

EFL University Students' Anxiety in Classroom Presentations: A Case Study

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Abstract

Delivering oral presentation in English is one of the difficult activities that demands English language learners to have huge courage and confidence in conveying message to the listeners. However, foreign language anxiety, which is a psychological phenomenon that affects learning, is considered as an obstacle to this end. Based on that, the current study aims to investigate the level and kind of anxiety that EFL university students have in oral presentation. In light of that, data were collected via a questionnaire consisted of (18) items on three themes: (6) items on Communication Apprehension, (6) items on Test Anxiety, and (6) items on Fear of Negative Evaluation. The questionnaire was presented to the sample of the study which included (90) male and female participants of third stage students at university level. Following that, data were analyzed statistically using SPSS program and the results show that EFL university students have high level of anxiety in oral presentation that demands speaking skill. Besides, the results indicate that there is no statistical difference between males and females in terms of level of anxiety, both are high. Finally, the study ends with some conclusions and recommendations.

Keywords: Anxiety, EFL, Oral Presentation.

1. Introduction

Feelings of anxiety can manifest as a feeling associated with discomfort, and research shows that's a common occurrence phenomenon when learning English as a foreign language. Many scholars believe that speaking is the main reason to feel anxious about foreign languages, because students have to process the input language and give their own thoughts during class (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1999; Young, 1992). To improve their speaking skill, students often participate in various classroom activities, such as giving presentations or participating in group discussions. However, these activities can be difficult and counterproductive to the learning process. Therefore, speaking in a foreign language is considered to be the most anxiety-provoking aspect of learning a foreign language.

Foreign language anxiety is an undeniable fact that can significantly undermine the psychological state of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and hinder their language acquisition. EFL students may experience excessive levels of anxiety during their studies, leading to stress and anxiety that lowers their self-esteem. It can also interfere with their language learning and is considered a significant concern in the fields of psychology and education. Therefore, researchers were motivated to investigate this common problem and find ways to alleviate it.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

With the increasing number of learners of another language, especially learning English as foreign language, it has become important to investigate the factors that affect speaking activities. One of these factors is foreign language speaking anxiety which is a common phenomenon in classroom activities (Shabani, 2012). Due to this phenomenon, students feel discouraged to participate in foreign language classroom activities, especially activities that require speaking in the class. It is a problematic area that most learners suffer from while speaking and communicating in the target language. Therefore, the current study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Does anxiety affect EFL university students' oral presentation in English?
2. What kind of anxiety has more negative effects on EFL university students' oral performance?
3. Is there any relation between students' gender and the level of anxiety in oral presentation?

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

It is hypothesized that:

1. Anxiety negatively affects EFL university students' oral presentation in English.
2. Fear of negative evaluation has more negative effects on EFL university students' oral presentation.
3. There is no statistical difference between gender and the level of anxiety in oral presentation.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The current study aims at:

1. Providing theoretical framework on the concept of anxiety, its types, factors, and effects on speaking activities.
2. Investigating EFL university students' level of anxiety in oral presentation.
3. Identifying which type of anxiety has more negative effect on EFL students' oral presentation.

4. Exploring gender difference in terms of level of anxiety in oral presentation.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The present research is limited to investigate EFL university students' anxiety in classroom presentation according to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). It is further limited to a sample of (90), 45 male and 45 female, third year students in the Department of English at Al-Noor University College, during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023.

2. Theoretical Background

This section provides information on the theoretical part of the research topic, as the following sub-sections tackle the details of the topic in terms of concept, definition, types, factors, etc.

2.1 The Concept of Anxiety

Anxiety is a type of emotional state associated with physiological arousal and is classified as one of the various emotions, such as sadness, fear and anxiety that contribute to the psychological state of the individual. It is considered a psychological concept commonly defined by psychologists as a feeling of insecurity, a vague feeling of fear indirectly related to an object. Anxiety encompasses a range of physical, behavioural, and cognitive responses that occur when an individual experiences negative expectations or feelings of failure related to foreign language learning (Herwanto, 2013: 20).

There are many reasons why students cannot deliver presentations. When it comes to public speaking, individuals often experience anxiety, which can interfere with their ability to communicate their message effectively. Although this study focuses on the anxiety experienced by EFL students during presentations, it is essential to have a general understanding of the psychology of anxiety. Anxiety is related to negative human emotions, and anxious people often experience stress, anxiety, frustration, tension, and fear. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety is "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous human system".

Accordingly, some researchers have come up with definitions of anxiety that share common characteristics such as fear, apprehension, and irritability (Horwitz & Young, 1991). These traits are associated with negative self-esteem and low self-esteem, causing individuals to avoid academic tasks, such as speaking in front of friends, due to anxiety during the learning process.

2.2 Types of Anxiety

There are two types of anxiety depending on the situation and the characteristics of the emotional response. These types are called trait anxiety and state anxiety (Macintyre and Gardner, 1991).

2.2.1 Trait Anxiety

This type of anxiety, known as trait anxiety, is characterized by persistent feelings of anxiety that affect learners' performance in the classroom or in other settings, regardless of the task, subject, or goal. It stems from a constant lack of confidence in one's abilities, which leads to low self-esteem and a general lack of confidence in various areas of functioning. Trait anxiety can be thought of as personal anxiety that occurs in any situation and in any particular task (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991).

Huda (2018) suggests that trait anxiety is the tendency to become anxious in different situations and is related to personality traits. It is a relatively stable aspect of an individual's personality and it is innate.

2.2.2 State Anxiety

State anxiety is a type of anxiety that is temporary and occurs during specific situations that are considered threatening, such as taking an exam or undergoing surgery. It is characterized by a subjective feeling of tension (Macintyre and Gardner, 1991). Dornyei (2018: 22) explains that this type of anxiety is situational and can be called situational self-esteem. For example, a learner may feel confident when writing an essay, but less confident when performing speaking tasks or vice versa. Teachers can help students deal with this type of anxiety. However, it is particularly problematic for learners' development of speaking skill, as it can prevent them from using language actively, even when they have the skills and knowledge to do so. Therefore, anxiety can be divided into two categories based on intensity, duration, and situation: state anxiety, which is the feeling of fear and tension in response to a particular situation, and trait anxiety, which is more intense anxiety that depends on the individual, regardless of the situation.

2.3 Factors of Anxiety

According to Asnur (2010) factors of anxiety in classroom can be divided into two, namely internal factors and external factors as follows:

2.3.1 Internal Factors

They are sub-divided into the following;

- A. Fear of Failure: This refers to the fear of making mistakes or being unable to answer questions asked by the audience, which can lead to social embarrassment (Linkguel, in Syarifuddin, 2006).

- B. Fear of Criticism: This is a common form of anxiety where the speaker is worried that their ideas will be ignored or dismissed by the audience.
- C. Speech Anxiety: This occurs when the speaker is concerned about their language proficiency, such as their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Making mistakes in speaking can lead to increased anxiety and a decline in performance.
- D. Negative Experiences: Negative past experiences with public speaking can lead to anxiety in future speaking engagements.
- E. Fear of Losing the Thread of Material: Speakers may experience anxiety if they forget their material or cannot remember what they want to say during their presentation.
- F. Fear of Being Stopped: Speakers may worry that their presentation will be interrupted or stopped due to poor performance.
- G. Negative Thinking: Negative thoughts before and during the presentation can lead to decreased performance and increased anxiety (Ansur, 2010).

Other factors that contribute to anxiety when speaking have been identified by various scholars. Tanveer (2007) suggests that internal factors such as students' opinions and beliefs about language learning and fear of loss of identity can cause anxiety. Jones (2004) has found that students are often afraid of making mistakes and appear inferior in front of their peers. Liu and Chen (2013) indicate that students' anxiety may stem from the fear that their peers have better English ability and performance. Pronunciation, grammar, and understandable language are some of the concerns of students when speaking in a foreign language (Williams and Andrade, 2008). Zhiping & Paramasivan (2013) add that shyness also plays a role in students' anxiety. In addition, the fear of being judged negatively has been identified by Liu & Jackson (2008) as a possible factor in anxiety.

2.3.2 External Factors

Speaking anxiety can also be affected by external factors, such as the environment in which the presentation takes place, including the number of people in the room, and the behavior of the audience, supervisors, and reviewers. According to Syarifuddin (2006), an inexperienced speaker may feel anxious because he does not know the situation and does not know what to expect (Ansur, 2010). The researchers also explored the extrinsic factors that may lead to EFL anxiety in classrooms activities. Sato (2003) suggests that large class sizes and teacher-centered environments can create an atmosphere that makes

students feel unsafe and less willing to participate. Similarly, Tseng (2012) notes that a strict and formal classroom environment can make students tense during speaking activities. Woodrow (2006) adds that presentations, role plays and formal discussions are the most anxiety-provoking speaking activities.

In addition, teachers can also be an external source of speech anxiety if they teach inappropriately or unrelated to their students (Worde, 1998). Worde (2003) adds that the way teachers correct students' mistakes can cause anxiety, such as correcting mistakes before students have finished speaking can make students frustrated.

2.4 Foreign Language Anxiety

Most language students experience foreign language anxiety, which can result in stress, doubt, difficulty, loss of trust, conflict, and negative interactions. Kurtus (2001) argues that the fear of making mistakes or appearing less intelligent is a significant factor in students' anxiety. Additionally, they are apprehensive about being judged by others if they make mistakes. Making mistakes is the primary reason that students hesitate to speak English in the classroom.

According to Hashemi (2011: 2), language-related anxiety has been identified as a significant barrier to foreign or second language learning in recent decades. As a result, language anxiety can negatively affect how students learn or acquire the target language. It is a psychological state that psychologists often describe as a vague fear that is not directly related to an object.

Sivadjati (2016) adds that oral presentation can be difficult because it makes the presenter to communicate the message effectively in appropriate language that is easily understood by the audience. Therefore, oral presentations can provide students with valuable practice not only to present their material in front of others using appropriate language, but also to improve their confidence. However, to be successful in this field, presenters must have good presentation skills.

2.5 Types of Foreign Language Anxiety

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), there are three types of anxiety in foreign language: they are (1) communication apprehension (CA), (2) test anxiety, (3) fear of negative evaluation.

2.5.1 Communication Apprehension (CA)

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), communication apprehension (CA) is a form of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety related to interpersonal communication. This type of apprehension is often present in public speaking situations, especially when students are asked to speak in

front of others. As a result, they may become shy and unable to reach their full potential. The degree of shyness can vary widely from person to person and from situation to situation.

2.5.2 Test Anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) claim that test anxiety is another aspect closely related to anxiety about foreign languages. Test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety that stems from the fear of failure. Language classes tend to be particularly susceptible to test anxiety due to the constantly evaluative nature of performance. Unfortunately, very anxious foreign/second language students need regular evaluation from the instructor, who is often the only fluent speaker in the class. It should be noted that speaking tests can induce both test anxiety and oral anxiety in vulnerable students.

2.5.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation

Horwitz et. al (1986) state that the fear of negative evaluation by others is related to the second component, test anxiety, of second/foreign language anxiety. This fear is not limited to test situations but can arise in any social or assessment setting, including job interviews or speaking in a second/language class.

The range of anxiety can be broader because it is caused not only by the teacher's assessment but also by other students in the class. In addition, anxiety can stem from individual differences that exist in an English classroom. Individual differences refer to psychological traits or habitual propensities that reveal the consistency, inner cause, and uniqueness of the individual (Carver et. al, 2000).

In other words, individual differences are related to the level of competition between students in the class. Students tend to judge their abilities relative to their peers based on their own perceptions, which can lead to stress and anxiety as they perceive themselves to be inferior to their peers.

2.6 Anxiety Scale in Foreign language Classes

As an aim to address the lack of suitable tools for measuring anxiety about foreign languages, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This tool is used to determine the anxiety level of individuals when learning a foreign language. FLCAS consists of 33 items with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale includes three areas: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. FLCAS has become a commonly used tool for measuring foreign language anxiety due to its specificity and situation-specific nature (Hewitt and Stevenson, 2012). Several studies have proved reliability of FLCAS, according to Cronbach's alpha that ranged from 0.92 to 0.95 (e.g.

Aida, 1994; Kim, 2009; Mahmood & Iqbal, 2010; Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009; Noormohamadi, 2009).

To put it more simply, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is a widely used tool to measure the anxiety levels of adult language learners. FLCAS has been tested for its reliability and validity in different cultures, contexts and ages, and studies have shown it to be a reliable and valid tool.

3. Previous Studies

A number of studies have been conducted on foreign language anxiety (FLSA). For example, Abrar, Failasofah, and Masbirorotni (2016) conducted a study on speaking anxiety of EFL students in an English teacher training program in Jambi, Indonesia. The purpose of the study is to examine the FLSA of 72 second-year EFL students at a university. A closed questionnaire based on Syakuri (1987) and Horwitz et al. (1986), was used to measure participants' FLSA and examine possible gender and ability differences. The study showed that EFL learners experience high anxiety when speaking English. Additionally, gender was found to have no significant effect on FLSA, while proficiency level did, with more experienced students showing less anxiety.

Later, Anshori (2016) conducted another study on students' speaking anxiety in the third year of the English Language Education Department at IAIN Surakarta 2015/2016 academic year. The results of the study showed that students of the third year have anxiety factors, which are lack of preparation, personal and interpersonal factors, and fear of making mistakes. The researcher also found strategies that students used to reduce anxiety while speaking in English, such as preparing material, deep breathing, and relaxation.

More recently, Mitha and Amri (2018) conducted a study on the speaking anxiety of fourth year English language students in the Department of English at the University of Negeri Padang. Based on the analysis of the research, it was found that the level of students' speaking anxiety is at an average level and the percentage was 82%. The types that respondents faced were fear of speaking test (44%), fear of communication (34%) and feedback from peers and lecturers (22%). The dominant type of speech anxiety was the fear of speaking.

4. Methodology

To achieve the aims and verify hypotheses of this research, a description of the practical part of the current study is explained in the following sub-sections.

4.1 Population and Sample

Population of the study included all 3rd year students in the English Department at Al-Noor University College. This population was selected on purpose because students at this level practice delivering oral presentation in Curricula and Methods of Teaching course. The sample included (90) participants, 45 males and 45 females, from the third stage who all were chosen randomly from the research population.

4.2 The Questionnaire

As an instrument of the study, the researchers constructed a questionnaire adapted from theoretical research and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Subjects of the study were required to respond to all items according to three point Likert Scale (Always, Sometimes, Never). The questionnaire includes (18) items on three themes: (6) items on Communication Apprehension, (6) items on Test Anxiety, and (6) items on Fear of Negative Evaluation.

4.3 Procedures

Before implementing the study, the items of the questionnaire have been presented to jury experts to judge on their suitability and relevance to measure students' anxiety in classroom presentation. Remarks concerning modifications, suitability and relevance of the items have been approved by the jury members to be suitable, relevant, and valid for the purpose of the current research.

Following that, the questionnaire of the study was submitted to the participants through using Google Forms to respond to all items within 45 minutes.

5. Results and Discussion

Data were analyzed and calculated statistically through using SPSS program and the results are shown in the following tables:

Table (1) Results of Participants' Responses

Item	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value	T _ Test		Sig.
					Cal.	Tab.	
Communication Apprehension	90	12.4556	2.12614	12	2.033	1.990 (0.05) (89)	Sig.
Test Anxiety	90	13.3667	2.34856	12	5.521		Sig.
Fear of Negative Evaluation	90	12.5667	2.56182	12	2.098		Sig.
Total	90	38.3889	5.19441	36	4.363		Sig.

Based on the results shown in the preceding table, it is found that participants have high level of anxiety in all types of anxiety since the calculated T-test values are higher than the tabulated t-test value. It is worth mentioning that Test Anxiety, according to the results, has more negative effect on students' anxiety level in oral classroom presentation. These results indicate that the first hypothesis of the study which reads "anxiety negatively affects EFL university students' oral presentation in English" is proved while the second hypothesis which reads "fear of negative evaluation has more negative effect on EFL university students' oral presentation" is rejected and the alternative is accepted. The following figure illustrates the mean scores of participants' responses:

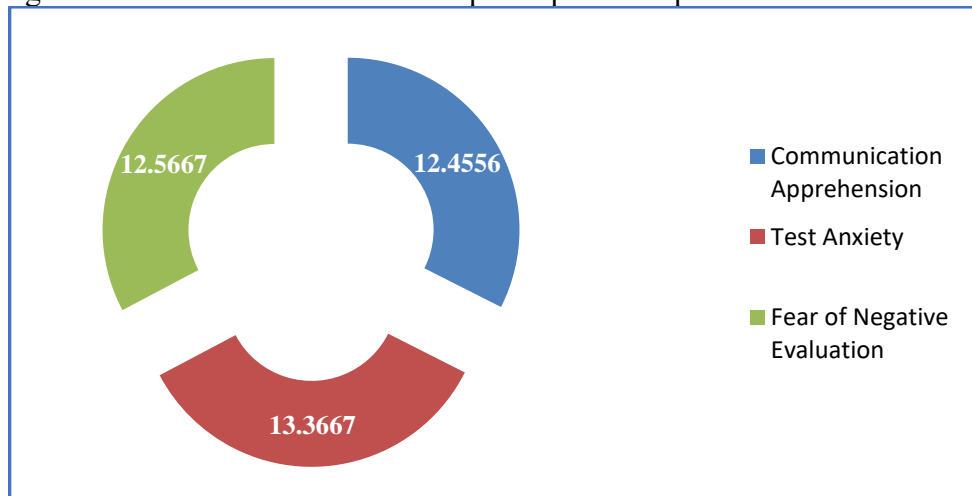


Figure (1) Mean Scores of Participants' Responses

Moreover, as far as the gender and the level of anxiety are concerned, results are shown in table (2) below:

Table (2) Results of Participants' Responses According to Gender

Item	Gender	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	T _ Test		Sig.		
					Cal.	Tab.			
Communication Apprehension	male	45	12.3778	2.40538	0.345	1.990 (0.05) (88)	Non . Sig.		
	female	45	12.5333	1.82906					
Test Anxiety	male	45	13.3556	2.59506	0.045		1.990 (0.05) (88)	Non . Sig.	
	female	45	13.3778	2.10291					
Fear of Negative	male	45	12.4667	2.54594	0.369			1.990 (0.05) (88)	Non .

Evaluation	female	45	12.666 7	2.60245			Sig.
Total	male	45	38.200 0	6.06255	0.34 3		Non
	female	45	38.577 8	4.21301			Sig.

As shown in the preceding table, there is no statistical difference between male and female participants since the tabulated t-test values are lower than the tabulated t-test values. Thus, the third hypothesis which reads “there is no statistical difference between gender and the level of anxiety in oral presentation” is proved.

The results of the current study are compatible with the results of the previous studies discussed in section (3) showing that EFL university students are highly anxious when speaking and delivering oral presentation in English and that oral test anxiety is the most anxiety provoking one.

6. Conclusions

Based on the theoretical research and the results obtained, the study provides interesting insights into EFL university students’ anxiety in classroom presentation. In light of that, due to high level of anxiety in classroom presentation, EFL students encounter difficulties in delivering presentation in English and discuss or share problems with instructors. It is concluded that the majority of the students felt anxiety due to their fear of making oral mistakes, shyness, fear of apprehension of instructors’ questions, fear of correction feedback, underestimating oneself, fear of criticism and negative evaluation of instructor and classmates. Therefore, EFL university students have high level of anxiety in oral presentation which, in turn, affect their performance and academic achievement.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations are suggested to reduce the level of students’ anxiety in classroom presentation:

1. Accepting students’ mistakes as a natural element of learning and providing feedback that saves their face.
2. Instructors are recommended to encourage students to practice speaking in pairs or small groups; due to the fact that practice helps improving speaking in English and reducing foreign language anxiety.
3. Creating a healthy relationship between instructor and students to promote positive behavior and reduce their level of anxiety.

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