

Students' Anxiety and its Causes in Oral Presentation at University Level: A Sequential Explanatory Mix Method Study

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Abstract

In recent decades, educational experts have increasingly expressed concern about the prevalence of anxiety among students during oral presentations. Academic achievement is seen as a critical factor in students' future prospects, but regrettably, the rate of engagement of students in oral presentation is reducing every day. The key objectives of the study were to evaluate students' anxiety in oral presentation at higher level and to investigate the reasons behind students' anxiety in oral presentation. This study followed a sequential explanatory approach within a mixed-methods framework. Both quantitative and Qualitative techniques were used to gather the data. A survey using a five-point rating system, having a considerable level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha of 0.8), was developed for quantitative data gathering. The study targeted both male and female students from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) and Government Sadiq College, and Women's University of Bahawalpur (GSCWU). The total population of the study was consisted of 51746. Table of Krejci and Morgan (1970) was utilized in order to calculate the sample size. Out of the total population, 367 students were selected using simple random sampling technique. After quantitative data collection data was entered in SPSS version 20, the results indicated that female students exhibited a significant level of anxiety during oral presentations, primarily attributed to a fear of public speaking and a high significant level of anxiety. On the bases of quantitative findings, qualitative interviews were conducted with 10 students selected through purposive sampling. The qualitative data revealed several key reasons behind students' anxiety during oral presentations, including low self-confidence, fear of public speaking, fear of public judgment, communication gaps between students and teachers, and a lack of interest for oral presentations.

Keywords: Oral Presentation; Students' Anxiety; Higher Education; Causes of Anxiety; Mixed Methods

Introduction

According to Richards and Thompson (2023) and Putra and Kayen (2025), communication is considered as one of the most crucial academic abilities in higher education since it helps students succeed academically and gets them ready for future professional requirements.

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Oral presentation is one of the many communication skills that have become essential to higher education since it enables students to successfully convey their information, concepts, and comprehension to a specific audience. Students must be able to articulate knowledge coherently, analyze critically, logically arrange pertinent content, and react appropriately to queries and comments from the audience (Putra & Kayen, 2025).

Oral presentations, according to Nundy et al. (2021) and Phan et al. (2022), are structured communication processes intended to convey ideas and information through efficient presentation techniques, such as well-structured content, accurate information, confident delivery, and innovative presentation styles. Speaking abilities are also essential to students' academic growth since they are used in class debates, group projects, seminars, and academic presentations (Leonita et al., 2023). Unlike reading and writing, speaking requires instant responses, proficiency, and self-assurance, making it one of the most difficult language skills for many students. As a result, speaking anxiety has become an ongoing barrier that keeps students from effectively communicating their thoughts during oral presentations. When speaking in front of an audience, students who struggle with presentation anxiety frequently experience anxiety, fear, and self-consciousness. Speaking anxiety is frequently linked to low self-confidence, a fear of making mistakes, and communication anxiety, according to Pan and Lou (2023). Similarly, Moafa (2024) found that a significant percentage of college students had significant anxiety when speaking English, with exam anxiety being the most prevalent characteristic, using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

Moreover, previous research studies show that both internal and external influences affect students' nervousness during oral presentations. First, internal factors include a small vocabulary, a fear of making mistakes, a lack of confidence, and poor speaking experiences in the past (Hanake, 2024).

In the opinion of Rajitha and Alamelu (2020), external elements include cultural expectations surrounding public speaking, peer pressure, severe instructors, and fear of being criticized by the audience. Students' willingness and potential to perform well during presentations are influenced by a variety of psychological and environmental factors.

Oral presentations are still one of the most popular forms of assessment in higher education, despite these difficulties. Universities regularly use oral presentations to assess pupil comprehension, communication skills, and general academic achievement, according to Lin (2023).

Additionally, a number of studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of oral presentations on students' academic and personal growth. They improve self-assurance, critical thinking, motivation, learning engagement, persuasiveness, and communication skills (Lin, 2023; Meganathan, 2024). Similarly, Apridayani et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of oral presenting in helping students enhance their communication, critical thinking, and self-efficacy skills.

However, there are often several obstacles in the way of achieving an excellent presenting performance. For instance, in a study of undergraduate English majors at a university in southern Thailand, Apridayani et al. (2024) discovered that students had nervousness, poor audience involvement, awkward posture and gestures, and trouble answering audience questions. In the same way, Karin et al. (2025) found that university students in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia,

frequently suffered from presentation anxiety, fear of being judged, poor comprehension of presentation topics, little audience interaction, and a lack of creative presentation techniques.

Furthermore, studies indicate that these difficulties might be reduced by using efficient preparation and presenting techniques. According to Putra and Kayen (2025), effective oral presentations necessitate careful preparation prior to the presentation. Their study, which involved students from Indonesian public and private institutions' Faculty of Communication and Language, found a number of useful techniques, such as summarizing important concepts, logically arranging ideas, practicing presentations, and boosting self-confidence. By lowering anxiety and boosting overall presentation effectiveness, these strategies assist students in improving the quality of their presentations.

Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend students' oral presentation anxiety in order to enhance both instructional strategies and students' communication abilities. Few studies have explicitly looked at students' perceptions of oral presentations coupled with the causes of their fear, despite the fact that earlier research has investigated presentation anxiety in several educational situations. Therefore, by analyzing students' experiences of oral presentation fear and determining the causes of it, the current study aims to add to the body of existing literature.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To examine students' perceptions of oral presentations.
- To examine students' anxiety during oral presentations.
- To explore the reasons behind students' anxiety during oral presentations.

In conclusion, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of oral presentation anxiety and produce insights that may help educators create encouraging learning environments and practical methods for improving students' oral presentation skills by investigating both situational and psychological factors.

Literature Review

The main reasons of presentation anxiety, according to research on students' anxiety during oral presentations, include social pressure, low self-confidence, weak language ability, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Research shows that this kind of anxiety has a substantial impact on students' performance, especially in EFL students when public speaking becomes a key academic challenge (Chuang et al., 2013; Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem & Taqi, 2014).

Al-Issa, Al-Qubtan, and Munby (2011) cite a substantial body of work that highlights the importance of excellent presentation skills for academic performance and the ways in which adequate instructional support can enhance students' oral communication experiences. Because they improve communication skills, critical thinking, and student involvement, oral presentations are frequently utilized in higher education (Encin, 2011).

Additionally, they promote cooperative learning through group projects and enhance comprehension of the course material (Rhee, Parent & Springer, 2013). Nevertheless, despite these benefits, a lot of students still struggle due to a lack of preparation, inadequate practice, and high levels of speaking anxiety (Le, 2021; Razawi et al., 2019).

A major factor influencing how well pupils present is anxiety. It is described as a psychological state involving tension, fear, and physiological arousal that interferes with cognitive processing and task performance (Bhandari, 2023). According to Craske et al. (2009), anxiety disorders involve heightened emotional and behavioral responses to perceived threats, which can negatively affect academic activities such as oral communication tasks. Various forms of anxiety including generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias may contribute to poor speaking performance, particularly when students anticipate negative judgment or failure (Leichsenring & Leweke, 2017; Wiley-Liss, 2010).

Studies further categorize the causes of anxiety into psychological traits (e.g., shyness, low self-esteem), past negative experiences, and environmental stressors such as peer pressure or instructor expectations (Nguyen, Wright & Dedding, 2019; Ackerman et al., 1998). In academic settings, anxiety can reduce concentration, impair memory, and decrease participation, ultimately lowering students' academic achievement (Ader & Erkin, 2012; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Test anxiety and presentation anxiety have been found to trigger physiological stress responses that hinder performance even when students are well-prepared (Ameringen & Farvolden, 2000).

In the context of oral presentations, both individual and group formats are used to evaluate students' communication competence. While individual presentations show a student's autonomous comprehension and speaking skills, group presentations encourage cooperation and collaborative learning (Walley, 2008; Al-Issa, 2014). Despite their educational advantages, students often report issues including content forgetting, disorganization, limited language proficiency, and evaluation anxiety, all of which lead to performance problems (Hadi et al., 2020; Shahar & Abdul-Raof, 2021).

Overall, the literature confirms that anxiety is a major barrier affecting students' oral presentation performance and academic achievement. Understanding the types, causes, and effects of anxiety is essential for developing supportive instructional strategies that can reduce learners' stress and enhance their communication skills.

Research Methodology

For this study, a Sequential explanatory mixed method research design was adopted. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for better understanding of the phenomenon. A five-point rating scale, self-administered questionnaire was developed to assess the students' anxiety during oral presentation. There were two sections corresponding to the questionnaire. The first section included demographic data about the university students. There were 30 open-ended questions in the second section. 367 students were then selected from the whole population using a simple random sampling technique for quantitative data collection. For qualitative data collection 10 students were selected via purposive sampling to explore the causes of students' anxiety during oral presentation skills. To investigate the reasons behind students' anxiousness during oral presentations, interview responses were recorded and examined.

Validation of Tool

In accordance with the study's goals, a five-point rating scale questionnaire was created. Four subject matter experts evaluated the face and content validity of the tool following the editing and modification of their suggestions. The questionnaire's reliability was evaluated in a small-

scale pilot research. After pilot testing, essential adjustments were made based on the feedback received. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of the data after it was entered into SPSS version 20. The reliability of the tool was 0.8. Students' anxiousness during oral presentations was investigated through a semi-structured interview. The results of the quantitative data analysis served as the foundation for the interview questions.

Analysis of Data

SPSS version 20 was used to enter the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire. The mean score, frequency, standard deviation distribution t-test, and percentage were computed. Student interviews were used to get the qualitative data. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to examine the collected qualitative data.

Statistical assessment

The quantitative data was collected via a questionnaire presented in the following tables.

The following tables show the quantitative data that was gathered via a questionnaire.

Table 1: Respondents' demographic data

Variable	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Gender		
Male	183	49.9
Female	184	50.1
institute		
IUB	274	75
GSCWU Bahawalpur	93	25

The respondents' demographic data is shown in Table 1. According to the final statistics, 50.1% of participants were female and 49.9% were male. Of the responders, 25% were from GSCWU and 75% were from IUB.

Table 2 students' perceptions about oral presentation

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA		Total <i>f</i>	Total %	Mean
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%			
Enjoy giving presentation	32	9	88	24	66	18	121	33	60	16	367	100	3.24
Like to giving feedback to classmates on their presentations	14	4	56	16	66	18	177	48	52	14	367	100	3.52
Like to present topic that chosen by themselves	13	3	21	6	47	13	181	49	105	29	367	100	3.94
Like to present topic assigned by course instructor	16	4	93	25	68	19	127	35	63	17	367	100	3.35
Prefer to memorize presentation rather than understand	45	12	69	19	64	18	148	40	41	11	367	100	3.19

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Like to receive feedback on their presentation	14	4	71	19	48	13	153	42	81	22	367	100	3.59
Prefer to assessed by written exam rather than oral presentation	19	5	47	13	53	14	161	44	87	24	367	100	3.68
Prefer group oral presentation	27	7	87	24	47	13	142	39	64	17	367	100	3.35
Presentations are effective way to learn and demonstrate knowledge	13	3	14	4	73	20	147	40	120	33	367	100	3.95
Like the idea of oral presentation	19	5	68	19	57	15	138	38	85	23	367	100	3.55
Oral presentation improves communication skills	12	3	17	5	59	16	131	36	148	40	367	100	4.05
Oral presentation is waste of time	98	27	107	29	47	13	90	24	25	7	367	100	2.56
Have ability to deliver their presentation effectively.	119	32	121	33	63	17	38	11	26	7	367	100	2.27
Oral presentations are unreliable for assessing students' academic performances	132	36	110	30	52	14	49	13	24	7	367	100	2.25
Better performs in subject which does not have oral presentation	124	34	120	32	48	13	54	15	21	6	367	100	3.26
Final Result	46	12	73	20	57	16	124	34	67	18			3.32

Note: SDA=Strongly Disagree, DA= Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

The statistics of students' opinions regarding oral presentations were shown in Table 2. The group statistics of students' perception factor displayed varying attitudes toward oral presentations, ranging from disagreement to strong agreement. The total mean score of "oral presentations are unreliable for assessing students' academic performances" was comparatively low ($M = 2.25$). Although the overall mean score of "oral presentation improves communication skills" was somewhat above average across all sub-factors of perception ($M = 4.05$). The overall mean score of the factor "perception" was 3.32, which led to that Oral presentations were frequently considered positively by university students, although some aspects, such as confidence in performance and reliability of assessment, were viewed less favorably.

The statistics of students' nervousness during oral presentations were shown in Table 3. The anxiety factor group statistics for pupils showed different levels of nervousness, fear, and low self-confidence while delivering oral presentations. The overall mean score of "fear of criticism from classmates during oral presentation" was relatively low ($M = 3.20$), indicating that this factor caused the least anxiety among students. While the overall mean score of "feel anxious during oral presentation" was moderately high across all sub-factors of anxiety ($M = 3.69$). According to the anxiety factor's overall mean score of 3.47, university students were somewhat anxious when giving oral presentations.

Table 3 students' anxiety during oral presentation

Items	SDA		DA		N		A		SA		Total	Total	Mean
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Nervousness before oral presentation exam	36	10	55	15	46	13	104	28	126	34	367	100	3.38
Frightened when a lot of people are watching me	33	9	55	15	44	12	164	45	71	19	367	100	3.50
Nervousness because of teachers' observation about my language skills	41	11	80	22	46	13	145	39	55	15	367	100	3.32
Fear of failure in oral presentation	34	9	70	19	61	17	144	39	58	16	367	100	3.67
Struggle with oral presentation due to lack of self-confidence	22	6	59	16	56	15	173	47	57	16	367	100	3.50
Feel embarrassed due to oral presentation in English	35	10	75	20	47	13	119	32	91	25	367	100	3.57
Past negative experiences effect self-consciousness while delivering oral presentation	32	9	82	22	55	15	95	26	103	28	367	100	3.58
Still feel worried even after well preparation	54	15	66	18	48	13	100	27	99	27	367	100	3.66
Starting an oral presentation tend to forget everything planned to say	35	10	57	15	59	16	121	33	95	26	367	100	3.50
Fear of unfair grades for oral presentation	23	6	47	13	47	13	163	44	87	24	367	100	3.34
Fear of criticism from classmates during oral presentation	43	12	78	21	50	14	147	40	49	13	367	100	3.20
Feel anxious during oral presentation	30	8	81	22	55	15	149	41	52	14	367	100	3.69
Starting the oral presentation faster the heartbeat	87	24	163	44	47	13	47	13	23	6	367	100	3.66
Loss of self-confidence during oral presentation	49	13	147	40	50	14	78	21	43	12	367	100	3.22
Feel anxious when questions asked by classmates	52	14	149	41	55	15	81	22	30	8	367	100	3.31
Final Result	41	11	84	23	51	14	122	33	69	19	367	100	3.47

Note: SDA=Strongly Disagree, DA= Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

Qualitative Analysis

The interviews highlighted that most students struggle with a lack of confidence during oral presentations. Many participants reported feeling nervous, experiencing a racing heartbeat, and forgetting key points. Some students also mentioned avoiding eye contact due to a fear of being judged. Additionally, communication gaps between students and teachers further increased anxiety, as students hesitated to ask for guidance or feedback. These findings indicate that better training and support systems are needed to improve students' oral presentation skills."

Table 4 Qualitative Analysis

Theme	Common Responses from Students	Frequency
Lack of Self-Confidence	Nervousness, fast heartbeat, sweating, forgetting key points	High
Fear of Public Speaking	Unable to maintain eye contact, voice trembling, forgetting speech	High
Fear of Judgment	Fear of making mistakes, skipping presentations, playing with markers	Medium
Communication Gaps with Teachers	Fear of teacher's anger, lack of guidance, missing feedback	Medium
Lack of Interest in Oral Presentations	Avoiding presentations, poor engagement, skipping presentation days	Low

Discussion and Conclusion

The major motivation behind the research was to explore the reasons behind anxiety among students during oral presentation. The first objective of the research was to examine students' perceptions about students' oral presentation. It was observed that students had positive opinions about oral presentations skills. They believed that oral presentations are a great source to improve their academic performance. However, the second objective of the research was to examine anxiety among students during oral presentation skills. The findings of the anxiety factor illuminated those students had moderate level of anxiety during oral presentation skills. Although, female students had more anxiety than male students. The research findings reveal that a significant proportion of higher-level students, particularly females, contend with various degrees of anxiety when confronted with oral presentations. The gender gap is clear, with girls in particular experiencing higher levels of anxiety, which is primarily related to fear of numbers, and moderate to high levels of anxiety in general.

The third and last objective of the research was to examine the reasons behinds anxiety among students during oral presentation skills. It was observed that the major reasons behinds students' anxiety was lack of self-confidence, fear of public speaking and judgment, communication breakdown between teacher and students and lack of interest about oral presentation skills.

Recommendations

On the basis of data analysis and conclusions, the following recommendations are incorporated to reduce students' anxiety and improve the effectiveness of oral presentation skills at the higher education level.

- Confidence-building activities should be incorporated into classroom practices, such as small-group presentations, peer-to-peer speaking tasks, and low-stakes practice sessions, to help students gradually overcome fear of public speaking.
- Workshops and training sessions focusing on communication skills, presentation techniques, and anxiety management should be arranged by universities to support students who experience moderate to high levels of presentation anxiety.

- Teachers should adopt supportive feedback strategies, ensuring that their behavior does not contribute to students' fear of judgment. Positive reinforcement and constructive, non-threatening feedback can reduce anxiety.
- It is recommended that open conversations, consultation hours, and interactive teaching approaches be used to increase teacher-student communication. A supportive setting might assist lessen pupils' hesitancy and anxiety of making mistakes.
- Female students, who showed higher anxiety levels, should receive special attention, such as targeted mentoring, confidence-enhancing activities, and opportunities for safe speaking environments.
- Curriculum designers should integrate oral presentation skills into regular coursework so that students can practice throughout the semester instead of only during graded assessments.
- Students should be encouraged to seek counsel when necessary by participating in awareness initiatives that help them understand that mild anxiety is normal and manageable.

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