

English Proficiency, Public Speaking Experience, and Communication Apprehension in Oral Presentation of Polytechnic Students

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ABSTRACT

Oral presentation apprehension plagues people when they communicate orally, especially when they make oral presentations in public. This study examined the relationship between English proficiency, public speaking experience, and communication apprehension in polytechnic students during oral presentations. The study involved 62 students from a polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia, who filled in the PRCA-24 questionnaire that focused on the elements of public speaking. The results showed that 6.4% of the students had a low level of communication apprehension, while 71% had a moderate level of communication apprehension. For 22.6% of the students, the level of apprehension was very high. The students felt anxious and uncomfortable when asked to give an oral presentation. The t-test showed that the male students significantly differed from the female students regarding their communication apprehension. The mean scores showed that the male students experienced greater communication apprehension ($M = 2.19 \pm 0.52$) than the female students ($M = 2.00 \pm 0.44$). There was a significant negative relationship between oral presentation experience and the level of communication apprehension. These results may suggest that extensive training in public speaking can improve public speaking skills and enhance employability opportunities.

Keywords: communication apprehension, polytechnic students, oral presentation, PRCA-24, English proficiency, public speaking experience

INTRODUCTION

Social interaction depends on effective communication at the verbal and non-verbal level. Communication aims to share an idea or information with a specific audience to achieve a communication goal. Communication is a two-way process of sending messages to the target audience and receiving appropriate feedback on the message conveyed (Bhasin 2022). Good communication skills are needed in daily interactions and formal communication, such as in the workplace. For example, as aspiring accountants, accounting students need to be able to communicate information to users in operations, finance or management (Tabassum and Hossain 2020). Cerezo-Narváez, Bastante-Ceca, and Yaguee-Blanco (2018) stated that professional success depends on synthesising three core competencies: Communication, intellectual, and interpersonal skills.

One obstacle to effective communication is anxiety. Regardless of age or developmental level, people affected by anxiety in communication will inevitably experience emotional and behavioural changes (Baroi et al. 2020). Anxiety and fear are common uncomfortable situations that all people face during communication, whether it is a presentation, a conversation with an honourable person, or formal or informal feedback (Razawi, Zulkornain, and Razlan 2019). This state of worry and anxiety in communication affects a person's behaviour, thinking and reasoning, and leads to severe depression

(Amir et al. 2022). In the context of education, communication apprehension is a psychological disorder such that students need the help of teachers or counsellors to address it.

Researchers such as West and Turner (2008) have defined communication anxiety as communication apprehension or anxiety regarding negative feelings that individuals experience when communicating, typically in tension, anxiousness or panic when speaking. For some people, anxiety arises from fear of contact with others (Sellnow, 2005). The anxiety these people feel when communicating with others manifests in nervousness (Weiten, Dunn, and Hammer, 2009). McCroskey (1982) sees anxiety as situational and linked to direct or indirect interpersonal communication experiences. An example of an anxiety-provoking situation is an oral presentation where students present tasks to the class for grading purposes and are the centre of attention.

Studies have shown that various factors lead to communication apprehensions, such as personality, audience, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of preparation, but language proficiency seems to be the most prevalent factor (Benraghda, Radzuan, and Ali 2017; Grieve et al. 2021; Naser and Isa, 2021; Prastiwi, 2012; Razawi, Zulkornain, and Razlan, 2019). Better mastery of the language would likely reduce the fear of making mistakes and give students more confidence. However, some researchers (Naser and Isa, 2021; Yaikhong and Usaha, 2012) found that students with good academic performance are still nervous when speaking in public. We assume that experience in public speaking may influence the level of communication apprehension, but this has not yet been investigated based on our literature review.

This study investigated the influence of English proficiency and public speaking experience on communication apprehension in polytechnic students during oral presentations. The objectives of the study are to (1) determine the extent of students' communication apprehension during oral presentations; (2) determine the relationship between students' communication apprehension and their English proficiency; and (3) determine the relationship between students' communication apprehension and public speaking experience. In this study, the term "public speaking experience" refers to past experiences in making oral presentations.

**LITERATURE
REVIEW**

**Factors
Contributing to
Communication
Apprehension**

Communication apprehension in oral presentations is influenced by various factors, such as personality, audience, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of preparation, but language proficiency seems to be the most prevalent factor in different groups of students and environments (Benraghda, Radzuan, and Ali 2017; Grieve et al., 2021; Naser and Isa, 2021; Prastiwi, 2012; Razawi, Zulkornain, and Razlan 2019).

In general, students have moderate levels of communication apprehension. For example, Aeni et al. (2017) studied marine students and showed that 20%, 60% and 20% had low, moderate and high levels of apprehension, respectively. Data were collected through Adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaires from 10 first-year students of the nautical programme at AIPI Makassar of Akademi Maritim Indonesia (Indonesian Maritime Academy). Overall, the students were often nervous when communicating orally in English as a foreign language. Speaking in public caused the most anxiety among the students. Students in the high apprehension category showed more symptoms than those in the moderate and low apprehension categories.

Prastiwi (2012) conducted a case study among five first-year students taking the Interpersonal Speaking course at the English Department of Satya Wacana Christian