



GLOSSOPHOBIA OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Glossophobia, or the fear of public speaking, is not uncommon. Students may fail at work or at school because of anxiety. The objective of this research is twofold: a) to survey if females have greater amount of anxiety when giving a public speaking presentation than males; and b) to investigate if the teaching of affective learning strategies helps reduce their public speaking anxiety. A 2x2 between subjects factorial ANOVA was calculated comparing the anxiety scores for females giving a speech in front of all female or male audience and also the male scores when speaking in front of all female or male audience. Next, McCroskey's (1998) 'Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) questionnaire was used to collect data on their feelings towards giving a speech. The same questionnaire was administered at the beginning and end of a course in public speaking. Paired T-test was employed to measure the difference of nervousness in the same semester. A total of 202 university technical students majoring in engineering and computing were chosen as subjects. The findings revealed that a) the hypothesis was not supported that females would have a higher amount of anxiety than males and b) male and female students significantly experienced less anxiety after they had been taught how to manage their stress. Further research is necessary to i) scrutinize gender differences in public speaking anxiety and ii) evaluate the casual nature of public speaking among university students.

Keywords: Public speaking anxiety, Second language anxiety, Affective strategies

INTRODUCTION

Glossophobia is the fear of public speaking (Hancock et al., 2010) and comes from the Greek *glōssa*, meaning tongue, and *phobos*, fear or dread. It is one of the most prevalent world fears, affecting approximately 75% of the population. Statistically, more people claim a fear of public speaking than a fear of death (Glossophobia, 2001). Fear of public speaking affects the speaker physiologically, for instance, dry mouth, increased blood pressure, blushing, sweating, irregular

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breathing, and emotionally, as they fear humiliation and looking foolish (Kushner, 2004). The speaker can be either a male or female. According to Furmark (2002) and Pollard & Henderson (1998), women reported higher rates of public speaking anxiety than men.

Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening (Scovel, 1991). Public speaking anxiety is very common among both college students and the general population. Persons with public speaking anxiety often avoid anxiety-producing social or performance situations, but when unavoidable, these situations are tolerated with feeling of profound anxiety and distress. Also, anticipatory anxiety frequently occurs as an individual imagines the situation in advance of the actual experience (e.g., worrying each day about a presentation to be given in a class several weeks in the future). Although individuals with these types of anxious responses often recognize that their fear is excessive and/or unreasonable, they are unable, without any help, to change their responses in these situations.

Many people who speak for a living, including actors, business people, and politicians, experience public speaking anxiety. In fact, these experienced public speakers feel a little nervous before a performance. However, for some people, the anxiety becomes so intense that it interferes with the ability to perform at all. In the case of students, this may lead to avoid attending certain courses where oral presentations are conducted in front of a group. Students who are very anxious about public speaking in class may also avoid social events they would like to attend or may not talk to classmates they would like to get to know. Language anxiety has been claimed by many researchers to influence language learning whereas facilitating anxiety produces positive effects on learners' performance, too much anxiety may cause a poor performance (Scovel, 1991).

Price's (1991) study on anxiety was to ask questions on what made students most anxious in a foreign language class. All subjects answered that speaking a foreign language in front of other students will result in the most anxiety. According to Beatty, Balfantz & Kuwabara (1989), public speaking anxiety may stem from numerous sources, such as public speaking skills, fluency in a foreign language, emotional predispositions, and characteristics of the public speaking situation itself.

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

In the past two decades, there has been a great deal of research in language anxiety. It is defined as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to using a language for communication beyond the classroom (Zheng, 2008). Most people have experienced language anxiety even if anxiety might not be the most important reason for failure or success in learning, we cannot ignore its affection. Undeniably learning a foreign language, especially English, is vital since it is the most widespread and important language in the world today.

It is also a major language for international business, diplomacy, science, and the professions; an official language of many international and professional organizations; and is used not only for communication between native speakers of English but also between non-native speakers. The need for effective oral communication skills is crucial in the business world. However, in the past few decades, technical graduates have been criticized by employers for their lack of communication skills (Greathouse, 1986; Dearlove, 1996). Curtis, Winsor, and Stephens (1989) in one survey of personnel managers found that communication skills are more important for applicants in obtaining entry-level positions than their technical skills, grade point averages, or their degrees.

Among the communication skills deemed to be core managerial competency is the ability to make effective presentations (Fandt, 1994; Whetten & Cameron, 1998; De Janasz et al, 2002). Thus, because of the importance of English in the world today, especially for technical graduates, this study analyzes the anxiety level of technical students in Universiti Malaysia Pahang. The implications of the study are discussed and a number of recommendations are made to aid students in dealing with their anxiety level. This study assumes that language anxiety is weakening and the likely causes of anxiety are surveyed using quantitative method.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Although a large amount of research is devoted to public speaking anxiety, much of it simply looks at its manifestations or the meanings behind it. The current study, however, intends to look at if females have more stress than males when giving a speech publicly and if the teaching of affective strategies can help alleviate students' anxiety. This research is significant and beneficial to the lecturers because it offers insights into the gender differences on the level of anxiety. It is also a starting point to understand the problems of language anxiety and subsequently create strategies to help students overcome their stress. Furthermore, the findings are not only applicable to students and lecturers but also helpful to others who are facing the same problem of language anxiety.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study was limited to engineering and computing undergraduate students in Universiti Malaysia Pahang and does not represent other technical universities. Thus, the sample might not be relevant to non-technical universities because the level of anxiety may be different and the findings may also differ. The subjects are non-native speakers of English, namely, Malaysians, Malaysian Chinese, and Malaysian Indians. English is their second language.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

a) Anxiety

Anxiety is part of a human condition and has a wide definition. Anxiety in general can be defined as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz et al, 1986, p.125).

b) Speaking Anxiety

The fear of speaking in public is related with anxiety or communication apprehension. It is a panic feeling associated with physical sensations that are all too painfully familiar to those affected-increased heart and breathing rates, over-rapid reactions, and a tension in the shoulder and neck area (Mohamad et al., 2009).

c) The Sample

The subjects were chosen from the Faculties of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Systems and Software Engineering in Universiti Malaysia Pahang. Altogether there were 101 male and 101 female students making a sample size of 202.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety is a physiological response and generally defined as " a state of apprehension, a vague fear" (Scovel, 1978, p. 134). It seems difficult to describe in a simple and exhaustive manner, as it arises from many kinds of sources often associated with particular contexts or situations that individuals perceive threatening according to their unique frame of reference (Eharman, 1996). Previous anxiety research suggests that there are roughly two types that can be experienced at different psychological levels (Spielberger, 1983; Levitt, 1980; Schwarzer, 1986).

At a global level, anxiety is viewed as a permanent trait, as some people are predisposed to be anxious. At a more local or situational level, anxiety can be experienced in response to a particular situation or act (Brown, 1994), for instance, in giving a speech. However, the question of how these constructs relate to second language learning contexts is still under debate, although several interpretations of language anxiety are offered in terms of situational nature of anxiety (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991a).

According to Tobias (1979, 1980, 1986), anxiety may work as a mental block to cognitive performance at all three cognitive stages: Input, Processing, and Output. In other words, anxiety arousal, which is typically associated with self-deprecating thoughts, fear of failure, or worry over performance procedures, may compete for cognitive resources that normal cognitive processing will demand.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Who has a greater amount of anxiety, male or female students, before giving a speech?
2. What can be done to help students reduce their anxiety in speaking publicly?

Hypotheses

- a) Research done by Misra and Mckean (2000) and Ohannessian and Lerner (1999) have shown that adolescent girls are a much greater risk for experiencing stress than boys. Hence female students are meant to be more anxious than male students.
- b) If students are taught and made use of affective strategies, their stress will be reduced. They are anxious because they do not recognize these strategies beforehand.

Respondents

202 undergraduate students chosen from the Faculties of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Systems and Software Engineering participated in this study. There were 101 male and 101 female students composing of Malaysians, Malaysian Chinese, and Malaysian Indians. English is their second language.

Data Collection

To survey if females have a greater amount of anxiety, participants were asked to answer a 5-item scale questionnaire (Appendices A & B) where they chose the answers they felt in most agreement with, or in most disagreement with. All subjects were treated in accordance with the ethical Principle of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 1999).

To investigate if the teaching of affective learning strategies helps reduce students' anxiety, students were asked to fill out the *Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)* questionnaire (McCroskey, 1970; McCroskey & Richmond, 1998) (Appendix C). This was done in two phases. The first measuring was conducted at the beginning of the first semester. Then, they were taught how to use nine affective learning strategies in order to reduce public speaking anxiety during one semester or 56 hours of English language lectures.

The following 9 affective strategies were adapted from the questionnaire developed by Kostić-Bobanović (2004):

- ❖ I try to relax my muscles by breathing deeply every time I feel nervous about speaking English.
- ❖ I listen to music for relaxation.
- ❖ I laugh in order to relax, whenever I feel nervous about speaking English.

- ❖ I make encouraging statements to myself to take wise risks in language learning even though I might make some mistakes.
- ❖ I give myself a reward when I have done something well in my language learning.
- ❖ I pay attention to physical signs of stress.
- ❖ I use a list in which I register my feelings, motivation, and attitudes about English language learning.
- ❖ I write down my experiences in a language learning diary.
- ❖ I talk to someone I trust about my feelings concerning the language learning process.

In the second phase, after the teaching of affective strategies at the end of the semester, students were given the same PRPSA questionnaire, with the above described instructions. The questionnaire consists of 34 questions measuring feelings associated with giving a presentation and has been reported to be uni-dimensional. Subjects were asked to indicate the degree to which the statements apply to them, by marking whether they strongly agree (1), agree (2), are undecided (3), disagree (4), or strongly disagree (5). The reliability level is high (alpha estimates $> .90$).

McCroskey and Richmond (1998) reported that normalized PRPSA scores fall into five categories (numbers in parentheses are percentages of a normalized population fitting each category): scores of 34–84 indicate low anxiety (5%); 85–92 moderately low anxiety (5%); 93–110 moderate anxiety (20%); 111–119 moderately high anxiety (30%); and 120–170 high anxiety (40%). Mean scores on the PRPSA have rarely been reported, as the instrument was designed and used primarily for identifying highly anxious students. “Highly anxious” is defined operationally as someone with a PRPSA score equal to or greater than 120. The questionnaire is scored by first summing the 22 positive items, then summing the scores of the reversed items, and finally subtracting the total from 132. Scores range from 34 to 170, with a higher score representing more public speaking anxiety.

The questionnaire was completed without any personal identification (except sex and code) to insure anonymity and increase the probability of honest responses. The reliability of the scale in this investigation is .86. The research was carried out on a total of 202 subjects, sophomore students majoring in engineering and computing at the Faculties of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Systems and Software Engineering. There were 101 male students (50%) and 101 female students (50%). They attended lectures in ‘Public Speaking’ four hours per week for fourteen weeks.

Data Analysis

A 2 (Audience) X 2 (Gender) between subjects factorial ANOVA was calculated comparing the anxiety score for females and males giving a speech in front of an all female or male audience. The main effect for the audience was insignificant [$F(1,97)=.307, p>.05$]. The main effect for whether or not gender mattered was also insignificant [$F(1,97)=.038, p>.05$]. It appears that the anxiety

level is not any higher in males or females when in a situation of giving a speech to an all male or female audience (Appendix D).

We wanted to investigate the difference in communication competence between the beginning and the end of the semester and that is why we used a paired t-test. A paired sample t-test indicated that there is a statistically difference between the above mentioned periods. At the beginning of the semester, students' PRPSA was significantly higher than at the end of the semester, $t_{(202)} = 4,137$; $p < .001$. According to t-test results, we may conclude that the teaching of affective strategies can reduce high levels of public speaking anxiety (Appendix E).

According to the PRPSA scores, at the beginning of the semester a great number of students experienced significantly high ($n=82$) and moderately high ($n=50$) levels of public speaking anxiety. After the teaching of affective strategies the PRPSA numbers significantly varied in comparison with the previous attained results, namely, a significantly smaller number of students reported high ($n=42$) and moderately high ($n=25$) (Appendix F) levels of distress while speaking in public. Therefore, a significantly greater number of students reported low ($n=49$) and moderately low ($n=45$) levels of public speaking anxiety (Appendix F).

DISCUSSION

Fear of public speaking is a very common form of social phobia. These individuals may underachieve at work or at school because of anxiety. The objective of this research is twofold: a) to survey if females have greater amount of anxiety when giving a public speaking presentation than males; and b) to investigate if the teaching of affective learning strategies helps reduce their public speaking anxiety. The results indicated that the anxiety level was not any higher in males and females which contradicted earlier research done by Misra and McKean (2000); therefore the work was inconsistent with previous research. In future investigation on this gender difference in public speaking anxiety, we could actually conduct a situation in which subjects did give a speech in front of a same gender audience or the opposite, recording their levels of anxiety just before the speech is given. Also, more participants would be helpful and a wider range of people used for the study, not just university students.

The second findings revealed that all students experienced significantly less anxiety after they had been taught how to manage their distress, by means of teaching affective strategies. According to the findings, a great number of our students were able to change their perception of anxiety level by the end of the course. Teaching affective strategies to students appears to be an effective way of reducing anxiety in public speaking, however, future research is needed to evaluate its casual nature among university students.

Apart from teaching affective strategies, there is a mecca of measures to reduce anxiety. The recommendations on coping with second language anxiety include the following strategies (Rolls, 1998 and Kim, 2005). The first strategy is to recognize your own feelings because in the process you will be able to recognize the causes of our anxiety. Just because people are nervous, it does not mean they have poor performance. Nervousness sometimes will help in enhancing the vitality and enthusiasm brought to the situation.

The next strategy is to share your feelings with others. It is helpful knowing that you are not suffering those feelings alone. Even professionals such as artists or experienced speakers may feel some sort of anxiety when they have to speak in public. Thus, having a slight feeling of anxiety is normal as it is experienced by many of us. Students must bear in their mind that nobody is aware of their fright except if there are outward signs of nervousness. However, nervousness can be controlled. Students must focus on getting their message across to the audience and not be afraid of making mistakes. Mistakes are the best way of learning so that we are less likely to keep making them.

Universities should adopt an innovative approach to minimize apprehension and maximize student achievement. Lecturers must encourage their students to express themselves in English and help them reduce their anxiety by giving them support. Lecturers might also use quick relaxation techniques such as that suggested by psychologist Anthony Grasha (1987) to tense the body for a count of ten and then breathe deeply in and out to a count of four for a period of three to five minutes. This is especially effective after a tension-producing event.

Above all, in order to increase the level of efficiency in the English language, we need to practise. Practice makes perfect. Practise speaking with friends or family, or even text messaging in English will also help increase the level of English proficiency thus indirectly reduces the level of second language anxiety. To conclude, anxiety is typically understood as a physiological response. We cannot make it go away, but we can help it work for us instead of against us.

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APPENDIX A

Your gender: Circle ‘Male’ or ‘Female’; Your age: _____

Direction: Read the following situation and apply it to each statement. Decide the extent to which you agree with it. Circle the number for your appropriate response. Scale: [1=strongly disagree (SD); 2=disagree (D); 3=undecided (U); 4=agree (A); 5=strongly agree (SA)].

You are giving a speech next week to the Ladies’ Club.. There will be an audience of approximately 50 ladies. Your speech has been rehearsed and studied.

No.	Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	You feel jittery, scared, and uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
2	You feel concerned about performing poorly and choking under pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
3	You are worried that the audience will be disappointed with your performance.	1	2	3	4	5
4	You are really nervous and you hope the next week goes by really slow.	1	2	3	4	5
5	You feel comfortable and secure about giving the speech.	1	2	3	4	5
6	You are hoping that nothing goes wrong with your speech.	1	2	3	4	5
7	You consider yourself to be an exceptional speaker and are not at all nervous.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

Your gender: Circle ‘Male’ or ‘Female’; Your age: _____

Direction: Read the following situation and apply it to each statement. Decide the extent to which you agree with it. Circle the number for your appropriate response. [Scale: 1=strongly disagree (SD); 2=disagree (D); 3=undecided (U); 4=agree (A); 5=strongly agree (SA)].

You are giving a speech next week to the Men’s Club. There will be an audience of approximately 50 gentlemen. Your speech has been rehearsed and studied.

No.	Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	You feel jittery, scared, and uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
2	You feel concerned about performing poorly and choking under pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
3	You are worried that the audience will be disappointed with your performance.	1	2	3	4	5
4	You are really nervous and you hope the next week goes by really slow.	1	2	3	4	5
5	You feel comfortable and secure about giving the speech.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	You are hoping that nothing goes wrong with your speech.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	You consider yourself to be an exceptional speaker and are not at all nervous.	1	2	3	4	5

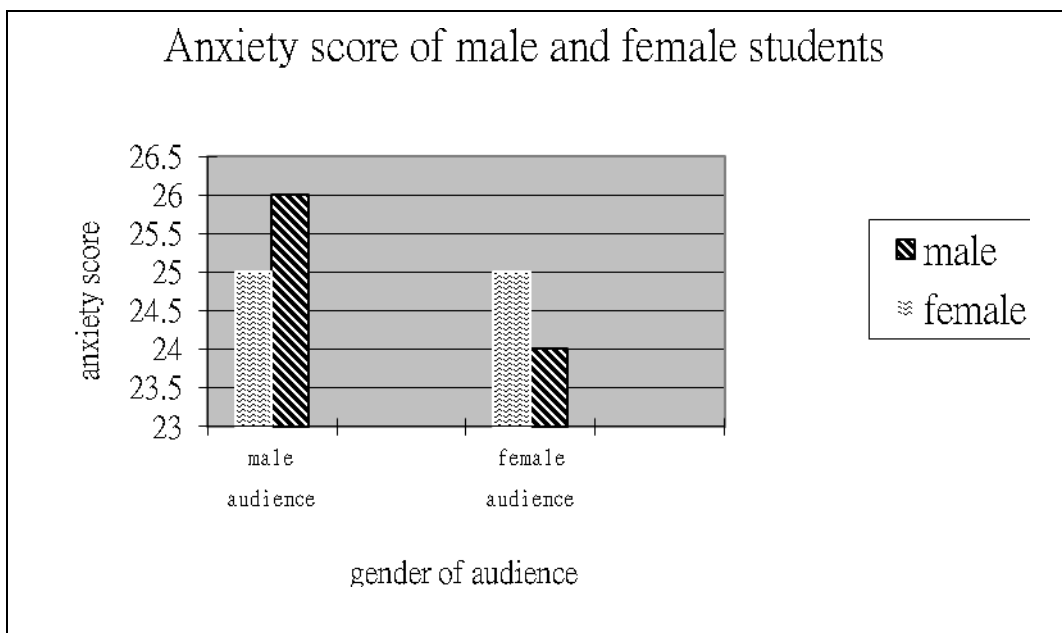
APPENDIX C

This questionnaire is composed of thirty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. Indicate the degree to which the statements apply to you by marking [1] strongly agree; [2] agree; [3] undecided; [4] disagree; and [5] strongly disagree on the line provided.

- ___ 1. While preparing to give a speech, I feel tense and nervous.
- ___ 2. I feel tense when I see the words ‘speech’ and ‘public speech’ on the course outline.
- ___ 3. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- ___ 4. Right after giving a speech I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.
- ___ 5. I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up.
- ___ 6. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- ___ 7. Although I am nervous just before starting a speech, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.
- ___ 8. I look forward to giving a speech.
- ___ 9. When the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class, I can feel myself getting tense.
- ___ 10. My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.
- ___ 11. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- ___ 12. I enjoy preparing for a speech.
- ___ 13. I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepare to say.
- ___ 14. I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don’t know.

- ___ 15. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
- ___ 16. I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a speech.
- ___ 17. My mind is clear when giving a speech.
- ___ 18. I do not dread when giving a speech.
- ___ 19. I perspire just before starting a speech.
- ___ 20. My heart beats very fast when I start a speech.
- ___ 21. I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.
- ___ 22. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- ___ 23. Realizing that only a little time remains in a speech makes me very tense and anxious.
- ___ 24. While giving a speech, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.
- ___ 25. I breathe faster just before starting a speech.
- ___ 26. I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a speech.
- ___ 27. I do poorer on speeches because I am anxious.
- ___ 28. I feel anxious when the teacher announces the date of a speaking assignment.
- ___ 29. When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.
- ___ 30. During an important speech I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.
- ___ 31. I have trouble falling asleep the night before a speech.
- ___ 32. My heart beats very fast when I present a speech.
- ___ 33. I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech.
- ___ 34. While giving a speech, I get so nervous that I forget facts I really know.

APPENDIX D



APPENDIX E

PRPSA at the beginning and end of semester for male and female students

CATEGORIES OF ANXIETY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS			
	BEGINNING OF SEMESTER		END OF SEMESTER	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Low	5	4	25	24
Moderately low	5	26	15	30
Moderate	10	20	15	26
Moderately high	30	20	15	10
High	51	31	31	11
TOTAL	101	101	101	101

APPENDIX F

PRPSA at the beginning and end of the semester for all students

<i>CATEGORIES OF ANXIETY</i>	<i>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</i>	
	<i>BEGINNING OF SEMESTER</i>	<i>END OF SEMESTER</i>
Low	9	49
Moderately low	31	45
Moderate	30	41
Moderately high	50	25
High	82	42
Total	202	202