

## **Role of Anxiety in Speaking Skills: An Exploratory Study**

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**Abstract**

There is no doubt that the present-day professional students are expected to deliver presentations and enhance public speaking skills. Students in professional courses must be trained how to overcome anxiety in public speaking. Based on the concept of anxiety, the present study makes an attempt to find out whether anxiety plays a major role in classroom public speaking tasks in comparison with individual performance with their familiar friends. 30 engineering under-graduate students were asked to present on two different topics: one with their friends and the other with another batch of students whom they were not familiar with. It was observed that the familiar faces in the audience group helped to make the presentations better. Later, the students were asked about the strategies they used to overcome 'anxiety'. The study highlights that 'anxiety' plays a major role in public speaking skills which can be overcome with a few simple strategies.

**Keywords:** speaking, anxiety, public speaking.

**Introduction**

Engineering graduate students are expected to deliver presentations during the course of their studies. Also, some of their courses are evaluated based on their presentation skills. Thus, public speaking skills are required to perform better during the programme. The study makes an attempt to find out whether anxiety plays a major role in public speaking skills of the graduate students.

**Literature Review**

Language learning is highly related to psychology. If one is highly motivated to learn a language, it would be easier for him/her to do so. Many studies have highlighted the significant link between language learning and affective factors. (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Chastain, 1975; Schumann, 1999; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Young, 1990; Ely, 1986; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992; Zhanibek, 2001). All of the studies associate language learning with the emotions and feelings of the learners. Further, Brown (1994) emphasises

the link between language learning and personality traits like self-esteem, empathy and introversion.

Anxiety plays a significant affective variable in the process of language learning. According to Krashen (1982) anxiety interferes in the process of acquiring a language. This is highlighted in the affective filter hypothesis given by Krashen (1982). In this context, Horwitz and Cope (1986) also highlight on foreign language anxiety when they state that it is “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning process”

### **Need of Speaking Skills for Engineering Graduates**

Engineering students need speaking both for their academic and professional requirements. The students should be given that much of language inputs which are required for them. Many a time, it has been observed that students have been overburdened with language inputs from language teacher. This has been observed by Nunan (1999: 148) when he states, “Learners were fed an undifferentiated linguistic diet regardless of their communicative ends”. Further, Gözüyeşil (2014) made an extensive study on language needs of engineering students in Turkey and found that many students need speaking skills more than other language skills like listening skill, reading skill and writing skill. This is also true for many other parts of the world including Turkey.

### **Sample Tasks on Speaking Skills**

The followings are some of the tasks which can be used to enhance speaking skills:

- a) Information-gap activity
- b) Role Play/ Simulation Tasks
- c) Picture Description
- d) Debate and Group discussion
- e) Quiz and discussion

The above list is not exhaustive. Teachers may choose the task type based on the learners’ needs and motivation.

### **Methodology**

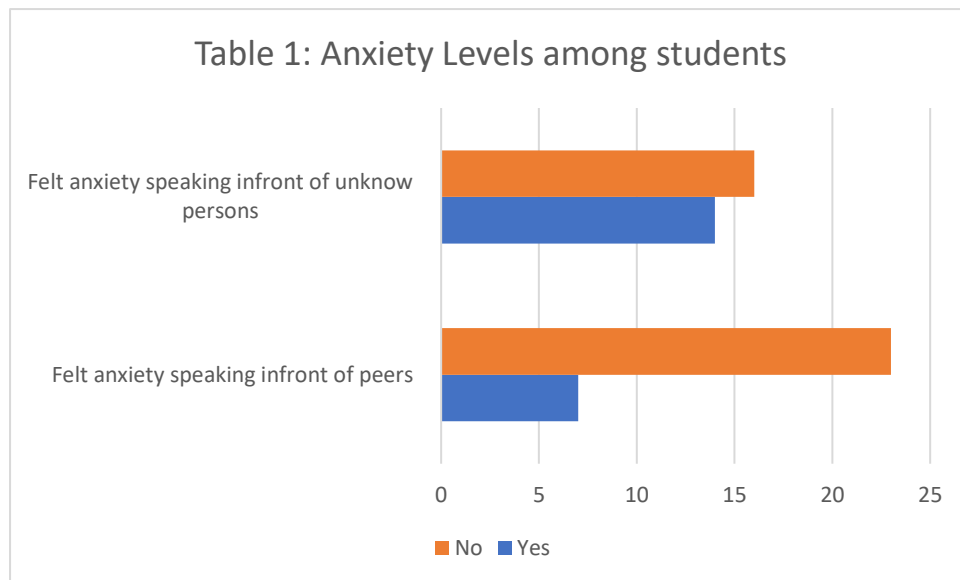
The research study is based on the exploratory study where students were asked to give their opinions between presentation in front of familiar friends and presentations in front of unfamiliar audience. This was carried out through a self-evaluative questionnaire. Further, the researcher as a participant-observer made extensive feedback. The data were analysed based on these two tools; questionnaires and filed notes.

### **Results and discussion**

The study intends to find out the following two issues:

1. Whether students felt anxiety while speaking in front of their peers?
2. Whether students felt anxiety while speaking in front of unknown faces?

The following table (Table-1) highlights students' responses from a self-evaluation form.



It is evident from the above table that students felt anxiety and tension while speaking in front of audience whom they were not familiar with. The graph shows that 14 out of 30 students felt anxiety while delivering a talk in front of unknown audience. Furthermore, the table (Table 1) highlights that students were very much at ease speaking in front of their peers. It is evident that 23 students out of 30 were very much comfortable and didn't feel anxiety while speaking in front of their peers.

The result from researcher diary also reveals the same. Students were more comfortable in their speaking pace when speaking in front of their peers in comparison to speaking in front of unknown audience. This was also evident in their body language, as many students were able to express their thoughts with smiles which reflect that they were motivated to share their ideas also.

### Conclusion

The study emphasizes the need of taking students' anxiety into consideration while enhancing speaking skills. Students are motivated and comfortable to speak in front of their peers. Thus, language teachers need to keep this in mind and make learners prepare for the world outside classroom by giving them enough scope for practice inside classroom on speaking skills.

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