



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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Noor Hanim Rahmat, Elias S. Mohandas, Zarina Razlan, Mazlen Arepin, Aini Faridah Azizul Hassan, Siti Aishah Taib

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i7/14254>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i7/14254

Received: 16 May 2022, **Revised:** 20 June 2022, **Accepted:** 01 July 2022

Published Online: 23 July 2022

In-Text Citation: (Rahmat et al., 2022)

To Cite this Article: Rahmat, N. H., Mohandas, E. S., Razlan, Z., Arepin, M., Azizul Hassan, A. F., & Taib, S. A. (2022). Oral Presentation: Is there a Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Cause of Fear? *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 12(7), 1259 – 1270.

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Vol. 12, No. 7, 2022, Pg. 1259 – 1270

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Oral Presentation: Is there a Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Cause of Fear?

Noor Hanim Rahmat¹, Eliyas S. Mohandas², Zarina Razlan³,
Mazlen Arepin⁴, Aini Faridah Azizul Hassan⁵, Siti Aishah Taib⁶

^{1,6}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang, ³Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Segamat, ⁴Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, ^{2,5}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia
Email: noorh763@uitm.edu.my, eliyas9154@uitm.edu.my, zarina1260@uitm.edu.my, jasmaszen@uitm.edu.my, ainifari@uitm.edu.my, aishah711@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Many are afraid of public speeches ; be it in formal or informal settings. The reasons for this fear ranges from visible and non-visible factors. While many are able to cope well to overcome their fear of oral presentations, some are paralysed by this fear. Interestingly, one of the main evaluation for language learning is through oral presentation. The environment does play an important role in the learning of language .As such, the environment is also known to either reduce or produce fear among the language learners. This quantitative study is done to investigate the factors that lead to the fear of oral presentation, especially fear of negative evaluation. This study also explore the relationship between all the three constructs; fear of negative evaluation, external and internal reasons. 129 respondents responded to the instrument survey. The survey has 4 sections, section A has items on demographic profile, section B has 9 items on fear of negative evaluation, section C has 7 items on external factors, and section D has 7 items on internal factors. Findings revealed that there is a weak positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and external and internal factors. There is a strong positive relationship between external and internal; factors. These findings bear interesting implications in the teaching of oral presentation to language instructors. The findings in this study contributes to the body of knowledge on the fear of oral presentations among people in general and language learners specifically.

Keywords: Language Learning, Oral Presentation, Fear of Negative Evaluation, External Factors, Internal Factors.

Introduction

Background of Study

People fear oral presentations even if they have spent time to prepare for them. Many are afraid of public speeches ; be it in formal or informal settings. The reasons for this fear ranges from visible and non-visible factors. While many are able to cope well to overcome their fear of oral presentations, some are paralysed by this fear. According to Grieve,et.al

(2021), many presenters do develop the use of strategies to overcome their fear and somehow ace the presentations they claimed they were afraid to make initially. Failure to use the correct strategies can lead to further anxiety to a person. According to Rahmat (2019), sometimes, people's fear of oral presentation is caused by the person's trait and state apprehension. Trait apprehension refers to the personality of the person who can be more prone to being anxious than others. State apprehension refers to the surrounding condition that can reduce or produce more stress to the person.

Over the years, many embark on learning a new language every now and then. While language instructors try to make the lessons as relaxing and fun as possible, the learners cannot avoid from being stressed by evaluations. Interestingly, one of the main evaluation for language learning is through oral presentation. The environment does play an important role in the learning of language (Rahmat, 2018). For the presenters, the audience is also part of their environment. According to Gufriyansyah and Khairani (2019), the audience can either trigger the presenters' fear or even calm them down. Having supportive audience can somehow reduce the presenters' anxiety. Failure to reduce the anxiety can sometimes give them other related problems. According to Rahmat (2020), anxiety for foreign language learning causes other problems for learners. These problems may snowball to effect other performance and achievement in other language related areas; thus, creating a cycle of fear.

For language classrooms, one of the main evaluations for the learners is that of oral presentation. Is the environment the cause for presenters' fear? Are the presenters anxious about their oral presentations because they fear the negative evaluation that they will get from it? This study is therefore done to investigate fear of oral presentations among language learners. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How does fear of negative evaluation influence oral presentations?
- How do external factors influence oral presentations?
- How do internal factors influence oral presentations?
- Is there a relationship between fear of negative evaluation with external and internal factors?
- Is there a relationship between external and internal factors?

Literature Review

Fear of Oral Presentation

The fear of oral presentation can be seen as belonging to three main categories and they are (a) the trait of the person, (b) the language ability of the person and also (c) the state that the person is in with respect to the oral presentation. According to Rahmat (2019), (a) trait refers to the person individual characteristics. Some people are by nature easily stressed by situations or events they are not familiar with. Next, according to Belaman, et.al (2022), some presenters are concerned with their (b) language ability. This includes their vocabulary and grammar knowledge as well as their pronunciation. Finally, some people are concerned with the state they are in when they present. This can be the external environment like the position of the presenter when they present, the audio ability, the audience, etc. In addition to that, state anxiety can also refer to the evaluation that the presenter will get based on the presentation. In order to overcome this, Belaman, et.al (2022) suggests that the presenters use oral communication strategies can help balance the anxiety. The fear may be external or internal and can be reduced through the use of oral communication strategies such as social

affective, fluency oriented accuracy oriented, negotiation for meaning, message reduction, orientation & non-verbal strategies.

Past Studies in Fear of Oral Presentation

The qualitative study by Grieve, et.al (2021) was done to investigate the fears experienced and strategies used by students who fear public speaking, including oral presentations. The study was also done to determine whether their fear affected their experience of higher education. A qualitative survey comprising four open-ended questions was completed by 46 undergraduate and postgraduate students with a fear of public speaking from the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. Thematic analysis was used to identify the following 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. The results of this survey identified the specific fears students have in public speaking and provide evidence of the overall negative effect on their higher education experience. This survey provides further evidence that higher education institutions should acknowledge public speaking fear among some students and provide more support in oral presentation assessments.

The quantitative study by Rahmat (2020) explored the fear of foreign language learning. The instrument used is a survey. There were 7 items on demographic profile, 8 items for communication apprehension, 5 items for fear of test anxiety. There were also 9 items of fear of negative evaluation, and items on fear of language classes. Findings reveal that the communication apprehension that students portray, can snowball to learners fearing taking test and getting negative evaluation and then this fear may extend to fearing the foreign language classes

Gufriyansyah and Khairani (2019) explored the level of public speaking anxiety on 97 students (54 psychology students, and 43 medical students). Data were collected from a survey. It was known that 47.4% of students had low public speaking anxiety, 48.5% in moderate category of public speaking anxiety, and only 4.1% in the high category of public speaking anxiety. Then, 54 psychology students were investigated of their public speaking anxiety based on listener's characteristic. Result showed that there was the difference of public speaking anxiety based on listener's characteristic on psychology students, the students who spoke in front of the listeners with higher educational level were more anxious than those who spoke in front of the listeners with lower educational level.

Soomro et.al (2019) investigated the factors affecting oral presentation skills of undergraduate-learners of English that influence their academic performance which potentially can affect professional career. The study has used quantitative instrument as questionnaire at one Public Sector University. Purposive sampling method was used since participants were selected on specific criteria of only first year engineering undergraduates. The data were analysed through SPSS, v.20 for obtaining percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, and standard error of mean to be measured. The findings revealed that oral presentation skills as the most problematic for engineering undergraduates. The results also revealed that the several factors affected engineering undergraduates' oral presentations.

Next, the study by Tian and Mahmud (2018) investigated the factors that contribute to academic oral presentation anxiety. They also explored the differences between English majors and non-English majors in their strategy employment for academic oral presentations. They examined the relationship between academic oral presentation anxiety and strategy employment, and compare the differences in oral communication strategy employment between high-anxiety and low-anxiety students. A total of sixty-one participants participated in this study by answering two questionnaires. Results showed that the three major sources of anxiety related to content of presentation, oral proficiency, and delivery skill. Moreover, a significant difference was found in the use of Social Affective strategies between English majors and non-English majors. Besides, negative significant correlations were found in the use of Message Abandonment strategies and Attempt to Think in English strategies. Furthermore, a statistically significant difference was found in the use of Message Abandonment strategies between high-anxiety and low anxiety-students.

The study by Raja (2017) was conducted to analyse the reasons behind the anxiety level in undergraduate students of a public speaking class. He also recommended strategies to overcome this fear. This quantitative quantitative was done on a sample of 50 students using convenience sampling technique from a reputable private sector business school in Karachi. The findings showed that students who fear public speaking can perform well if they used certain strategies to fight their fears. 75% participants admitted their fear of public speaking and 95% participants agreed that if proper counseling, instruction and coaching is provided, this fear can be overcome. Research revealed that exposure to virtual environment can facilitate student confidence and enables them to face audience irrespective of the size.

Bulca and Safaie (2013) investigated the issues regarding speech-making. The data collected through interviews and other means are used at a later stage in order to propose practical solutions to the issue of speech-making in terms of effective content and delivery. The subjects of this study were sophomore students from the Management Faculty and Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Atılım University. A semi-structured interview form consisting eight open-ended questions. Results showed that the students at the Department of Foreign Languages, who take Eng. 202, the Presentation Skills Course, as a non-elective course benefited from the process of mini-presentations which helped them to bridge the gap between the stage and the audience, and their own writing which helped to organize their thoughts and speeches, along with the repeated opportunities for them to appear before public and, hence, manage their anxieties.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study is rooted from the constructs by (Carleton et al., 2007). They revealed that the fear of negative evaluation often hinder presenters from doing their best. Fear of negative evaluation ranges from the feelings that the presenter get from what the audience (evaluators) think. The fear can be caused by external and internal reasons. In addition to that, the arrows show the possible relationship between all the constructs; fear of negative evaluation, external and internal reasons.

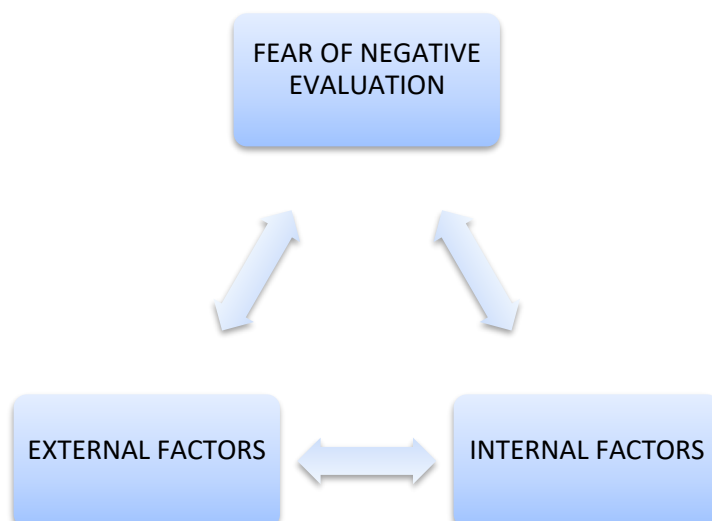


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and their Reasons

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to investigate the factors that lead to the fear of oral presentation, especially fear of negative evaluation. This study also explore the relationship between all the three constructs; fear of negative evaluation, external and internal reasons. 129 respondents responded to the instrument (refer to table 1) which is a survey. The survey has 4 sections, section A has items on demographic profile, section B has 9 items on fear of negative evaluation, section C has 7 items on external reasons, and section D has 7 items on internal reasons.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	CONSTRUCTS	NO OF ITEMS
B	Fear of Negative Evaluation	9
C	External Factors	7
D	Internal Factors	7

Table 2

Reliability Statistics for the Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.855	23

Table 2 shows the reliability statistics for the survey. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .855 thus showing a high external reliability for the instrument used.

Findings

Findings for Fear of Negative Evaluation

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How does fear of negative evaluation influence oral presentations?

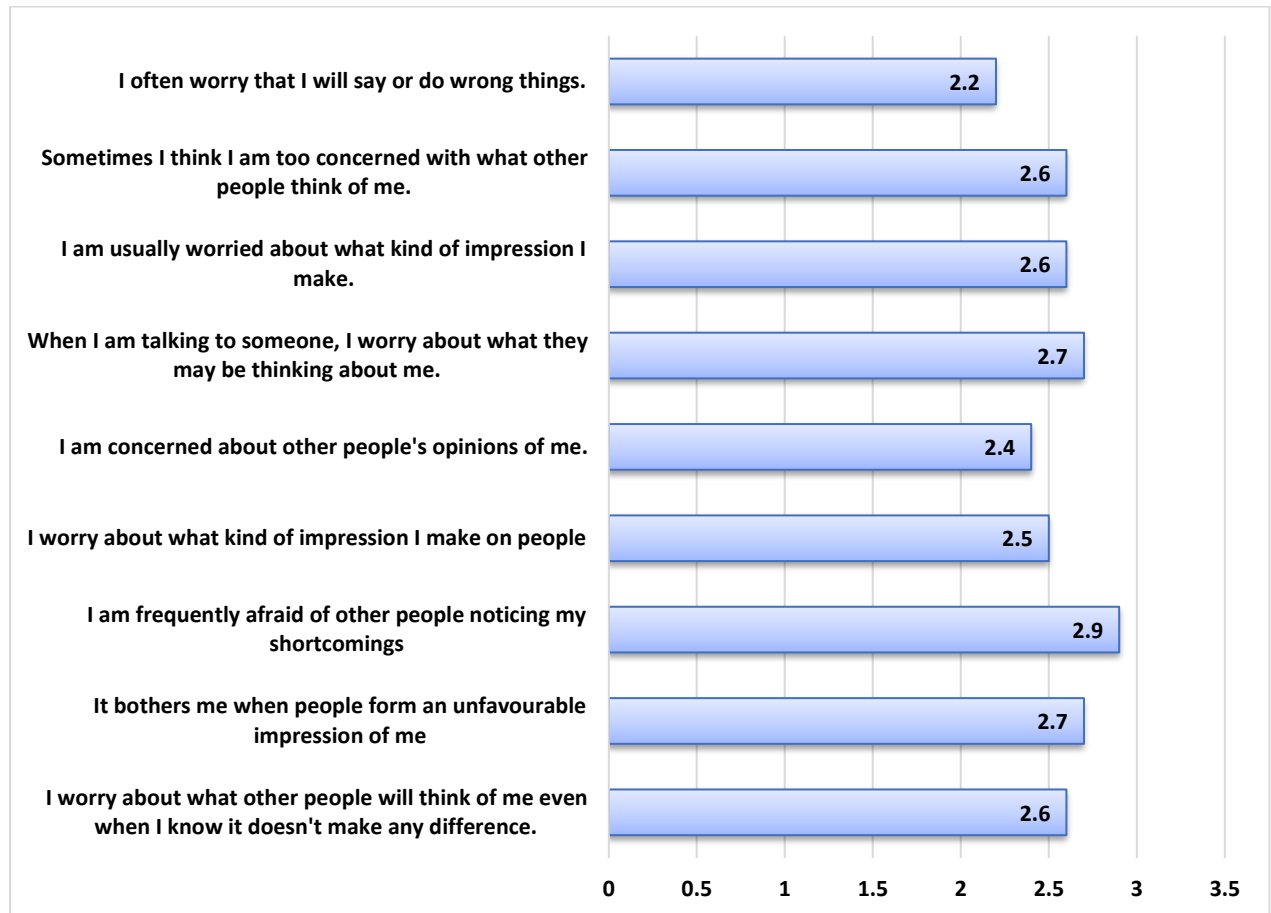


Figure 2- Mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation

Figure 2 shows the mean for fear of negative evaluation. The highest mean (2.9) is for “frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings”. This is followed by 2 items with a mean of 2.7 and they are “bothers me when people form an unfavourable impression of me”, and “When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me.”.

Findings for External Factors

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do external factors influence oral presentations?

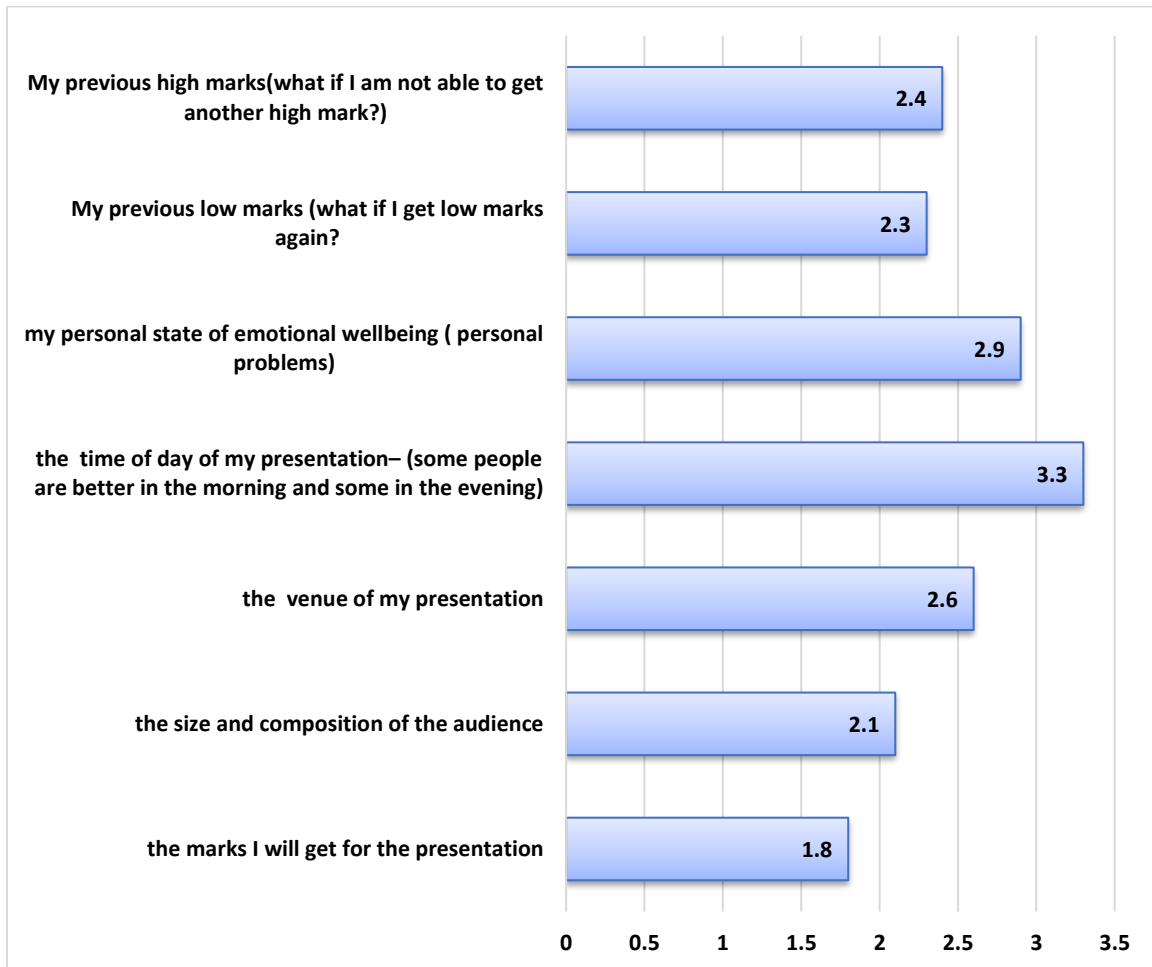


Figure 3- Mean for External factors

The mean score for external factors is presented in figure 3. The highest mean is 3.3 for “the time of day of my presentation– (some people are better in the morning and some in the evening)”. Next at a mean of 2.9 is “my personal state of emotional wellbeing (personal problems)” Interestingly, the respondents reported the lowest mean (1.8) for “the marks I will get for the presentation”.

Findings for Internal Factors

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do internal factors influence oral presentations?

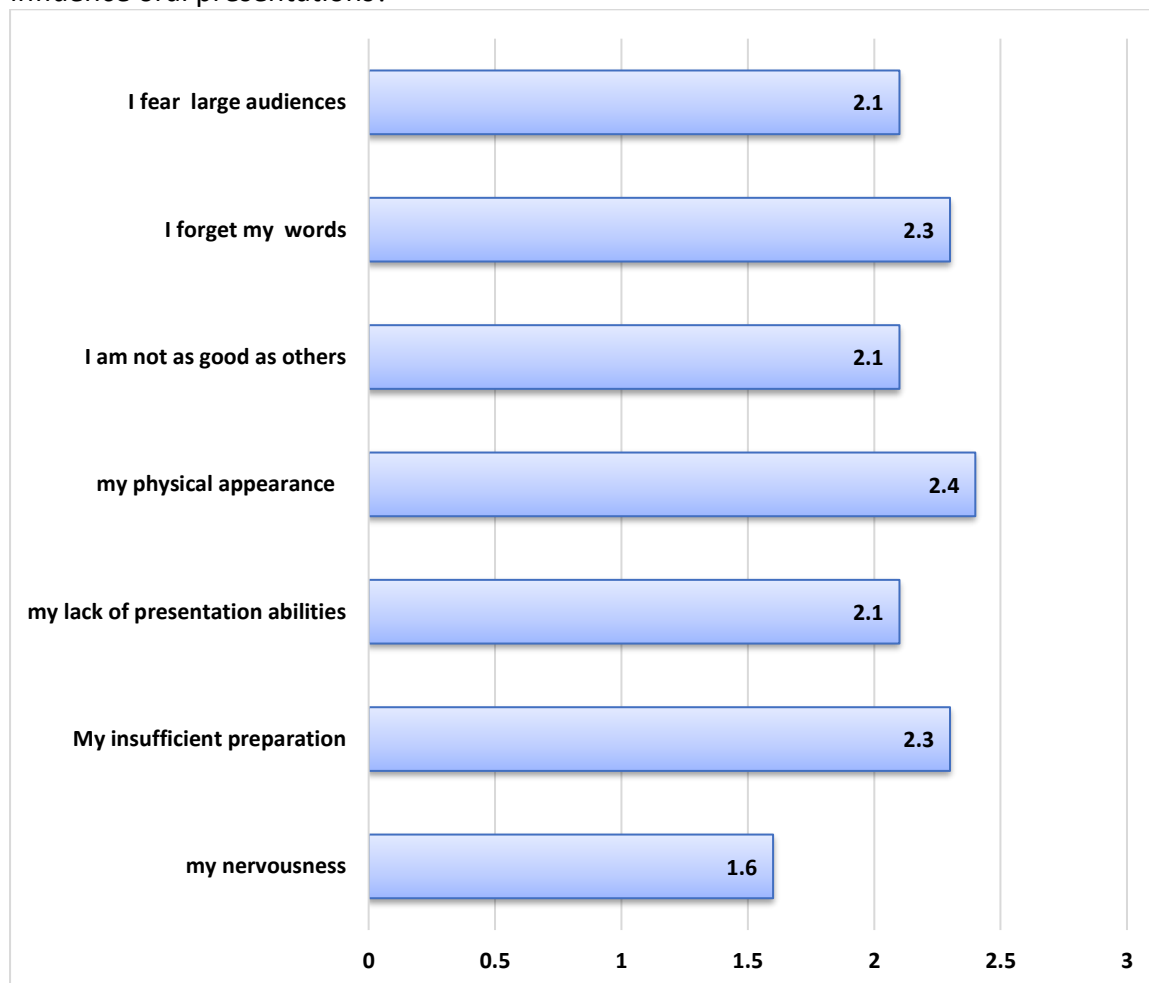


Figure 4- Mean for Internal Factors

Figure 4 shows the mean for internal factors. The lowest mean (1.6) is for “nervousness”. The highest mean (2.4) is for “my physical appearance”. This is followed by two items with a mean of 2.3 and they are “insufficient preparation” and “forget my words”.

Findings for Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation

This section presents data to answer research question 1: Is there a relationship between fear of negative evaluation with external and internal factors? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between fear of negative evaluation and external factors, correlation coefficient was conducted.

Table 3 shows that there is a moderate significant association between fear of negative evaluation and external factors ($r=.371$) and ($p=.000$). The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. According to Jackson (2015), positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. Hence, there is a weak positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and external factors.

Table 3
 Correlations for Fear of Negative Evaluation and External Factors

		FearsofNegat iveEvaluation	ExternalFacto r
FearsofNegativeEvaluati on	Pearson Correlation	1	.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	129	129
ExternalFactor	Pearson Correlation	.372**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	129	129

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

Next, table 4 shows that there is a moderate significant association between fear of negative evaluation and internal factors ($r=.447$) and ($p=.000$). The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. According to Jackson (2015), positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. Hence, there is a weak positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and internal factors.

Table 4
 Correlations for Fear of Negative Evaluation and Internal Factors

		FearsofNegat iveEvaluation	InternalFacto rs
FearsofNegativeEvaluati on	Pearson Correlation	1	.447**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	129	129
InternalFactors	Pearson Correlation	.447**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	129	129

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

Findings for Relationship between External and Internal Factors

This section presents data to answer research question 1: Is there a relationship between external and internal factors? Table 5 shows that there is a moderate significant association between fear of external and internal factors ($r=.556$) and ($p=.000$). The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. According to Jackson (2015), positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. Hence, there is a strong positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and internal factors.

Table 5
Correlations for External Reasons and Internal Reasons

		ExternalFactor r	InternalFactor rs
ExternalFactor	Pearson Correlation	1	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	129	129
InternalFactors	Pearson Correlation	.556**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	129	129

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

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

A summary of the findings also show that presenters are affected by their fear of negative evaluation, external and internal factors. Presenters worry if the audience can see their shortcomings and they worry about not giving a good impression. This findings is in accordance with the study by Raja (2017); Bulca and Safaue (2013) who also reported that presenters are anxious with how they are portrayed to their audience.

Next, a summary of the findings also show interesting relationship across all the three constructs; fear of negative evaluation, external and internal factors. There is a weak positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation with external and internal factors. This means that presenter who have the fear of negative evaluation are likely (weak positive relationship) to be concerned with their external surroundings. They are also likely (weak positive relationship) to be bothered by what they think of themselves. However, there is a strong positive relationship between external and internal factors. This means presenters who are concerned with themselves are most (strong positive relationship) likely to be bothered also by the surrounding environment of their presentation. Similar findings were also reported by researchers like Belaman et. al (2022); Grieve et. al (2021) and also Gufriyansyah and Khairani (2019) who also found that speech anxiety and speech ability are related to one another.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestion for Future Research

The teaching of oral presentations need to also take into account on how to manage the fear of oral presentation. Learners should be guided to handle their oral presentation fears; both from external and internal sources. Future researchers could explore issues like what do learners do to overcome their fear before and even during the oral presentations. Qualitative studies could be done to investigate what learners feel when they fear oral presentation, and what the do to overcome the feeling.

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