

Investigation into Difficulties in Public Speaking among English-majored Students at University of Phan Thiet

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ABSTRACT

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The main aim of the study was to identify the difficulties in public speaking skills among English-majored students at the University of Phan Thiet. A total of 60 students were asked to participate in the research. The findings revealed that students have clear perceptions about the significant roles and the high difficulty level of public speaking skills. Furthermore, of all the difficulties students encountered when speaking in front of many people, the two most common problems were fear of making mistakes and being observed, which wore down their confidence. Based on the findings, several suggestions were made to improve students' public speaking skills. The findings in this study were also expected to be beneficial to teachers, educators, and schools in improving the experience of students when taking public speaking courses.

Introduction

Public speaking is a multifaceted skill that is useful in the workplace, academia, or public advocacy. In fact, the ability to communicate effectively is an asset that contributes to success in various areas of life, ranging from personal to professional development (Baumayer, 2018). The definition of public speaking varies, depending on different factors, namely individual perspectives, professional contexts, educational emphasis, and cultural differences. However, public speaking, in nature, requires speakers to speak in front of an audience and other types, namely, a job interview, a presentation to potential clients, a talk with a journalist, or a talk with colleagues at a trade (Lamerton, 2001). In fact, research on public speaking skills has already been extensively studied. Lucas (2009) defines public speaking as a method of publicizing your ideas with others and influencing them. Regarding the benefits of public speaking, Farrell (2011) stated that speech can be even more powerful than handwriting due to the merits of public speaking ranging from better personal satisfaction, stronger reasoning skills, better research skills, and potential career advancement to the ability to advocate for causes and more.

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Recognizing the importance of public speaking in various personal and professional contexts, numerous studies have been conducted to point out difficulties that might hinder speakers from having successful speeches. Some studies showed that speech-making ranks near the top in provoking anxiety (Baumayer, 2018; Lucas, 2009). Even a successful speaker can be nervous before making a speech due to stage fright, which is a common worry among students in public speaking courses (Boonkit, 2010). According to this author, the main causes of this situation stem from fear of judgment and a lack of confidence. The findings from a case study in the Thai context revealed that undergraduate students lost confidence in communicating in public because they were anxious about making errors, making their voices low, and shaking their hands (Boonkit, 2010). According to Forman (2005), Thai EFL students' reluctance to communicate led to a loss of natural feeling when they were speaking, resulting in a lack of confidence to perform in the medium of the target language. In another study surveying non-English major students, Tuong (2022) indicated that students found it hard to understand in English without any preparation when they were presenting in front of their class.

In Vietnam, in a study conducted by Van et al. (2021) in Ho Chi Minh University of Education to find problems in public speaking courses, the results indicated that fear was the most common barrier. However, no studies have been conducted in the context of the University of Phan Thiet. Therefore, this research was carried out to understand the current situation in terms of difficulties students faced when taking speaking courses and to see whether students at Phan Thiet University (UPT) encountered similar problems to students in other contexts. Phan Thiet is a coastal city that is home to numerous five-star hotels and resorts. If job candidates have good public speaking skills, they can easily get a good job. This means that public speaking skills are important for students at UPT after graduation. However, the reality shows that graduates suffer from public speaking anxiety, which hinders their professional growth. This study aims to delve into the specific challenges faced by the English-major students at the University of Phan Thiet, providing insights that can inform targeted teaching strategies to strengthen their public speaking proficiency. The results from this research are expected to contribute to developing courses to reduce difficulties among students in learning public speaking and to help educators create an education curriculum that is more effective in enhancing public speaking skills among students.

Research questions

This research investigates the students' difficulties in public speaking and strategies to overcome those challenges. Therefore, the research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What were students' general perceptions toward public speaking skills?
2. What were students' specific difficulties when dealing with public speaking skills?

The purposes of the study

The purposes of the study are threefold: (1) to gain insight into the students' general opinions about public speaking skills; (2) to find out barriers that students encounter when speaking in public; (3) to offer strategies to help students defeat those challenges.

Literature Review

Definitions of public speaking

The concept of public speaking is diverse. In the Cambridge dictionary, the word "public" is defined as relating to or involving people in general rather than being limited to a specific group of people. In other words, public speaking is the process of speaking to a few or many people to inform, motivate, persuade, educate, or entertain the listeners (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2017; Steel, 2010). In line with this, Baumeyer (2018), an instructor in Organizational Leadership and Management and Teaching Business Courses, said that public speaking is considered the process of communicating information to an audience. This process is usually done before a large audience, namely in school, the workplace, or even in our personal lives. Lucas and Wattam (2019) state that public speaking is a technique to communicate messages or ideas in front of people to make them understand the information or alter others' views or opinions. Slagell (2009) further confirms that public speaking refers to the communication practice of a speaker sharing ideas with an audience primarily through speech.

Types of Public Speaking

Informative Speaking

Informative speaking is among the most often used styles of public speaking. According to Lucas and Wattam (2019), an informative speech is one where the speaker intends to educate their audience on a specific topic. The aim of such a speech is to transfer data and information to help the audience better understand the topic. Researcher teams at the University of Pittsburgh further affirm that informative speaking generally centers on speeches describing an object, showing how something works, reporting on an event, and explaining a concept. However, it is important to remember that when it comes to an informative speech, the speaker's job is to enlighten rather than advocate (Lucas and Wattam, 2019). At the same time, a persuasive speech would seek to modify attitudes or ask the audience to adopt a specific position, which is not a feature in an informative speech (Lucas and Wattam, 2019).

Persuasive Speaking

When persuading someone, you act as an advocate; therefore, your job is to get listeners to agree with you and, perhaps, to act on that belief, or to defend an idea, to refuse an opponent, to sell a program, or to inspire people to action (Lucas and Wattam, 2019). Similarly, Chen (2005) says persuasive speaking is speaking with the goal in mind to convince your audience of your idea or point of view, which usually includes emotional elements and strong language. Persuasive speech is arranged in such a way as to hopefully cause the audience to accept all or part of the expressed view. Though the overarching goal of a persuasive speech is to convince the audience to accept a perspective, not all audiences can be convinced by a single speech, and not all perspectives can persuade the audience. The success of a persuasive speech is often measured by the audience's willingness to consider the speaker's argument. To create the greatest impact, the speaker needs to employ many different communication skills, namely tone of voice to inform their audience on how they should feel while listening, body language such as hand gestures, eye contact, and posture to improve their persuasive speech as well as to set the tone to draw the listener in.

Ceremonial Speaking

Ceremonial speaking is a speech conducted on a special occasion, for instance, a graduation speech or an office party, which often involves a personal or emotional connection to the people you are speaking to (Chen, 2005). The goal of a ceremonial speech is to captivate an audience

and create a sense of response to the situation or occasion. The occasion will inform what kind of experience the speaker is creating. Different occasions have different expectations for speakers based on values that they rely on inspiring, commemorating, accepting, or unifying. In other words, when speaking at a special occasion, your job is to bring the community together by elevating and advocating for a perspective appropriate to the contextual values.

Demonstrative Speaking

Demonstrative speaking is explaining how to do something. Lucas and Wattam (2019) defined demonstrative speeches as explaining how listeners can do something by giving them specific instructions and details. It is a form of expository speaking. If you are in the technology field or any field where processes are part of your work, demonstrative speaking is a skill you will want to cultivate. In a demonstration speech, the presenter must give background information on the subject and set the scene for the audience. After that, they can move forward with the demonstration, which can be as simple as teaching people how to put on a swim cap or as complex as teaching people how to make deviled eggs. Most of the time, the speeches are limited to around 10 minutes, and the speaker may use one person to assist with the demonstration.

Previous studies on barriers to public speaking skills

Results from previous research indicate several difficulties hinder the positive outcomes of learners in dealing with public speaking skills.

Public speaking anxiety

Public speaking anxiety is a problem that many people encounter, particularly students in their academic careers. According to Schreiber and Hartranft (2017), public speaking anxiety constitutes a unique type of anxiety characterized by physiological arousal, negative thought patterns, or behavioral reactions during real or anticipated public presentations.

Liu (2007) studied 547 non-English major students (430 males and 117 females) in their first years. The author used surveys, observations, reflective journals, and interviews in the study. The result revealed that (1) more than a third of the students felt anxious when speaking English in their class, (2) the more proficient students tended to be less anxious, and (3) responding to teachers in English when doing presentations was the most anxious. Liu (2007) also stated that the main sources of public speaking anxiety come from a lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency, and poor memory. The findings indicate that the results cannot be generalized to other EFL students because the author did not study English-majored students and students in their second, third, and fourth years.

However, there are opposite opinions about public speaking anxiety. Chen (2005), Fiadzawoo (2015), Kirkwood, and Melton (2002) indicated that students are more concerned about being ridiculed by their friends when they are doing their presentations in front of their class. However, the authors had different perspectives on public speaking anxiety. While Chen (2005) stated that this anxiety can boost students' motivation to study English harder, Fiadzawoo (2015), Kirkwood, and Melton (2002) claimed public speaking anxiety makes students lose their self-esteem, resulting in poor performances.

Language factor

According to Liu (2007), language factor derives from that fact that students do not pronounce words correctly, lack ideas, and lack vocabulary. This factor can be the result of the inability to perform the target language well (Liu, 2007). Similar to Liu's opinion, Adayleh (2013) stated that "not being able to find the words you need to express yourself is the most frustrating

experience in speaking another language”. This is also in line with Tuyen and Dan (2021), the authors studied obstacles hindering public speaking ability of English-majored students at Can Tho university, Vietnam. There were 100 participants (68 females and 32 males), all of whom were English-majored in their second year. The findings showed that limited language knowledge was the major barrier. However, this may not be the case if the participants were in the fourth year, as their language skills might be better than those in the second year.

Social shyness

Horwitz (2001) defined shyness as an emotion strongly linked to the fear of others. This can be caused by general personality traits such as quietness, shyness, and reticence. Regarding shyness, Santos et al. (2022) studied 264 participants with an average age of 21 in an analytical, observational, and cross-sectional study. Their study aimed to clarify the relationship between shyness and public speaking. The findings showed that shy participants scored lower in public speaking skills. Shy participants had more vocal symptoms, such as higher vocal pitch and weaker loudness when speaking in public. The study makes sure the relationship between shyness and public speaking skills. However, it cannot ascertain the extent to which shyness has a negative impact on the public speaking skills of different groups of people, such as English and non-English major students.

Test Anxiety

Brown (2000) states that when students are afraid of getting bad results in a public speaking exam, they are more likely to suffer from test anxiety. This may be caused by their previous testing experiences related to their poor performance. In addition, Tsai & Chang (2013) added that students may experience test anxiety because of the high levels of pressure, and their concern about test outcomes can heighten test anxiety. In some contexts, the type of test can influence a student's anxiety levels, with public speaking exams being the most stressful (Liu, 2007). A public speaking test is particularly intricate as it generates anxiety both during the test itself and in the fear of being negatively judged (Tuyen and Dan, 2021). However, Chen (2005) argued that a little anxiety caused by public speaking exams can boost students' creativity, which makes them perform better.

Fear of negative evaluation

Horwitz (2001) states that this form of anxiety is broader than situational test anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation is closely linked to apprehension because students sometimes doubt their own capacity when attempting to engage with others in a second language. According to Grieve et al. (2021), the overriding fear of negative evaluation may hinder students from demonstrating their knowledge and intellectual skills. Both Horwitz (2001) and Grieve et al. (2021) concluded that fear of negative evaluation might restrict active learning as students are afraid of asking their teachers questions and interacting with their classmates during public speaking lessons.

Solutions for reducing public speaking anxiety.

Lucas (2009) states that to speak effectively in public, speakers should have a clear purpose, select a good topic beneficial to audiences, and be verbally articulate. Similarly, Horwitz (2001) stated that outstanding public speakers must organize, plan, and edit the content of their speeches to adjust the audience's interests. However, according to Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004), good preparation is the most important of all solutions for reducing public speaking anxiety. This refers to the standard efforts devoted to the learning process and the strategies used. Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004) further stated that positive thinking can be very valuable as it helps to reduce the problematic cognitive processes underlying student anxiety. These tactics seek to shift focus from stress-inducing scenarios to more favorable ones. These solutions help students

reduce anxiety and nurture their self-assurance as they consistently maintain a positive outlook on their speech performance and anticipate favorable outcomes.

The research gap

Although there is much research in many countries about the difficulties of public speaking skills, there is little research conducted in the context of the University of Phan Thiet. Therefore, this research is conducted to determine whether the University of Phan Thiet students have the same difficulties as those in previous studies. Thanks to the result, lecturers at the University of Phan Thiet will be able to offer proper strategies for students to enhance their public speaking skills.

Methodology

Participants

A group of 60 English majors at UPT, including 17 males and 43 females, was chosen as the study's participants. The samples were in their second and third year. The reason for choosing the samples from second and third-year students was that first-year students in UPT were required to finish three speaking courses as prerequisites to be eligible for the public speaking course. In addition, students have to pass this subject to enter the fourth year. That is why there were no first-year and fourth-year students in the study. These research topics were purposely chosen as they were directly related to learning English and experienced speaking to many people ahead of the crowd. They were exposed to and applied many public speaking skills when participating in clubs and communicating with friends, teachers, and everyone around them, so they understood the difficulties and inadequacies of learning public speaking.

The study employed purposive sampling in choosing the participants since the researcher was conscious that the selected subjects meet fundamental and essential requirements for the research purposes and questions (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012).

Table 1.

Participants' demographic information in the first phase

| | Current academic school year | | | | Gender | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|--------|
| | 1 st year | 2 nd year | 3 rd year | 4 th year | Male | Female |
| Frequency | 0 | 34 | 26 | 0 | 17 | 43 |
| % | 0 | 56.7 | 43.3 | 0 | 28.3 | 71.7 |

Research design

The study employed the questionnaire to explore the participants' difficulties when dealing with public speaking skills. Several explanations can be given for choosing questionnaire as a data collection method. First, questionnaires are very useful for gathering large-scale information regarding different kinds of issues, such as language needs, communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities and attitudes, and beliefs (Nunan, 1992). Second, questionnaires would best investigate people's perceptions, behavior, activities, or attitudes (Wisker, 2001). Third, questionnaires allow researchers to collect a large amount of factual information in a relatively short period of time (Thomas, 2003). Finally, questionnaires are economical, standardized, confidential and used for specific purposes (Thomas, 2003). After taking into consideration the advantages of using questionnaires to serve

the purposes of this research, the researchers decided to use a questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection.

Students' challenges in dealing with public speaking skills were measured in the form of a survey research design by means of a self-designed questionnaire. The items in this self-designed questionnaire were compiled from questionnaires in studies conducted to find similar concerns. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the first gathered general information about the participants, the second explored the participants' general perceptions of public speaking skills through multiple-choice questions allowing more than one response, and the third identified challenges the students encountered when learning public speaking skills. Regarding part 3, the students' difficulties were categorized into confidence challenges, attention concerns, fear of making mistakes, pressure from lecturers, lack of topic knowledge, and subjective matters. Questions in the final part employed a 5-point scale to score the agreement levels of aspects regarding students' difficulties when learning public speaking skills based on the following criteria.

Table 2.

The criteria of the agreement levels of aspects concerning students' difficulties when learning public speaking skills

| Scale | Mean range | Agreement level |
|-------|------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 1.00-1.49 | Strongly disagree |
| 2 | 1.50-2.49 | Disagree |
| 3 | 2.50-3.49 | Undecided |
| 4 | 3.50-4.49 | Agree |
| 5 | 4.50-5.00 | Strongly agree |

Results then were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 20. The data was analyzed, tabulated, and interpreted by using means, percentages, and frequencies. Mean (M) was used to calculate the average level of agreement on aspects concerning the students' challenges when dealing with public speaking skills. Standard Deviation (S.D.) depicted the spread of the scores of the respondents within the respondent group.

Results

Student's general perception towards public speaking skills

The researcher first discovered the students' perceptions towards public speaking skills before gaining insights into specific challenges encountered by the students when dealing with public speaking skills.

Table 3.

Rate of difficulty level among four English skills

| Rate of the level of difficulty | Frequency | % |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Listening | 9 | 15 |
| Speaking | 24 | 40 |
| Reading | 10 | 16.7 |
| Writing | 17 | 28.3 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

Table 4.

Rate of difficulty level of public speaking skills

| Rate of difficulty level of public speaking skills | Frequency | % |
|---|------------------|------------|
| Very difficult | 20 | 33.3 |
| Difficult | 35 | 58.3 |
| Neutral | 2 | 3.3 |
| Easy | 2 | 3.3 |
| Very easy | 1 | 1.8 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

As shown in Table 3, the highest proportion of the participants, 40%, reported speaking as the most challenging skill for them, compared to only 28.3%, 16.7%, and 15% of those who rated writing, reading, and listening as the most difficult, respectively. This finding was further asserted when most participants rated public speaking very difficult (33.3%) and difficult (58.3%). Meanwhile, only a small percentage of the students indicated public speaking skills were either easy or very easy.

Table 5.

Rate of the importance of public speaking skills

| Rate of the importance of public speaking skills | Frequency | % |
|---|------------------|------------|
| Not important | 0 | 0 |
| Slightly important | 3 | 5 |
| Moderately important | 5 | 8.3 |
| Important | 9 | 15 |
| Very important | 43 | 71.6 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

Based on a 5-level Likert scale (Very Important, Important, Moderately Important, Slightly Important, and Not Important), the surveyed students showed the importance of speaking skills mainly at the levels of "very important," "important" (71.6% equivalent to 43 choices), and "important" (15% or 9 choices). They appreciated that having good public speaking skills would greatly help them.

Table 6.

The total time spent by students on improving English speaking skills

| Rate of the importance of public speaking skills | Frequency | % |
|---|------------------|------------|
| More than 3 hours | 4 | 6.7 |
| 2 - 3 hours | 5 | 8.3 |
| 1 - 2 hours | 20 | 21.7 |
| Under an hour | 18 | 30.0 |
| I do not have time to practice English every day | 13 | 33.3 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

However, when it comes to the total amount of time the surveyed students spent enhancing their public speaking skills, the highest proportions of the students did not spend time for everyday practice due to time constraints, at 33.3% or spent just under an hour, at 30%. Only a small percentage of the samples spent between 2 hours and 3 hours improving their public speaking skills.

*Students' specific difficulties in dealing with public speaking skills.**Confidence concerns*

Table 6.

Confidence challenges

| Confidence Concerns | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| Lack of confidence when speaking in front of teachers and friends | 3.70 | .962 |
| Fear of not speaking well enough | 3.60 | .960 |
| Fear of being judged | 3.87 | .747 |

Table 6 shows challenges related to confidence concerns when the students were dealing with public speaking skills. Overall, most of the participants agreed with all the comments about the lack of confidence mentioned in the survey questionnaire. Lack of confidence when presenting in front of class and lecturers got the highest mean score of 3.70. This result indicated that they lost confidence when giving presentations. This is also a situation that needs to be overcome urgently so that the students can be more confident in studying and working while speaking English in front of a crowd. Furthermore, fear of not speaking well and fear of being judged when speaking also received strong agreement among the students, with an average score of 3.60 and 3.87, respectively.

Attention concerns

Table 7.

Attention concerns

| Fear of being the center of attention | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| Get nervous and forget things I know | 4.22 | .739 |
| Display poor body language when presenting | 3.92 | .645 |
| Get nervous when being the focus of attention | 4.07 | .710 |

Table 7 clearly shows the anxiety of the students about being the center of attention when speaking in front of a crowd. The participants largely agreed with all the comments about attention anxiety mentioned in the survey questionnaire. When dealing with public speaking skills, students who worried and forgot things they studied earlier had the highest score of 4.22. This result is significant; many students commonly experience it when speaking in front of a crowd. In addition, students who felt nervous when they were aware of being the focus of attention had an average score of 4.07. Meanwhile, the percentage of the students who worried about their awkward body language was the lowest, with a mean score of 3.92 in this regard.

Fear of making mistakes

Table 8.

Fear of making mistakes

| Fear of making mistakes | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| Be afraid of making grammatical mistakes | 3.87 | .769 |
| Be afraid of making pronunciation mistakes. | 3.85 | .840 |
| Worry about a limited vocabulary knowledge, making sentences not diverse and unattractive to listeners. | 4.00 | .781 |

Similarly, fear of making mistakes is also a common concern among the students when presenting in front of a crowd. The students mostly agreed with all the comments about the fear of making mistakes mentioned in the survey questionnaire. They were afraid of not having enough knowledge, which can make their sentences broken and not attract listeners, with the highest score of 4.00. In other words, most of the students were afraid of a lack of vocabulary for themselves, making them take a longer time to think of the words to respond. In addition, when speaking in front of many people, students' fear of making mistakes in pronunciation and grammar also rated high, with average scores of 3.85 and 3.85, respectively. This result seemed to indicate that most of the students had a fear of getting into public speaking practice.

Pressure from instructors

Table 9.

Pressure from lecturers

| Pressure from instructors | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| Get a pounding heart when teachers call my name | 3.52 | .930 |
| Not knowing how to answer teachers' questions. | 3.52 | .833 |

As shown in Table 9 about difficulties related to pressure from instructors, the results indicated that students were also under pressure due to their lecturers. Most students shared fears of getting a pounding heart when their teachers called their names and when they did not know how to answer their teacher's questions, with an average score of 3.52 each.

Lack of knowledge

Table 10.

Lack of topic knowledge

| Lack of topic knowledge | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| Have limited knowledge about presented topics | 3.70 | .850 |
| Be not well-prepared to respond promptly to inquiries from listeners. | 3.50 | .997 |

The results of Table 20 show the lack of knowledge about the topic students discussed when speaking in front of a crowd. In general, most of the participants agreed with all the comments in the survey questionnaire about their lack of knowledge on the topic. The responses from the students who believed that they had limited knowledge about the presented topics had the highest score of 3.70. This result indicated that the students need to study more knowledge about the topic to be more confident when speaking in front of a crowd. Meanwhile, the situation where the students needed to prepare better in time to answer promptly inquiries from the audience had a slightly lower score of 3.50.

Subjective matters

Table 11.

Subjective matters

| Subjective matters | Mean | SD |
|--|-------------|-----------|
| Not spend much time enhancing public speaking skills | 3.15 | 1.147 |
| Not being active in class activities | 3.27 | .989 |
| Lack of motivation when learning public speaking skills | 3.63 | .863 |
| Lack of seriousness when learning public speaking skills | 3.58 | 1.033 |

Table 11 shows students' subjective concerns when dealing with public speaking skills. This category received the lowest rate of agreement among the students. The highest response of the students fell into the lack of motivation when learning, with an average score of 3.63. The second place in this category was not being active in-class activities, with an average score of 3.27. Meanwhile, the students who needed more seriousness when learning public speaking skills and spent less time on improving their speaking skills had an average score of 3.58 and 3.15, respectively.

Discussions and Recommendations

This study collected data from a questionnaire survey of English majors to identify their difficulties in handling public speaking skills. Based on the results, there were some solutions, and suggestions to improve the public speaking skills for students.

Student's general perceptions toward public speaking

The results showed that most students consider public speaking skills important for their future careers, even though they found them to be the most challenging skills compared to writing, listening, and reading. However, despite understanding the importance and challenges of public speaking skills, the students did not spend a lot of time honing their public speaking skills. The results show that most of the participants devoted less than one hour to enhancing their public speaking skills because they were busy.

Students' difficulties when dealing with public speaking skills.

Fear of making mistakes and being the center of attention

Noticeably, the categories “fear of making mistakes” and “fear of being the center of attention” received the highest agreement level among the participants. More specifically, the pressure when standing in front of many people made them nervous and forget things to be presented. This result is consistent with Horwitz (2001) about a strong association between speaking outcomes and anxiety. The consequences of these fears might include displaying inappropriate body language or appearing shy. It is because students believe that they will make many grammar and pronunciation mistakes or even produce poor sentences. To help students overcome this problem, Lucas (2009) states that, to speak effectively in public, speakers should have a clear purpose of what they are going to speak about, select a good topic beneficial to audiences, be verbally articulate, keep a calm attitude, and manage themselves effectively.

Looking at these fears from a positive perspective can help students anticipate the worst possible outcomes from the current circumstance. To illustrate, Horwitz (2001) stated that if speakers could not properly deliver their talks, they would experience negative feedback from the audiences, which would drive them to be better prepared before the speech. Teachers should tell their students about challenges and opportunities of fear of making mistakes and being the center of attention (Alnuzaili & Uddin, 2020).

Additionally, public speaking should be more focused in class activities for two main reasons. First, students will have a calm and confident mind when speaking in public. Secondly, they will be more open to the audience's opinions, regardless of positive or negative ones. Finally, this helps students to anticipate questions that are more likely to be asked during their presentation.

Lack of knowledge about the topic

Subjective difficulties have the lowest agreement among the surveyed samples. It is because students did not study public speaking skills seriously and were inactive in class activities. Students need to expand their knowledge in various aspects, reading books and newspapers in English to have more ideas and, most importantly, to practice public speaking skills regularly. In other words, students should listen to English speeches more often to learn the presentation styles and enhance their language proficiency, which are the keys to success in public speaking. This is consistent with the suggestions from the research by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) about the importance of having good preparation. Fortunately, these are much easier for students at present as many useful social networking sites are available online. According to Nguyen and Pham (2022), technology greatly influences speech. The study found that film, YouTube, PowerPoint, Speech Recognition Software, and other technological tools can significantly improve EFL learners' oral communication abilities. Moreover, support from lecturers (effective teaching skills, good lesson contents, engaging class activities, and encouragement) could play a major role in enhancing the students' public speaking skills. Regarding class activities, communitive activities, such as information gaps or jigsaw exercises, can improve students' speaking skills (Vo, 2022)

Confidence challenges

The results from the study also indicated that confidence challenges were also noticeable among the students because confidence challenges discouraged students from actively presenting in front of their teachers and friends. This could be explained by the fact that students thought their speeches could be judged negatively by the audience (Tuyen & Dan, 2021). Seriously, students were also worried about being asked unexpected questions or to present promptly. The situation could be worse if the students did not have a decent knowledge of the topic they were talking about. In fact, to speak confidently and fluently, students need a lot of practice in standing in front of a crowd to develop confidence.

According to Liu (2007), to avoid the phenomenon of timidity or lack of confidence when speaking in public, students need to stay calm and take deep breaths to be more comfortable while speaking. In addition, to make the atmosphere more natural, students should interact with the audience to create a more friendly and fun atmosphere. More importantly, for a successful presentation, students must be well-prepared and rehearse many times beforehand. It can reduce anxiety when they are speaking in public. Speaking is a skill that requires hard work, and it can develop over time with proper practice.

Limitations of the research

Although the writers tried to clarify the research's purposes, there are still many limitations. The number of participants is not large enough (only 60 participants attending the survey). It is likely that some students answered perfunctorily, or they might not carefully read the questions when answering them, so the results were not 100% certain. However, the researchers made a lot of effort to access the data and make the results from the questionnaires as valid and reliable as possible. From the above limitations, the writer hopes that other researchers will rely on the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of this study to have better results in the future.

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