

[Open Peer Review on Qeios](#)

Public Speaking Training Plan for Mitigating Oral Communication Apprehension

Marcus Gee-Whai Kho¹, Su-Hie Ting²

¹ Kuching Polytechnic

² Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

This paper presents a public speaking training plan adapted from Toastmasters International's Handbook of Competent Communication to reduce students' communication apprehension. The training plan draws on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which links experience, perception, cognition and behaviour, making it particularly well suited for developing practical skills such as public speaking. The programme engages participants in a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation consistent with successful public speaking training principles. The training addresses aspects of public speaking that often contribute to communication apprehension, such as language structure, language use, non-verbal communication and voice modulation. The programme also emphasises active experimentation through visual aids and the delivery of persuasive and inspiring speeches so that participants have ample opportunity to practise and hone their public speaking skills. This approach effectively reduces communication apprehension and gives students the skills and confidence to deliver impressive oral presentations. However, the effectiveness of this training plan can be influenced by various factors, such as cultural background, language proficiency, and individual personality traits. Therefore, successful training should be flexible and adaptable to meet learners' different needs and contexts.

Marcus Gee-Whai Kho^{1,*}, Su-Hie Ting²

¹*Department of General Studies, Politeknik Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3421-8254>*

²*Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2479-6395>

***Corresponding author:** marcus.k@poliku.edu.my

Keywords: communication apprehension, public speaking, experiential learning, Toastmasters International, public speaking training plan.

Introduction

A common problem faced by many students worldwide is oral communication apprehension. It is described as the worry or discomfort a person feels when preparing for oral encounters such as presentations or speeches (McCroskey, 2013). This anxiety can manifest itself in many ways, such as increased heart rate, sweating, or even panic attacks, and it can seriously affect academic and personal development. For example, students may refrain from speaking up in class or avoid giving presentations, which can limit their learning opportunities and adversely affect their grades (Daly & Stafford, 1984). At-risk students often appear to lack confidence in classroom communication. By definition, at-risk students have experienced academic failure, which can create communication apprehension and fear of failure. Their family environment, where parents may not have a college degree, and siblings may have dropped out of school, often exacerbates this problem. In these situations, schools do not encourage dialogue as students may feel alienated or think they are doomed to fail like their relatives, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Poor language mastery heightens the problem of oral communication apprehension. Limited English proficiency is an important factor affecting the oral communication skills of these at-risk students in second and foreign-language classrooms (Chesebro, McCroskey, Atwater, Bahrenfuss, Cawelti, Gaudino, & Hodges, 1992). For example, a student with problems with English grammar may be afraid to speak in front of the class for fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed by classmates. It takes time to build students' English proficiency in an environment where some speak little or no English during the day (Marzuki, Ting, Jerome, Chuah & Misieng, 2013). However, it may be achievable to train students to perform public speaking with confidence at their existing level of language proficiency.

A quicker way to overcome oral communication apprehension is through public speaking training. This can include giving speeches, participating in discussions or performing in front of the class. These practices can reduce the student's communication apprehension and help them feel more comfortable speaking in front of an audience. For example, a student who is initially afraid to give a presentation may gain more confidence and reduce their fears after several practice sessions and helpful criticism. Conversational skills courses conducted in an informal and non-threatening environment