

**I-ROLE 2023****International Conference of Research on Language Education****INVESTIGATING SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG PRE-SERVICE  
ESL TEACHERS IN ORAL PRESENTATION**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to categorise the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during their oral presentations. There were 10 pre-service ESL teachers involved in this qualitative case study. The 10 pre-service ESL teachers were selected through purposive sampling from a private higher learning institution, took part in a semi-structured interview discussion. The results of the study revealed nine main categories of the factors that cause the pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentations: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, students' beliefs, self-perceptions, feelings, technological anxiety, technological anxiety, topic/content anxiety and stressful classroom environment. This study asserts that educators should have a sense of awareness about the oral presentation anxiety to plan the teaching and learning in oral presentation classroom. Educators should also employ inclusive, sensitive, and responsive English instructional programs. This study presents an implication in accordance with the curriculum development of speaking course in higher education, including the need to reformulate the speaking course curriculum, emphasizing the integration of technology to arouse the spirits among pre-service English teachers in speaking English.

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## 1. Introduction

Anxiety has sparked a lot of attention in the second speaking activities. Horwitz et al. (1986) stressed that speaking is one of the most anxiety-provoking situations for most learners. Most ESL students say that speaking English is difficult and it is the most obvious source of anxiety in language classroom where students avoid talking because they are unprepared, uninterested, or unable to express themselves, most anxiety stems from feelings of alienation in classroom, lack of confidence, or because students fear communication itself. Oxford (1990) stressed that the affective side is one of the most important factors in learning a language among students. Affective Filter Hypothesis is associated with oral presentation anxiety. Affective or emotional factors have a significant in learning and teaching language process, play a vital role either facilitating or impeding language learning. Emotions such as anxiety have become a filter that hinder language learners' ability to process language input while delivering their content orally in the classroom. Foreign Language Anxiety or Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is a situation-specific anxiety experienced in the context of the foreign language classroom (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) and Horwitz et al. (1986). Meanwhile, foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA) is an emotional state that results from the individual, motivational, and perceptual unease, it can be observed before, during, and after teaching Uştuk and Aydın (2016). Foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA), according to Ellis (1994) is a kind of precisely situation-specific anxiety can be defined as a psychological discomfort or apprehension which is unique for pre-service teachers also educators who are responsible for teaching learners how to learn a foreign language effectively and professionally at a real classroom setting by using all skills and subskills required for teaching the target language. In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986) define foreign language anxiety as "a distinguished multipart of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning derived from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). They also identified three anxieties related to foreign language anxiety; trait anxiety, state anxiety and situation specific anxiety. They also identified three anxieties related to foreign language anxiety within academic and social contexts can be divided into three categories; Communication apprehension, Test anxiety, Fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). The phenomenon alike was found by the researcher who conducted this current study, where anxiety is one of crucial factors as it affects the pre-service ESL teachers' speaking performance. Many factors of speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers have received research attention but many research focused on EFL pre-service teachers (Akinmulegun & Kunt, 2017; Baltaci, 2017; Can, 2018; Mai, 2016; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013; Yoon, 2012) but rather limited results in the Malaysian context (Nashir, 2018; Tajuddin et al., 2021; Wong, 2015). Speaking anxiety could lead to inhibition of L2, especially English learning and affect students' speaking ability, which may have negative impact on students' SLA and performance (Hwa, 2012). Therefore, this study is intended to bridge the gap by identifying the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers in a private higher learning institution. This study was conducted, in part, due to the growing number of ESL pre-service student teachers who experienced anxiety during their teacher training program in one of the private institutions in Malaysia.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The issue here is on the English language competencies among pre-service teachers specifically focusing on ESL/EFL teachers. A pre-service teacher refers to a college student who is engaged in an assigned student teaching experience (Agustiana, 2014). Brown (1994) asserted that learning a second language can be a complex process and causing these learners to have anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) added that speaking is one of the most anxiety-provoking situations for most learners. Hence, “when the feelings of inadequacy in the target language are frequent and unrelated to a realistic assessment of competence, they parallel the anxiety reactions seen in inexperienced language learners” (Horwitz et al., 1986). Of course, the anxiety experienced by language teachers may affect their feelings of self-confidence, use of target language, and instructional decisions (Horwitz, 1996). There is an urgent need to address the issue of anxiety as it can lead to undeveloped proficiency and affect the performance and achievement in language learning especially among future/student teachers. Therefore, in this study, researcher would like to identify the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during their oral presentation.

## **3. Research Objectives**

- i. to categorize the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentation

## **4. Literature review**

This section discusses the literature review; types of speaking anxiety, factors of speaking anxiety and factors of speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers.

### **4.1. Types of Speaking Anxiety**

Past research shows a consistently negative and significant relationship between facilitating anxiety, debilitating anxiety and language performance. Vo et al. (2019) did a study on debilitating effects of foreign language anxiety and engineering graduate students' language performances. The results revealed consistently negative and significant relationships between FLA and individual presentation, FLA and group discussion, FLA and final exam, and FLA and course grade. In another study, Selvam et al. (2016) in their quantitative study investigates how anxiety affects speaking in the L2 among Malaysian ESL learners' in terms of the two different dimensions which are debilitating and facilitative. The finding revealed 70% of the students have negative attitudes towards speaking a second language (L2) despite having facilitative anxiety in speaking English as L2.

### **4.2. Factors of Speaking Anxiety**

Speaking has been highlighted as the most anxiety-provoking skill and it is the most prominent source of anxiety in language classrooms (Horwitz et al., 1986). There are internal and external factors that contribute to speaking anxiety among ESL learners. The internal factors which involve psychological

problems that contribute in speaking anxiety among ESL learners was found in Sabbah (2018) who revealed that the students' anxiety was due to communication apprehension which was due to discrepancy between secondary education and college education, test anxiety due to the unfair breakdown of grades, and the unified tests and fear of negative evaluation. Kankam and Boateng (2017) who examined the psychological factors. The outcome of negative evaluation was caused by lack of adequate preparation, inferiority complex, fear of derision and needless comparisons among students. The fear of derision stifles students' desire to be heard, makes students timid and prevents class participation. The major causes were also due to some students' deficient in the use of English language due to poor reading habits, overuse of vernacular, obsession with the use of pidgin and apprehension following from the fear of making mistakes. Haidara (2016) revealed that the psychological factor affects negatively on the students' English speaking performance. Most of the problems were fear of making mistakes, feeling shy, feeling hesitated and lastly lack of confidence while speaking English. Meanwhile, some research has identified both internal and external factors that contribute to speaking anxiety. Alzahrani (2019) findings revealed that the teaching and learning environment weakness, then the weakness of the students themselves were the main themes discovered by the sample. Gender differences did not play a significant impact on the opinions toward the reasons behind the weakness of speaking English. Husnawati (2017) found out factors and problems refer to the internal and external factor include, psychology (anxiety, shyness, and lack confidence), linguistic competence (lack of vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge), topical knowledge, performance conditions (time pressure, planning, amount of support, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation to speak, etc), and learning environment (listener support).

### **4.3. Factors of Speaking Anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers**

Baltaci (2017) investigated the feelings of foreign language teaching anxiety of pre-service and in-service teachers. It was revealed that pre-service and in-service teachers always continue to have considerable levels of foreign language teaching and speaking anxiety which may negatively influence themselves and their teaching performance since they remain as a foreign language learner. Secondly, in-service teachers turned out to have more self-confidence, less fear of negative evaluation and less communication apprehension when compared to the pre-service teachers. Hismanoglu (2013) studies revealed that male English language teacher candidates had a lower level of foreign language learning anxiety than female English language teacher candidates. Meanwhile, older English language teacher candidates had a lower level of foreign language learning anxiety than younger English language teacher candidates. There are studies examining internal and external factors that contribute to pre-service ESL teachers' speaking anxiety. Can (2018) studies found out cognitive factors, affective factors, socio-cultural factors and psychological factors among pre-service ESL teachers. Agustiana (2014) students of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education to fulfil their graduation requirement. It was found that lack of teaching experience and less of mastering the material caused the anxiety during teaching.

## **5. Methodology**

This study employed a case study approach using semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted after each subject has done their oral presentation via online platform. All interviews were carried out on the students individually and were audio-recorded through online platform and telephones (on the experts) to record the interviews. Each interview was last for approximately 40 minutes to one hour. Prior to audio-taping the interviews, the researcher sought the consent of the interviewees. Before conducting the interview, the researcher also needed to 'break the ice' and build rapport with the interviewees first before audio-taping them. In principle, the interviews followed a set of standardized questions even though individual subjects will be asked in-depth, probing questions when their responses needed further clarifications.

### **5.1. Participants**

The study was conducted on ten (10) pre-service ESL teachers from a private higher learning institution in Selangor. The participants were all studying Bachelor of Education (Hons) TESL, who were studying in their fourth and fifth-year teacher education programs. The participants were 3 males and 7 females, ranged in age from 19 to 21 years old. The subjects were from the two main ethnic groups – the Malays, and Indians. In this study, the qualitative sampling that the researcher employed is convenience sampling (Creswell, 2012). It is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected in a non-random manner and it is unlikely for every member of the population to be included, and they are available to the researcher (Creswell, 2012). It involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing the process until the required sample size has been obtained or those who happen to be available and accessible at the time (Creswell, 2012). The researcher has selected the sample of the subjects in the population which were easy access to the researcher as the classroom instructor for the content subject, where the participants that are chosen share the same characteristics, a group of students who study TESL, for more in-depth and accurate data collections.

### **5.2. Instruments and Data Collections**

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researcher to obtain data. In assuring compliance to health protocols amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, the interviews were conducted through phone calls as face-to-face interviews were prohibited as it elevates the risk of contracting the virus. The responses were recorded by the researcher which was allowed by the participants for data analysis purposes only. The semi-structured interviews were aligned with the study's research questions and were asked to the participants during the interview.

### **5.3. Data analysis**

The data were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were analyzed with reference to the procedures of Thematic Analysis. Before one begins with an analysis, verbatim data are transcribed, which simply means that texts from interview and observational notes are typed into word processing

documents. The transcriptions; a fully transcribed, word for word, are then analysed either manually or with computer programmes, named Atlas.ti.8. Verbatim transcriptions of the interview will be performed early during the data collecting stage via interviews and observations. Thematic analysis will be applied as a data analysis method for finding and reporting patterns. Predetermined themes identified in literature can be used based on theory, or themes can be generated and emerged from raw data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### **5.4. Findings and Discussions**

This section presents the themes developed from the data that were analyzed with the main research question about the categorize of the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentation. The most representative quotes from the responses were presented to support the developed themes.

##### **5.4.1. Factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentation**

###### **5.4.1.1. Communication Apprehension**

Based on the data analyzed, the first reason that cause speaking anxiety is due to communication apprehension.

“I am scared that I might forgot whatever that I read during my presentations”. It indicated that pre-service ESL teachers suffered from high level of speaking anxiety because she was scared that she might forgot her points that she has read during her oral presentation and low self-confidence. It also indicated that learners experienced high level of speaking anxiety and their anxiety was particularly associated with failing to use proper grammar during oral presentations. This study is comparable to Aeni et al. (2017) in that students were usually anxious in EFL oral communication. The students were the most afraid of public speaking. The findings in this study is a case in point of impact that communication anxiety might have on students' overall academic performance (Daly & McCroskey, 1984).

###### **5.4.1.2. Fear of Negative Evaluation**

The second reason that caused speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers, fear of negative evaluation. Pre-service ESL teachers were said to be aware of being evaluated and therefore they will feel anxiety when they do oral presentation. Pre-service ESL teachers also do feel anxiety upon lecturer's judgment while they deliver oral presentation. The factor that contribute to pre-service ESL teachers' anxiety is due to teachers' manner (Balemir, 2009). Pre-service ESL teachers revealed that lecturer's attitude does trigger their anxiety as demonstrated:

“For the first class, I will feel nervous, like, I'm scared that like my grammar is not good, I'm scared that they're a lecturer will not understand my presentation” (P5).

The findings is consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986) called it as “fear of evaluation” in explaining language anxiety, where they get worried to know that their teachers evaluate them badly when they were being observed.

#### **5.4.1.3. Test Anxiety**

The third reason that caused speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers is test anxiety, such as Linguistic issues, can affect the grading of speech performance when delivering oral presentation. Pre-service teachers' self-perceived on their linguistic competence caused them anxious while doing oral presentation. Pre-service ESL teachers who have insufficient linguistic knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary) tend to have a high level of anxiety. Pre-service ESL teacher stated that factors of speaking anxiety is due to afraid of making grammar mistake as demonstrated:

“I am anxious mostly about grammar ..” (P2).

This anxiety may raise students' affective filter which may inhibits students' cognitive ability to produce the language (Krashen, 1982). Consequently, they may not perform well which, in turn, might escalate their anxiety and impacting their academic performance.

#### **5.4.1.4. Students' Belief**

Another factor that caused speaking anxiety is student's beliefs.

“the lack of experience and lack of experience, so, my speaking is not that good compared to other members” (P4)

This is echoed to Widhayanti (2018) findings that students get more concerned when they consider grammar, accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation. All of the participants reported that they become more anxious when they thought about having perfect grammar, accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation.

#### **5.4.1.5. Self-perceptions**

Perception of self is crucial on how students approach the learning and usage of a second language is heavily influenced by their self-perception. For example the following excerpts from the interview shows Participant 1 was concerned with speaking presentation as quoted:

“I'm scared that I will forgot whatever I want to say and I will talk nonsense sometimes”

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), individuals who believe they are competent in their home tongue may feel humiliated when forced to communicate in their second language. Furthermore, people who study a foreign language typically assume that their self-perception will be challenged in their foreign language learning environment.

#### **5.4.1.6. Feelings**

Pre-service ESL teacher in the present study demonstrate that speaking a foreign language in the class is a fairly stressful learners. In the discussions around the cause of the feelings were due to many factors that have been identified, for example: feeling scared, feeling anxiety, feeling worried and feeling uncomfortable. Pre-service ESL teachers were feeling scared when they have to deliver their oral presentation as the following illustrate:

“I am way too scared, really ruins your mood, and ruins yourself, in the aspect of okay for example I've made a preparation for me to present. But at the same time, I'm still not confident. I'm still scared” (P1).

This study is similar to Hamouda (2012) who did a study on the causes of the non-English major students found out the reasons oral anxiety in English language classrooms were due to fear of speaking in front of others and negative evaluation.

#### **5.4.1.7. Technological Anxiety**

Besides the themes ‘test anxiety’, ‘fear of negative evaluation’ and ‘communication apprehension’, comparable to the study by Horwitz et al. (1986), ‘technological anxiety’ are emerging themes in this study. Due to pandemic Covid-19 Movement Control Order (MCO) the presentation method has to be conducted through online platforms. During their online presentation, participants were anxious due to technical glitches i.e. disconnected internet line during presentation. These experienced happened to Participant 3.

“So what makes me anxious, is I might think about the line. You know, Sometimes, the line is not that great. And yeah mostly the line, because I feel like maybe I'm talking, and then my classmates and lecture cannot hear in my saying, what am I explaining and because it happened last semester when I'm explaining, they told me to explain it again, because other line got lag. And then, at that time my words, all gone” (P3).

This echoed to Nur'Asifa et al. (2022) findings that students feel that online learning makes them feeling insecure in while doing speaking activities during online learning.

#### **5.4.1.8. Topic/Content Anxiety**

Participants felt distracted with the topic and content which are unfamiliar to them as they need to do analysis and learn more about the topic assigned to them. Participant felt afraid that the points being presented later will be misleading too and this will distract them and trigger their anxiety. Participants experienced the Topic and Content Anxiety in the oral presentation were participant 7.

“the anxiety comes from actually having to learn the topics for me, learning new ways, it's not that much of a problem but I have to associate with the topic, I have to find relevancy and I have to find the importance of it. So for me, learning the topic, learning about the topic is much more appealing, much more anxiety than the language itself“. (P7-Haziq).

The finding is consistent with Chen (2015) who stressed that topics which are unfamiliar to pre-service ESL teachers not only cause students' anxious feeling in presentations, but also lead L2 students to get a lower score.

#### **5.4.1.9. Stressful classroom experienced**

It indicated that pre-service ESL teachers suffered from high level of speaking anxiety because she was scared that she might forgot her points that she has read during her oral presentation and low self-confidence. The role played by experience was different between the pre-service ESL teachers as the background and classroom experience of them were varied. Some pre-service ESL teachers had been anxious from the first they entered the class meanwhile others had started out with a positive attitude and became anxious after having had a particularly painful experience like Participant 1 who was sexual



harassed by one of her classmates. It affects her emotionally and she felt scared to open the camera during presentation. She was afraid that the male student would stare at her during presentation and made her feel insecure too.

“Maybe like, something like sexual harassment. Its happen to me at UNISEL, so yeah, that, its quite hard for me to see that people in the same class with me. He is in the same class with me which is in your class. So it’s quite hard for me to sometimes I need to open the camera its like something like the feelings, like I’m scared to open the camera”.

This findings echoed to Hashemi (2011) who stressed that it is important to language learner to have a more friendly and informal the language classroom environment, as it is less likely to be anxiety provoking.

The study has provided a qualitative analysis on the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentation. The present study addressed a gap on speaking anxiety and the need for research in a private higher learning institution. The findings of study revealed the nine categories of the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentation.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the data analyzed, the majority of the participants experience speaking anxiety due to communication apprehension. This study highlights the categorise of the factors that cause speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers during oral presentation. The findings reveal that speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers is primarily caused by nine factors; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, students’ beliefs, self-perceptions, feelings, technological anxiety, technological anxiety, topic/content anxiety and stressful classroom environment. The findings of this study will help higher education institutions to identify the causes of speaking anxiety among pre-service ESL teachers and provide training programs that would help pre-service ESL teachers cope up with speaking anxiety. It is suggested to also develop a guideline of strategies to be adopted by pre-service ESL teachers apply in overcoming speaking anxiety during oral presentation and prepare them to engage in the real world of teaching.

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