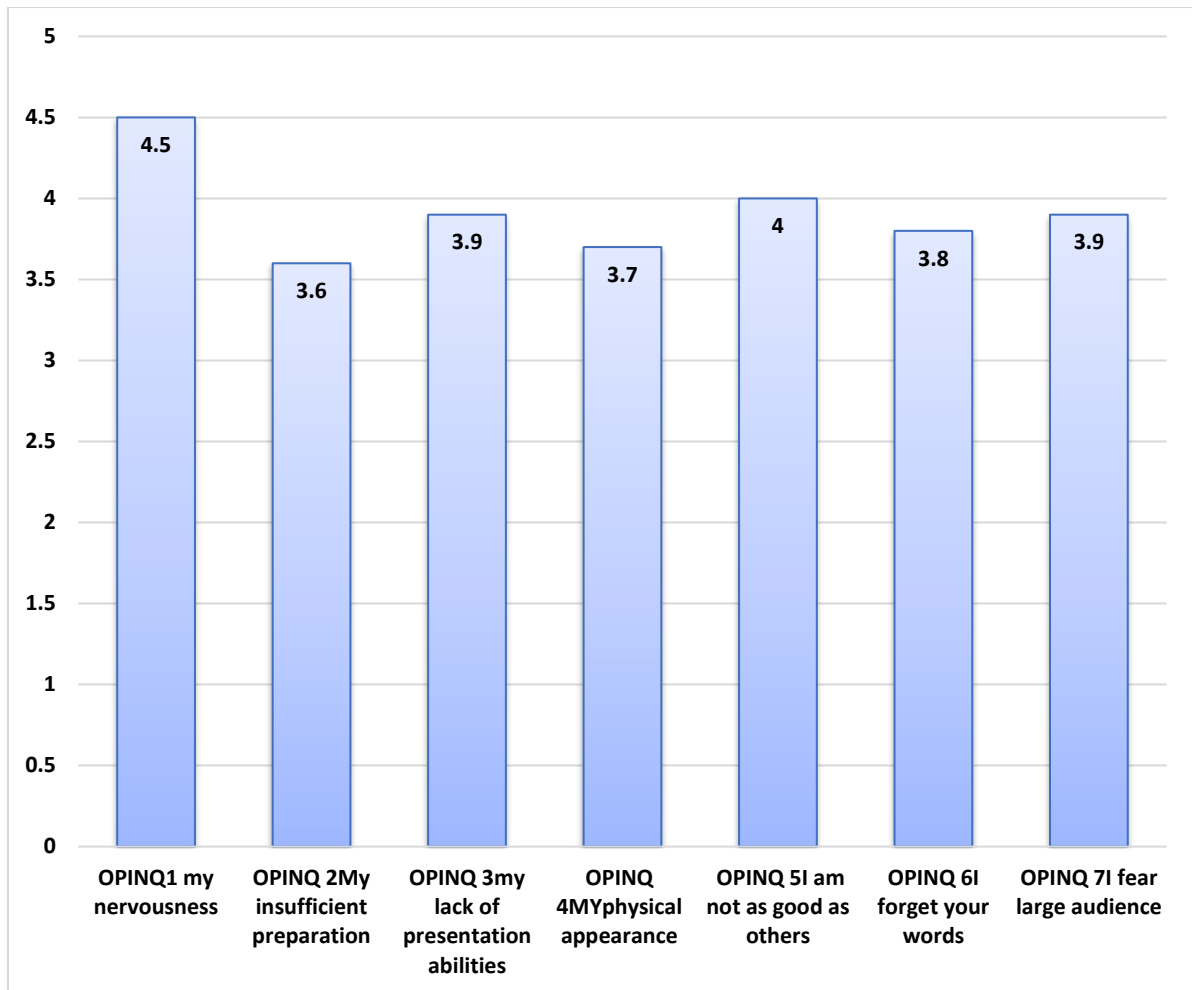


Figure 7- Mean for Trait Anxiety in Oral Presentation

Figure 7 presents the mean for trait anxiety in oral presentation. The highest mean (4.5) is for the speakers' "nervousness". Speakers also felt that they were "not as good as others" (mean= 4). Some also "feared large audience" (mean=3.9) and felt the "lacked presentation abilities" (mean=3.9).

1.6 Findings for State Oral Presentation Anxiety

This section answers research questions 2: How does state anxiety influence communication?

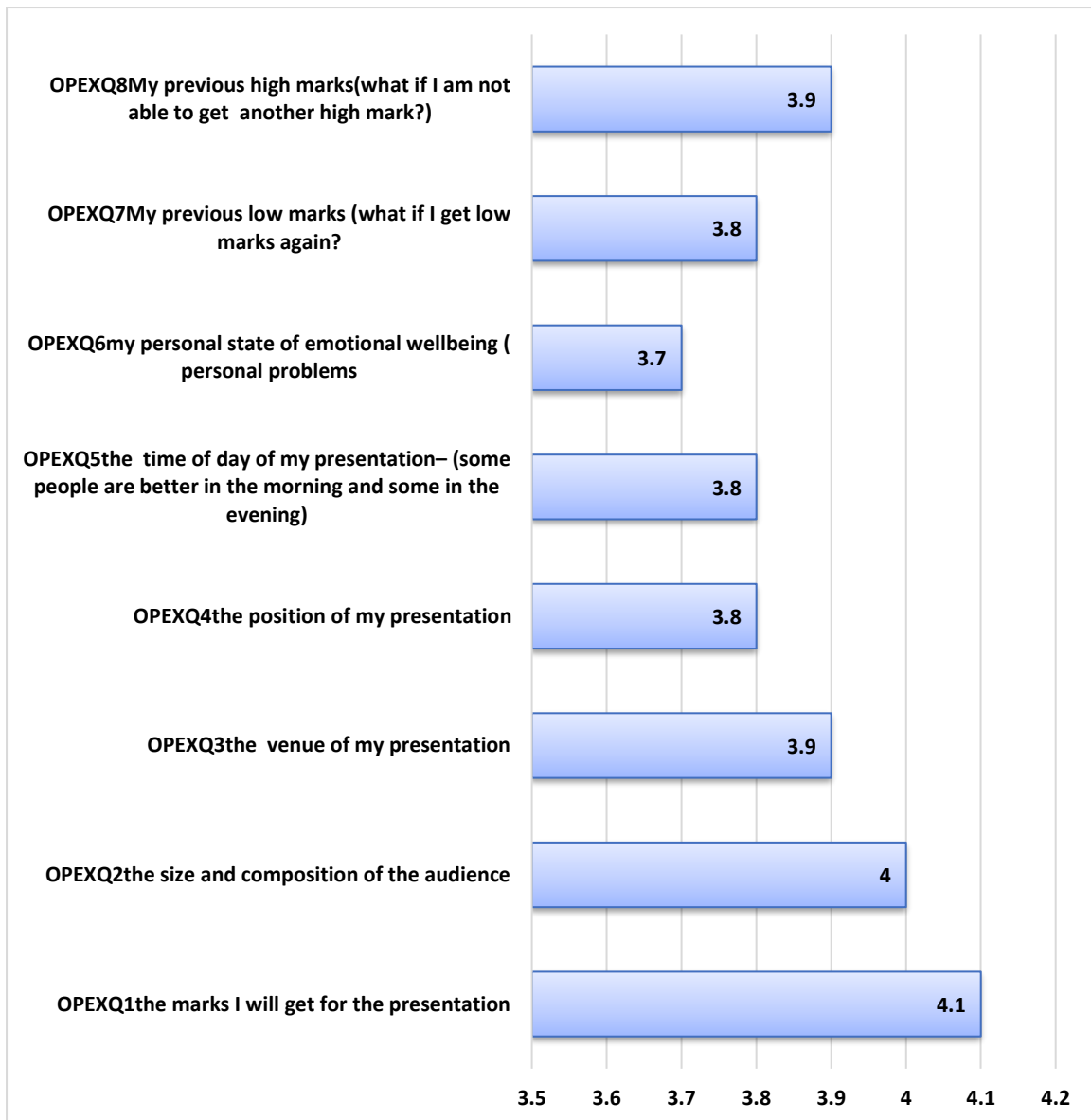


Figure 8- State Anxiety for Oral Presentation

Figure 8 shows the mean for state anxiety for oral presentation. The highest mean is for “the marks I will get for the presentation” (mean=4.1) and “the size and composition of the audience” (mean=4). Presenters also fear the “venue of the presentation” (mean=4).

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Generally, speakers' feeling of inadequacy has added on to their fear of oral presentation. The study by Gufriyansyah and Khairani (2019) also found oral presenters' fear do differ for different categories of audience. Presenters fear less if they know the audience had a lower level of education than them. They would be more nervous if they know the audience had a higher level of education. This study also found that presenters are affected by external factors. Their surroundings can hinder or facilitate effective presentations. Raja (2017) also found that the surroundings that the learners are in can either hinder or foster effective communication.

Pedagogical Implications

Findings in this study have shown that presenters feared oral presentations from internal and external factors. Perhaps instructors teaching oral presentations could consider some issues to reduce presenters' anxiety. According to Soomro, et al. (2019), instructors should provide enough practice. The communication instructors should provide undergraduates ample opportunities for the development of effective oral communication skills besides motivating the learners. In addition to that, there is a need for training to help learners reduce hindrance to effective presentations. Finally, learners should constantly be reminded of the importance of oral communication that goes beyond learning experiences in higher institutions. Future research could focus on investigating more factors that hinder effective oral presentations. Learners should also be interviewed on what they feel to be a conducive environment for effective oral presentation.

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