

Experiential Learning and Toastmasters International Programme: Transformative Effects of Public Speaking Training on Oral Presentations

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Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

The current study reviewed the literature on oral communication apprehension and its effects on academic performance, specifically the effectiveness of public speaking training: the Toastmasters International programme. Communication techniques, expertise, and various aspects that lead to oral communication anxiety were investigated, including a broad range of communication dimensions. Furthermore, the study investigated numerous forms and repercussions and demonstrated the link between anxiety and academic accomplishment. The significance of public speaking training as a powerful method to reduce anxiety was emphasised. A comprehensive description of the Toastmasters International programme and its function in developing excellent communication skills was also clarified. The study explained the theoretical basis, specifically the experiential learning theory and its contextual relevance to public speaking training. The current literature highlighted the scarcity of research on communication anxiety in technical and vocational schools, specifically among polytechnic diploma students. Communication apprehension within a vocational institution was investigated to address the research gap. A novel approach was proposed, which combined public speaking training based on the Toastmasters Competent Communicator Manual, Kolb's experiential learning theory, and McCroskey's communication apprehension theory. This technique developed Malaysian students' oral communication aptitude by systematically addressing the reasons for communication anxiety and providing an experienced learning environment. The method provides the students with the skills required to thrive globally. The current study uncovered new paths for minimising communication anxiety to push for student success.

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Keywords: Oral communication apprehension; public speaking training; Toastmasters International program; vocational institution.

Introduction

Several terms describe the phobia of public speaking, namely stage fright, communication anxiety, and public speaking anxiety, which are used synonymously. Bodie (2010, p. 72) defined public speaking anxiety as “a situation-specific social anxiety that arises from the real or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation”. The fear of speaking in front of an audience is known as glossophobia (Hancock et al., 2010), which originates from the Greek word for “fear or dread” and “tongue” or “glossa”. The impacts of social anxiety on college students have been inadequately researched (Russell & Topham, 2012). Pörhölä and Kunttu (2019) discovered that some college students suffer from severe social anxiety in a classroom setting (Almonkari & Kunttu, 2012; Kunttu & Huttunen, 2009; Russell & Shaw, 2009; Russell & Topham, 2012). Kählke et al. (2018) disclosed that the prevalence of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) among college students ranged from 3.4% (12 months) in the United States (US) (Blanco et al., 2008) to 16.1% (point prevalence) in Sweden (Tillfors & Furmark, 2007). The Russell and Shaw UK prevalence survey (2009) revealed that approximately 10% of students at a large university and its partner colleges experienced substantial social anxiety. The current study provided a comprehensive literature analysis of oral communication anxiety, its impacts on academic performance, and the significance of public speaking instruction, specifically the Toastmasters International Programme (2022). The study examined a wide range of issues related to communication, including the factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety, the forms of anxiety, the damage, and the effects on a person’s learning ability. Assessment methods, the benefits of public speaking training in reducing anxiety, and the building blocks of oral and public speaking presentations were also discussed. A synopsis of the Toastmasters International course load was included. The study aims are as follows:

- a. To analyse the Benefits of Experiential Learning on Participants’ Oral Presentation Skills in the Toastmasters International Curriculum by improving the speaker’s clarity, organisation, body language, voice diversity, and overall delivery.
- b. Toastmasters applies four distinct stages of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. To analyse how the participants improve their abilities, boost their self-assurance, and overcome their anxiety in communicating at each step.
- c. To identify what makes the Toastmasters programme unique and how it improves members’ public speaking skills. For instance, holding a firm grasp on how the interplay of practice, feedback, and access to learning resources may lead to improvement.
- d. To evaluate participants’ confidence in public speaking following their Toastmasters participation and determine how their self-perceptions of their linguistic abilities change as they engage in sustained practice, acquire new abilities, and receive constructive criticism.
- e. To examine how Toastmasters members’ oral presentation skills develop from receiving and giving feedback and

analyse how to improve their understanding of their speaking abilities, weaknesses, and development prospects using peer and expert assessment.

- f. To investigate how Toastmasters' experiential learning process helps people overcome their public speaking fear. To raise awareness of exposure to real-world circumstances, theoretical understanding, and consistent practice could overcome the fear of public speaking.
- g. To provide suggestions to public speaking training programme educators, trainers, and organisations based on findings. To highlight the core concepts of experiential learning and the game-changing elements of the Toastmasters International programme that could be replicated to improve public speaking abilities.

The current study emphasised enhancing participants' oral presentation skills and decreasing communication anxiety by outlining the transformative effects of experiential learning based on the Toastmasters International programme.

Failure to enhance abilities or participate in reskilling and upskilling programmes could cause over 4.5 million Malaysians to lose their jobs by 2030 (Bernama, 2023). In the present globalised world, effective communication skills, specifically public speaking and oral presenting talents are critical for personal and professional success. Similar to other nations, a widespread worry manifests in graduates' need for these critical abilities. The factors below outline the need for more public speaking and oral presenting abilities among Malaysian graduates and propose viable solutions based on the recent literature.

- a. **Factors Contributing to a Skill Gap:** The Malaysian educational system and curriculum have historically prioritised rote learning and exam-oriented assessment, often disregarding the development of practical communication skills. Traditional educational techniques highlighting information delivery rather than active participation hinder the development of public speaking and oral presentation skills (Jalleh et al., 2021). The current curriculum must provide more opportunities for students to develop and refine their communication abilities to prevent ill-preparedness for real-world circumstances (Ali & Akbar, 2020).
- b. **Cultural Factors:** The cultural variety of Malaysia increases the range of communication techniques and preferences, which could facilitate or hinder positive communication. According to Ng et al. (2019), cultural norms and language limitations could influence students' confidence in public speaking and oral presentations as they fear making mistakes in front of various audiences.
- c. **Dependence on Technology:** The rise of digital communication tools has shifted the emphasis from face-to-face encounters. Consequently, graduates require more interpersonal skills to connect with and engage audiences in physical settings. The World Economic Forum (2020) report stated that interpersonal skills, specifically public speaking, will become increasingly crucial as automation and technology become more integrated into the job.
- d. **Lack of Pedagogical Approaches:** Numerous Malaysian educational institutions continue to apply traditional teaching techniques that do not effectively underline the development of public speaking and oral presentation skills. Modern instructional practices, such as experiential learning, collaborative projects, and interactive workshops should be more frequently addressed (Zulkifli et al., 2018). These approaches are vital for fostering environments for students to practice and enhance their communication skills.

- e. **Rejection and Judgment:** Public speaking anxiety is normal and amplified by the dread of being judged harshly by peers and teachers. Ibrahim et al. (2021) mentioned that this fear is usually caused by low self-confidence, specifically among Malaysian students needing more training or public speaking exposure.

Strategies for Overcoming the Issue:

- a. **Curriculum Improvement:** Malaysian institution curricula should be revised to include communication-focused courses emphasising public speaking and oral presentation skills. Modules requiring students to participate in regular presentations, debates, and discussions could aid them in gaining confidence and competence.
- b. **Experiential Learning:** Experiential learning tactics, such as mock presentations, role-playing, and real-world case studies could provide students hands-on experience with various communication contexts. These methods enable students to practice and receive constructive feedback in a safe atmosphere, which lowers anxiety and raises confidence.
- c. **Faculty Development:** Educators play a crucial role in developing students' communication skills. Offering faculty members training and workshops on effective teaching techniques for communication skills could enhance the learning experience and ensure constant skill development.
- d. **Cross-Cultural Communication Training:** Given the Malaysian multicultural environment, cross-cultural communication training could assist students in understanding and appreciating multiple communication styles. This strategy could help students overcome language hurdles and develop their capacity to tailor their ideas to multiple audiences.
- e. **Integration of Technology:** Technology could exacerbate communication challenges and improve skills. Students could practice public speaking and receive feedback in a safe environment using online platforms and virtual reality simulations. These tools bridge the digital and in-person communication experiences.

Malaysian graduates' low public speaking and oral presentation abilities is a complicated issue driven by the education system, culture, technology, and personal insecurities. Hence, a comprehensive approach encompassing curriculum reform, novel teaching techniques, staff training, and highlighting cross-cultural communication could address this issue. These measures would equip graduates with the necessary communication skills for success in an increasingly linked world.

The current study critically reviewed and synthesised recent scholarly research to gain relevant insights on the transformative effects of public speaking training in the Toastmasters International programme on participants' oral presentation skills.

A. Strategy for Identifying Literature:

1. **Database Selection:** To access relevant scholarly articles, the study used conference papers, reports, and research, reputable academic databases, such as PubMed, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and Education Research Complete.
2. **Keywords and Search Terms:** Combining keywords and search terms ensures comprehensive issue coverage. "Experiential learning," "Toastmasters International programme," "public speaking training," "oral presentation

skills,” “communication anxiety,” and other relevant phrases were used.

3. Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion: Studies published within a specific time frame were included to ensure current and relevant sources. Peer-reviewed articles, empirical research, literature reviews, and conceptual papers were also included. However, sources with little credibility or significance were eliminated.

B. Literature Review Process:

1. The identified literature was subjected to a first screening based on titles and abstracts to determine its relevance to the topic and research questions.
2. Full-Text Review: Selected papers from the initial screening underwent a thorough full-text review. Articles relevant to the review topic, specifically the transforming impacts of the Toastmasters programme on oral presenting abilities and communication anxiety remained.
3. Data Extraction and Synthesis: Key findings, techniques, theoretical frameworks, and implications were extracted systematically from the selected papers. A thematic synthesis approach was employed to identify common themes, patterns, and noteworthy insights across the evaluated literature.

C. Thematic Investigation: The retrieved data were thematically evaluated to evaluate reoccurring themes and patterns and gain a more nuanced knowledge of the transforming effects of the Toastmasters programme, similarities and differences in findings, theoretical viewpoints, and techniques.

D. Theory Integration of Experiential Learning and Communication Anxiety: Kolb's theory of experience learning and McCroskey's theory of communication anxiety were applied to analyse the reviewed material. The links between the programme experiential learning components, communication anxiety reduction, and oral presentation skills improvement were scrutinised.

E. Considerations for Ethical Behaviour: The review was based on existing material, thus the primary ethical considerations were correct citation and credit of sources. The review process involved strictly following academic integrity and ethical principles.

Toastmasters International Programme

Toastmasters International is a non-profit educational organisation that teaches leadership and public speaking skills through a global network of clubs and assists people from diverse backgrounds to become more confident in their abilities (Toastmasters International, 2022). The programme has no formal structure or instructors, and members' performance is not graded. Instead, members learn through reading a communication guide and constructive mutual feedback to develop their public speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills (D21 Toastmasters, 2022). Active participation and engagement in the roles allow members to build leadership skills and develop their presentation skills while raising their self-confidence.

Yee and Abidin (2014) stated that participation in Toastmasters meetings enables students to practice presentations in an organised manner and gradually acquire public speaking skills. The 10 speaking tasks in the programme aim to enhance

learners' public speaking skills, which cover aspects ranging from organising a speech to delivering an inspiring speech using well-crafted materials. Toastmasters meetings provide a friendly, inspiring, and non-threatening atmosphere for speakers to practice (Nordin & Shaari, 2017). Nordin and Shaari (2017) investigated L2 learners at Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS and revealed that Toastmasters sessions helped them to speak in public, gain courage, and listen to the unique stories of others. Self-directed learning in Toastmasters sessions motivates members and encourages them to learn independently (Sun, 2008). This approach develops a natural meeting environment that encourages knowledge transfer from the classroom to real-life situations.

Irfan and Zafar (2020) investigated how Toastmasters clubs in Pakistan lowered participants' English as a Second Language (L2) speech anxiety during the closure of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) through organised online activities. The qualitative study with 23 Toastmasters from two clubs revealed that a supportive classroom environment could reduce participants' anxiety. Toastmasters International was an effective model for lowering speech anxiety among L2 learners with speakers' confidence in their topic and natural delivery to reduce anxiety. Sun (2008) examined how the Toastmasters training model could be integrated into an EFL speaking lesson with 18 students participating in 10 speaking tasks to build a public speaking foundation. Students learned to give formal presentations, organise meetings, and respond to impromptu speaking requests by attending real Toastmasters meetings. Observably, a Toastmasters-based public speaking course significantly reduced stage anxiety and encouraged active learning.

The programme provided members with opportunities for self-directed learning and constructive feedback to become better public speakers, listeners, and thinkers. Success with this curriculum resulted in its adaptation for public speaking training where its premise of "learning-by-doing" is assisting people to overcome communication fear, as reported by Toastmasters members. Although the Toastmasters programme is widely acknowledged for its positive impact on communication anxiety and skill development, a review article on its effectiveness and discussing potential areas for improvement is warranted due to its various aspects.

Organisational and programme structure issues:

- a. Focus on Academic Context is limited: Although the Toastmasters curriculum directly applies to academic presentations, more research is required to determine the best application. Academic presentation requirements, readings, and audience assumptions may or may not align with the course content.
- b. Diversity in Cultural and Linguistic Terms: Toastmasters members often come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Evaluation could reveal whether the programme is tailored to students' specific needs who are not native English speakers and how well it addresses the challenges in the classroom.

Programme Novelty and Relevance:

- a. Academic Contextualisation: This analysis bridges the literature gap by considering how the Toastmasters programme could be improved for Malaysian technical college students. This contextualisation fulfils the specific communication needs of academic lectures.
- b. Integration of Theoretical Frameworks: The review is critical as it combines theoretical frameworks, such as Kolb's

experiential learning theory with McCroskey's communication anxiety theory. This combination helps develop an individualised programme to eradicate communication anxiety among polytechnic students through public speaking training.

- c. Addressing the Research Gap: The review paper is an innovative attempt to address the knowledge gap on students' communication fears in technical and vocational settings, specifically those pursuing a polytechnic diploma. This research attempt provides insights and solutions specific to the challenges encountered by pupils.

This evaluation is critical as it emphasises how students in Malaysia could tailor the Toastmasters International curriculum to their educational context. The current study incorporated pre-existing theoretical frameworks to present a novel method for reducing students' anxiety in public speaking and to improve their oral communication abilities, which are essential for future professional and academic success.

Public Speaking and Oral Presentation: a Conceptual Overview

Speaking ability assesses a person's communicative capability. Communicative competence is an individual's capacity to successfully employ language in actual communication (Goh & Burns, 2012). This explanation proves that public speaking is one of the communicative skills that should be developed. The ability to communicate with a large group in public is known as public speaking. Menjadi Public Speaker Andal (Viera, 2021) defines public speaking as "a communication process in front of an audience that aims to provide information, persuade, or entertain." Several steps were included in the public speaking process: setting up, appearance and body language, voice behaviour, audio-visual support, and question-and-answer sessions, which are crucial aspects of public speaking (Gareis, 2006).

Public speaking is a complex skill for EFL students to master. Shen and Chiu (2019) explained that students' challenges in speaking English were psychological (nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence), linguistic (insufficient vocabulary, grammar, expressions, insufficient sentence organisation), and environmental (lack of learning context for English conversation). Students who perform public speaking tend to experience nervousness. Bodie (2010) described public speaking anxiety as "a situation-specific social anxiety that arises from the actual or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation." According to Gareis (2006), the speaker expresses his or her thoughts to a larger audience and frequently experiences uncertainty and anxiety before and during the presentation.

An effective method is required to improve student confidence when teaching public speaking (Ningsih et al., 2023). Effective oral communication must be taught more than reading, prepared, strategised, rehearsed, and evaluated in a 'genuine' environment (Chan, 2011). Balley presented several concepts of teaching children to talk (Nunan, 2003) as follows:

- a. Recognise the distinctions between second language and foreign language learning contexts. Language as a foreign language refers to a language not widely spoken in the country, which is a second language. The pupils are challenged in this setting to apply and learn the target language.
- b. Allow pupils to practice fluency and accuracy. Accuracy is determined by how often the student utilises the target

language. Contrarily, fluency is the speaker's ability to utilise the language swiftly and confidently.

- c. Provide students an opportunity to talk by employing group or pair work and reducing instructor talk. Experience is the most effective approach to developing students' speaking abilities.
- d. Create speaking tasks that require meaningful negotiation. Speaking assignments that require pupils to negotiate meaning would assist them in interacting with others.
- e. Create classroom activities that involve instruction and practice in transactional and interpersonal speaking. Enjoyable and motivating activities could gain transactional and interactional speaking.

Public speaking and oral presentations are two vital communication skills involving verbally conveying information to an audience to persuade, inform, or entertain (Lucas & Stob, 2004; O'Hair et al., 2011). Despite similarities, these two communication forms differ in their approach, purpose, and the interaction level they promote. This section explores the similarities and differences between public speaking and oral presentation to provide a better comprehension of their nature, tasks, and applications. Public speaking and oral presentation require strong verbal communication skills (Lucas & Stob, 2004). Influential speakers must articulate their thoughts clearly, utilise appropriate vocabulary, and ensure correct pronunciation to convey their message (O'Hair et al., 2011). Additionally, non-verbal communication plays a critical role in both communication forms. Speakers use body language, facial expressions, and gestures to emphasise their message, build rapport with the audience and hold their attention (Pease & Pease, 2006). Another vital commonality is preparation, as speakers must research their topic, organise the content, and rehearse their speech to ensure a polished presentation (Lucas & Stob, 2004).

Despite these similarities, public speaking and oral presentations differ in multiple aspects. Public speeches are typically aimed at a larger audience and could be in various forms, such as keynote speeches, motivational speeches, or political debates (Lucas & Stob, 2004). Meanwhile, oral presentations usually emphasise a specific topic and are common in academic, business, and professional settings (O'Hair et al., 2011). Public speaking is usually inspiring, informing, or persuading, while oral presentations highlight sharing research findings, updated information, or introducing ideas. Another important difference is the interaction level with the audience. Public speaking is generally a one-way communication process where the speaker relays information or ideas without expecting immediate feedback (O'Hair et al., 2011). Meanwhile, oral presentations often encourage more interaction and discussion with the audience and open opportunities for questions, comments, and constructive criticism. This interactive nature enables presenters to outline concerns, clarify misunderstandings, and modify their message based on audience feedback (O'Hair et al., 2011).

Public speaking and oral presentations share similarities in their application of verbal and non-verbal communication skills and the need for preparation. Nonetheless, their approach, purpose, and interaction level with the audience differ. Comprehending these differences could allow individuals to adjust their communication skills to the context and achieve the desired results (Lucas & Stob, 2004; O'Hair et al., 2011).

Types of Oral Presentation

Through verbal communication, oral presentations relay information, ideas, or arguments, often accompanied by visual aids, such as slides or props. Presentations are normally conveyed in an academic, professional, or social setting, which ranges from informal conversations to formal lectures or keynote speeches (Lucas, 2015). The effectiveness of an oral presentation relies on factors, such as the speaker's communication skills, the audience engagement, and the presentation organisation and clarity (Zarefsky, 2016). Various Malaysian universities include oral presentations in their curricula to enable students to develop effective communication and public speaking skills vital for success. University students who speak well in public could develop their oral presentation skills, thus boosting their confidence when entering the workforce (Muthusamy, 2019). Oral presentations in university courses are persuasive and informative. Instructors assign students a specific presentation or research topic, however students could choose their topics and presentation style (Quigley & Nyquist, 1992; Richards, 2022). The objective of oral presentations is to teach students how to present their ideas to a group in an orderly, concise, and effective manner. This opportunity enables students to improve their presentation skills during their studies, thus preparing them for future presentation tasks (Schreiber, 2011).

An informative presentation mainly informs the audience by imparting new knowledge or elaborating on a familiar topic (Schreiber, 2011). Meanwhile, persuasive presentations aim to move, motivate, or change the audience mind on a specific topic, often involving controversial issues (Smith, 2021). Presenters must be well-prepared and utilise credible facts and data to support their claims. Mastering the subject matter and the desire to communicate with people allow individuals to share their knowledge effectively, provided they plan and organise their presentation systematically (Živković, 2014). Presentation skills are critical for students in higher education as they promote professionalism in the classroom (Muthusamy, 2019). Oral presentations also promote learner autonomy, enabling learners to enhance their learning identities and supplement learning materials to fulfil their individual needs (Amir, 2020). Students who give oral presentations gain direct control over the lesson content and flow, which allows them to practice their English skills in an authentic setting (Brooks & Wilson, 2014). Oral presentations improve student's communication skills and awareness effectively. These presentations are critical in providing quality educational experiences, as professionals must communicate with others in meetings, seminars, and conferences in multiple professional settings (Grieve et al., 2021; Živković, 2014).

Oral Presentation Components and Assessments

Oral presentations are vital for academic and professional communication, which require a comprehensive understanding of numerous elements to be effective and successful. Lucas (2001) suggested that an effective presentation should hold a clear structure, including an introduction, main body, and conclusion logically constructed with smooth transitions between ideas. Moreover, strong verbal and non-verbal communication skills, namely tone of voice, pitch, volume, pace, eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions, are critical (De Grez, Valcke & Roozen, 2009). Nature Education (2014) identified three components of effective presentations: verbal (what is said), vocal (how it is said), and visual (what the audience sees). Lowenbraun (2022) discouraged memorising or reading off prepared content. Instead, speakers should memorise the outline and deliver the speech naturally and engagingly. Speakers could hold audience interest by varying their voice, avoiding filler words (Dlugan, 2009), and utilising visual cues, such as eye contact, gestures, body movements,

and facial expressions to build rapport and relay information effectively (Nature Education, 2014). Matching facial expressions to verbal messages is crucial to reinforce the message and prevent distractions and confusion (Lowenbraun, 2022).

Oral presentations are a valuable assessment method in higher education to evaluate students' knowledge and communication skills (Bhati, 2012). Students should prepare and practice consistently to enhance their presentation skills and ensure effectiveness (Le Hoai, 2021). Le Hoai (2021) suggested that practice opportunities and explicit teacher instructions could develop students' speaking and learning skills. Frameworks and rubrics for assessing oral presentations often emphasise content, organisation, delivery, and language utilisation (Rubin et al., 1990). Content assessment analyses the information relevance, accuracy, and comprehensiveness. The organisation assessment examines the logical structure of the presentation, clarity of main points, idea flow, and transition effectiveness. Verbal and non-verbal communication skills are considered to assess delivery, including quality of voice, eye contact, body language, and application of visual aids and technology. Grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency are reviewed in assessing language use to ensure clarity, conciseness, and engagement (Pathak & Le Vasan, 2015).

Assessment techniques for oral presentations include self-assessment, peer assessment, and instructor assessment (Dannels, 2001). Self-assessment encourages ownership of learning and reflection on performance and opportunities for improvement (Brown & Knight, 1994). Peer assessment enables students to gain feedback from their classmates, which encourages a collaborative learning environment and improves critical thinking and assessment skills (Topping, 1998). Instructor assessment, typically using a rubric, provides expert feedback and guidance, outlines strengths and weaknesses, and presents the groundwork for future improvement (Brookhart, 2013). Summarily, comprehending and addressing the components of oral presentation and assessment is crucial to developing practical communication skills in academic and professional contexts. Highlighting content, organisation, delivery, and language use and incorporating self-assessment, peer assessment, and instructor assessment enable educators to help students develop their oral presentation skills, communication skills, and success in their academic and professional endeavours.

Communication Process, Critical Factors, and Public Speaking Training

Communication

Communication is transmitting information, messages, or ideas from one person to another (Heath & Bryant, 2000). Successful communication plays a critical role in shaping a person's image, as those who communicate effectively tend to hold a positive self-perception due to the positive feedback and accolades received (Nelson, 2011). The communication process includes several components: information sources, senders, and receivers collaborating to ensure information transmission (Barker, 2010). Fiske (2002) stated that communication entails giving and receiving codes and cues and serves as a social interaction that establishes connections between people.

Verbal and non-verbal communication are the two main forms of communication. Verbal communication encompasses

spoken words, while non-verbal communication covers body language, gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions that complement the message content (Lindh et al., 2009). Non-verbal communication is a vital communication component, which social anthropologists estimate accounts for 60% of all public discourse (Barker, 2010; Heath & Bryant, 2000; Fiske, 2002). According to Bhardwaj (2008), non-verbal communication involves body language, gestures, facial expressions, and spoken words. Verbal and non-verbal communication are critical in effectively transmitting messages and establishing social relationships.

Communication Competence

Communicative competence involves using language effectively in various cultural and social contexts. Hymes (1972) mentioned that communicative competence extends beyond knowledge of linguistic rules and involves the ability to utilise language appropriately in numerous situations. This competence covers several skills and abilities, such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Furthermore, grammatical competence entails knowledge of vocabulary rules, sentence structure, pronunciation, spelling, and linguistic semantics. Sociolinguistic competence includes producing and understanding utterances in multiple contexts and the sociocultural rules of language use. Discourse competence is the speaker's ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to develop a coherent text in a specific genre. Meanwhile, strategic competence involves coping mechanisms for multiple language and performance issues, including utilising reference materials, grammatical and lexical paraphrases, and other communication strategies (Galajda, 2012).

Communication apprehension could prevent the development of communicative competence, specifically in public speaking situations. Communication apprehension is the fear or anxiety regarding communication, which could produce adverse outcomes, such as performance decline and avoidance of communication situations (McCroskey, 1984a, b). Individuals could undergo public speaking training to overcome communication fears and develop communicative competence. Public speaking training aims to enhance an individual's ability to deliver effective speeches and overcome the fear of public speaking (Beebe & Beebe, 2021). Public speaking training enables individuals to develop discourse competence by learning to organise and deliver effective speeches. Sociolinguistic competence could also be developed by adapting the individuals' language to various audiences and contexts. Additionally, public speaking training could enhance strategic competence by teaching individuals how to apply communication strategies effectively and fluently by developing their delivery skills (Beebe & Beebe, 2021). Summarily, communicative competence is critical for effective communication. However, communication apprehension could hinder the development of this competence, specifically in public speaking. Public speaking training could assist people in overcoming their communication apprehension and developing communicative competence, which could enhance their communication skills in multiple contexts.

Communicative Approach

Richards and Rodgers (1997) mentioned that the communicative approach to language acquisition highlights developing communicative proficiency by applying linguistic principles to create grammatically correct sentences and comprehend the

subtleties of when and how to utilise them. This pedagogical strategy is based on the concept that communication is innate in humans, which emphasises the necessity for language teaching to promote organic language use instead of simply emphasising rules or structures. The primary goal of language instruction with this methodology is to provide students with the skills necessary to effectively apply language in context-appropriate manners.

Richards and Rodgers (2002) outlined that the communicative approach emphasises the societal aspect of communication where language learners communicate for meaningful ends. Contrary to the grammar-translation approach, which highlights rote memorisation of grammatical rules and text translation, the communicative approach values language as an engagement tool. The technique utilises everyday words and idioms to promote effective communication. This method facilitates the acquisition of colloquial speech and writing skills in the target language and fosters the comprehension of linguistic intricacies through actual language usage. Furthermore, the communicative method outlines the significance of presentation abilities and speech intelligibility (Yee & Abidin, 2014). Effective communication necessitates the capacity to articulately transmit information straightforwardly, understandably, and with linguistic precision. Consequently, the communicative technique encourages teaching that emphasises enhancing presentation skills and explaining ideas coherently through spoken language.

The communicative approach highlights language inherent, unrestricted application, the social dimension of communication, and the significance of presenting skills and intelligibility in the multidimensional language learning process. This instructional technique is influenced by numerous views, which aligns with the concept that language is a dynamic tool that enables meaningful interaction and comprehension in numerous linguistic circumstances.

Communication Apprehension

The Communication Apprehension Theory (CAT) was introduced by James McCroskey (1970) to elaborate on the anxiety and fear individuals experience while communicating with others. The theory states that communication apprehension (CA) is a trait-like anxiety that impacts an individual's willingness and ability to communicate orally. McCroskey (1970) underlined four types of CA: trait-like, context-based, audience-based, and situational. Past studies discovered a negative relationship between CA and academic performance, specifically oral presentations (McCroskey, 1977; McCroskey & Andersen, 1976). As levels of communication apprehension increase, academic performance tends to decrease, and vice versa. These studies verified that communication apprehension negatively affects students' academic achievements, specifically when delivering oral presentations. Oral communication apprehension concerns individuals' fear or anxiety when engaging in oral communication, namely public speaking, group discussions, or one-on-one conversations (West & Turner, 2008). This experience is common and could influence people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds (Sellnow, 2005). Oral communication apprehension is affected by numerous situational, dispositional, and cultural factors, including the nature of the communication task, audience characteristics, physical environment, personal characteristics, such as self-esteem, social anxiety and communication competence, and cultural background and identity (Weiten et al., 2009).

Oral communication apprehension could negatively impact individuals in personal and professional contexts, including limiting social and career advancement opportunities and impacting academic performance where oral communication is a

crucial assessment component (McCroskey, 1984; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Communication apprehension normally manifests in four characteristics, namely internal discomfort, avoidance of communication, interference with communication, and overcommunication (McCroskey, 1984). Numerous strategies could assist people in managing their fear of oral communication. These techniques include cognitive behavioural methods, such as relaxation exercises, desensitisation techniques, cognitive restructuring, public speaking training programmes, and interventions, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction. These strategies help individuals build confidence and skills in oral communication, reduce anxiety and fear concerning communication tasks, and prevent negative consequences, such as avoidance of communication situations (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).

Communication apprehension could negatively impact students' learning experiences in universities and prevent them from interacting in class (McCroskey & Andersen, 1976). Students suffering from communication apprehension fear communicating with the faculty and other students, which hinders their communication attempts. Academics argue that students' challenge in interacting with the faculty is due to large class sizes at university, however communication apprehension could hinder communication efforts regardless of class size. Hence, anxiety over spoken communication is a regular occurrence in personal and professional settings. Nevertheless, cognitive behavioural approaches, public speaking training programmes, and interventions, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction could assist people in overcoming their fear of oral communication. Internal discomfort, avoidance of communication, interference, and overcommunication are symptoms of communication fear. Communication fear could negatively impact university students' learning experiences by hindering them from communicating in class.

Types of Oral Communication Apprehension

McCroskey's (1970) categorisation of CA into four distinct types: trait-like, context-based, audience-based, and situation-related presents a comprehensive framework for comprehending how communication manifests in individuals. Trait-like CA is a stable and enduring characteristic inherent in a person's personality, which permeates several communication contexts and is not dependent on specific situations or individuals (McCroskey, 1970). Individuals with high trait-like CA experience recurrent communication apprehension regardless of the circumstances.

Context-based CA relates to specific situations or environments: public speaking, small group discussions, or interpersonal conversations (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). This apprehension occurs when a person experiences anxiety in specific communication contexts and dissipates when the person is outside the anxiety-provoking context. Audience-related CA is characterised by anxiety when communicating with specific individuals or groups depending on the audience (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). An individual may feel comfortable communicating in specific contexts nevertheless become anxious when confronted with specific individuals or groups or audience characteristics, such as their authority, expertise, or relationship to the speaker contributing to this apprehension.

Situational CA arises from factors or conditions within a communication context, such as the situation novelty, the communication perceived importance, or time constraints (Beatty et al., 1998). Situational CA is temporary and changeable and could change based on the situation or conditions surrounding the communication event. Comprehending

the types of communication apprehension highlighted by McCroskey (1970) is critical to understanding the subtleties of human communication. Recognising the differences between trait-like, context-based, audience-based, and situation-based apprehension allows researchers and practitioners to address the challenges of communication apprehension better and develop effective strategies.

Factors That Influence Oral Communication Apprehension

Oral communication apprehension is anxiety that occurs when speaking in public or in front of an audience (McCroskey, 1977). This anxiety could prevent effective communication and detrimentally affect academic and professional performance. This apprehension is caused by introversion, shyness, self-consciousness, past negative experiences with public speaking, and fear of judgment (McCroskey, 1982). Situational factors, such as the audience size, the topic perceived complexity, and the presence of supportive resources also affect this apprehension (McCroskey, 1977). Cultural considerations, such as communication norms and performance expectations within a particular culture could further exacerbate this anxiety (McCroskey, 1997). Motley and Molloy (1994) suggested that speakers could be either performance-oriented or communication-oriented. Performance-oriented speakers intending to develop an aesthetic experience for their audience perceive presentation skills as formal and rehearsed (McCarthy & Hatcher, 2002). Contrarily, communication-oriented speakers strive to communicate their message and believe audiences forgive common communication missteps. Anxious speakers tend to be performance-oriented and shifting to a communication orientation could substantially alleviate their anxiety (Motley, 1997). This prevailing performance orientation may have origins in traditional education, which highlights recitation and reading aloud, thus viewing public speaking as a performance instead of a communicative activity (Motley, 1997).

Individuals who fear public speaking often experience challenges in developing practical presentation skills due to stress (Illeris, 2007). These people tend to strive for flawless performance, which leads to exhaustive preparation, such as writing scripts and memorising speeches, which exacerbates their anxiety (Motley, 1997). These individuals become anxious as their primary goal is to finish the presentation, which shifts their focus away from their core message (Motley, 1997). This situation stems from the misconception that a successful presentation involves something other than procrastination (Turk, 2002). Ireland (2018) proposed that various factors contribute to speech anxiety where the most common theme is audience-related, with size, familiarity, fear of judgment, and self-consciousness frequently cited. Other studies reported fear of forgetting the lines or making mistakes, evaluation stress, and fear of performing alone. Meanwhile some studies reported physical and emotional anxiety symptoms, such as trembling, panic, nausea, hurry, and feelings of embarrassment. Such feelings could worsen apprehension as students anticipate the unpleasant experience. Low mastery of oral presentation correlates with increased apprehension (Griffiths, 2012).

Several strategies for managing oral communication apprehension involve public speaking training, relaxation techniques, cognitive behavioural therapy, and systematic desensitisation (McCroskey, 1977). Systematic desensitisation minimises apprehension by gradually exposing individuals to increasingly challenging speech situations while using relaxation methods (McCroskey, 1997). Public speaking and counselling training programmes could improve communication skills and facilitate people in managing their anxiety (McCroskey, 1977). Oral communication apprehension could prevent

effective communication and negatively impact academic and career progression due to personal, situational, and cultural factors. Shifting from a performance-based technique to a communication-based one could significantly alleviate public speaking anxiety. Public speaking training, relaxation techniques, and systematic desensitisation could assist individuals in overcoming their fears and encourage more confident and effective communication.

Effects of Communication Apprehension

The CA has been broadly examined in communication and recognised as an essential factor affecting people's personal, academic, and professional lives (McCroskey, 1977). The CA could produce psychological and physiological consequences, which affect emotional well-being, cognitive processing, and communication competence (Ayres, 1988). High CA could lead to adverse psychological impacts, such as anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem (McCroskey, 1984), which results in negative self-perception, avoidance of communication situations, and defective social relationships (McCroskey & Richmond, 1995). The physiological manifestations of CA could involve elevated heart rate, sweating, trembling, and an increased fight-or-flight response, which further worsens anxiety and stress (Woods et al., 1987).

In the academic setting, CA could negatively influence students' learning experiences, academic performance, and overall success (McCroskey et al., 1989). Students with high CA would avoid participating in class discussions, oral presentations, and other communication-intensive activities, which results in lower grades and a decreased sense of belonging in the academic community (Neuliep, 2012). Additionally, CA has been connected to higher procrastination, lower motivation, and a lower likelihood of seeking assistance when needed (Zhang et al., 2022).

In a professional setting, CA could impede career advancement and limit professional opportunities (Bodie, 2010). Individuals with high CA may require assistance in job interviews, networking events, and workplace communication, which leads to a perceived lack of competence and potential exclusion from leadership roles (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012). Furthermore, employees with high CA may be dissatisfied with their work, exhibit lower productivity, and suffer from increased work-related stress, which ultimately impacts their overall job performance and career trajectory (LeFebvre & Allen, 2014). McCroskey (1976) highlighted that 10 to 15% of students suffer from CA, which decreases classroom interaction. These students may be reluctant to ask questions, provide feedback, or participate in class discussions, which interrupts their learning (Borzi & Mills, 2001).

Marshall (2001) and Zimbardo (in Bowie, 1984) support this claim by emphasising that students with high CA avoid speaking up in class and participating in discussions, which leads to negative self-perceptions. Additionally, classroom learning often requires practical group work, which could be challenging for individuals with CA (Richmond, 1997). Individuals with high CA may need assistance participating in group discussions and often provide less relevant feedback than other group members (Boam, 1999; Wells & Lashbrook, 1970). Physical and emotional symptoms could result in negative self-esteem and self-perception, which negatively impacts interpersonal communication and willingness to express oneself (Butler et al., 2004; Wong, 1998; McCroskey, 1997).

The impact of CA on students extends beyond the classroom. Nadler (1992) stated that CA influences students' ability to

interact with peers and teachers and adapt to the school environment. Furthermore, individuals with high CA may have limited career opportunities and require assistance in career advancement as they cannot excel in job interviews and contribute ideas in the workplace (Butler et al., 2004; Fordham & Gabbin, 1996). McCroskey et al. (1989) examined the impacts of CA on grade point averages and persistence in university and concluded that students with higher CA scores had lower grade point averages and tended to drop out of university. This finding highlights the need for effective interventions to minimise students with high CA dropout rates.

Students' perspectives and challenges with delivering oral presentations in English have been the subject of various research. Students are willing to present in English, however, Benraghda et al. (2017) discovered that nervousness is a substantial barrier. Speech and pronunciation issues, restricted vocabulary, and an uninterested audience are additional obstacles. Tabassum and Hossain (2020) observed that female Bangladeshi students in Bangladesh reported less fear about public speaking as time passed. Van Ginkel et al. (2015) revealed that students' sense of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and oral presentation skills improved when they presented in front of an audience. Nevertheless, Kadir and Raof (2020) discovered that students who had to prepare for or had prepared last-minute oral presentations in English tended to be anxious. Yee and Abidin (2014) suggested implementing a public speaking curriculum to facilitate English as a Second Language (ESL) students to overcome their fear of public speaking and enhance their speaking skills. The research emphasises students' obstacles when presenting in English, such as nerves, language barriers, and apathy.

The solutions to these issues include developing public speaking programmes and giving students opportunities to communicate in front of an audience. Oral presenting skills are critical for students' academic and professional success, which could help them gain confidence, overcome their fear of speaking English, and enhance their abilities in these areas. Researchers, educators, and practitioners could assist individuals with CA in overcoming their concerns and improving their communication skills by addressing the issue and developing interventions and methods to overcome the situation. Communication apprehension, known as public speaking anxiety, is a critical factor that hinders people's effectiveness and ease when delivering speeches in front of an audience. Nonetheless, additional factors could impact one's success and assurance when giving a public speech, namely:

- a. **Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy:** The ability to effectively engage an audience is directly related to the speaker's level of self-confidence and self-efficacy. Confident speakers could hide their nerves better and project an air of authority.
- b. **Audience Engagement:** Establishing rapport with the target audience is essential. Speakers who take the time to learn about their listeners' needs, wants, and background could modify their remarks.
- c. **Preparation and Practice:** Sufficient time spent learning the material and practising is a must. Confident public speakers tend to have studied their topic, prepared their message, and practised their delivery.
- d. **Content Quality:** The audience impression of the speaker's expertise and credibility is strongly influenced by the content quality, relevance, and coherence.
- e. **Nonverbal communication:** Perceptions of a speaker are impacted by their body language, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Message clarity and speaker credibility are enhanced by effective nonverbal communication.

- f. Method of Delivery: Using various voices, cadence, and exhibiting enthusiasm could capture and hold listeners' attention.
- g. Visual aids: Slides, videos, and physical objects could help the audience better comprehend and remember key points of the presentation if appropriately utilised.
- h. Flexibility: Adjusting one's presentation style and content based on how an audience responds is critical.
- i. Cultural Sensitivity: Effective communication requires understanding cultural differences and sensitivity to the expectations and norms of various audiences.
- j. Context: The room ambiance and the equipment at hand affect a speaker's poise and effectiveness. Knowing the way around the site and its technological amenities is essential.
- k. Feedback and Reflection: Giving constructive comments and reflecting on previous speaking experiences could help presenters develop their craft.

The significance and impact of these aspects vary based on personal preferences, cultural backgrounds, and unique speaking situations.

Public Speaking Training

Public speaking skills are crucial for students as they enhance employment opportunities and academic success and promote effective interpersonal communication in professional settings, specifically for future leaders (Whitworth & Cochran, 1996; Warner & Bruschke, 2001). Studies outlined that public speaking training could significantly reduce communication apprehension and enhance speaking skills (Herbein et al., 2018; Mowbray, 2010; Burnley et al., 1993; Colbeck, 2011; Heuett et al., 2003; Schroeder, 2002, 2011). Training programmes aimed at personal and professional development emphasise verbal and nonverbal communication, organising thoughts and ideas, speaking practice, and managing anxiety (Ady, 1987; Weissberg & Lamb, 1977; De Grez, Valcke, & Roozen, 2009; Pearson & Nelson, 2000). Studies present that public speaking skills training significantly enhances communication competence and self-efficacy and reduces anxiety (Smith & Frymier, 2006). Structured courses often include experiential learning activities and practice opportunities, which are effective in developing students' speaking skills (Allen et al., 1989). Targeted workshops and seminars highlighting specific aspects of public speaking, such as vocal delivery, body language, and audience engagement present valuable opportunities for skill development and refinement (Daly et al., 1995).

Integrating skills training into standard lectures is straightforward (Robinson, 1997) and seamless integration into public speaking courses offers significant benefits (Sawyer, 2016). Pribyl et al. (2001) demonstrated that skills training significantly reduced public speaking anxiety in Japanese high school students compared to a control group, thus suggesting that this aspect could assist students in overcoming their communication apprehension. Practising presentations in front of various audiences assists students in feeling more comfortable and confident in their speaking skills (Kho & Ting, 2021). Emphasising practice and proactively improving oral communication skills is critical for students, similar to practising answers to various questions to reduce anxiety further. A multifaceted approach is key to successfully developing presentation skills and confidence.

Ireland (2018) stated that providing opportunities for presentation experiences is vital, as supported by empirical data. Hence, skills and public speaking training are essential in promoting effective communication and improving personal and professional success. These programmes involve experiential learning activities and aid individuals in developing the necessary skills and confidence to excel in multiple communication contexts. Public speaking skills training increases students' marketability and academic success and reduces their fear of communication. Meanwhile, the skills training approach effectively combats anxiety and develops public speaking skills. Integrating public speaking training into standard lectures and promoting presentation exercises could improve students' public speaking skills and lower communication apprehension.

Experiential Learning: Theoretical Framework and Application

The theory of experiential learning (ELT) by Kolb (Kolb, 1984) is the theoretical foundation for this investigation. The learning cycle in ELT comprises four stages: direct experience, introspective observation, theoretical abstraction, and practical application. Students can make real progress by being involved in their education. In public speaking classes, students can try new communication methods through practice, self-reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. The ELT was created in 1980 by American psychologist David Kolb (Lewis & Williams, 1994), which states that learning is most effective based on personal experience and introspection. "Learn by doing" and applying knowledge to acquire new abilities or ways of thinking are central to the technique, which combines real-world circumstances comprising the body, mind, emotions, and actions (Kolb, 1984, p. 17).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is a well-known learning theory highlighting the significance of reflecting on one's experiences. Learning is a cyclical process that involves first-hand encounters, introspective analysis, theoretical speculation, and practical application. Despite the attention to Kolb's theory, other learning- and cognition-related theoretical frameworks exist. Below is an evaluation of Kolb's model beside other competing paradigms:

A. Behaviourism (B.F. Skinner):

1. Behaviourism places a premium on behaviours that can be observed and are influenced by incentives and punishments in response to environmental cues.
2. This theory does not investigate the workings of the mind or the speaker's emotions.
3. Kolb's theory, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of contemplation and introspection in the learning process.

B. Cognitivism (Jean Piaget):

1. Cognitivism outlines the significance of underlying cognitive processes in learning, including perception, memory, and problem-solving.
2. The theory stresses the significance of building meaning and comprehension through mental frameworks.
3. Cognitivism, in contrast to Kolb's theory, places a premium on mental organisation and growth rather than hands-

on experience.

C. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory:

1. This theory highlights how much we learn from seeing and imitating others around us.
2. The concept proposes that people learn by observing the actions of others and the results of those actions.
3. The notion borrows from experiential learning but emphasises introspection and unique encounters less than Kolb's model.

D. Constructivism (Lev Vygotsky):

1. Constructivism underlines the learner's role in constructing their knowledge and understanding.
2. The concept implies that learning is a social process significantly dependent on interactions with others and cultural milieu.
3. Kolb's theory is similarly participatory, which outlines introspection and the value of direct experience.

E. Connectivism (George Siemens):

1. Connectivism is an approach to learning that underlines making and maintaining meaningful connections in today's digital world.
2. The notion suggests that learning is a procedure for establishing ties among disparate chunks of knowledge.
3. Connectivism focuses on decentralised and networked learning as opposed to Kolb's model, which emphasises individual experience and reflection.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory highlights learning through repeated exposure to new situations, thoughts, and practice. Comprehending how people learn from real-world events and how those experiences alter their brains requires appreciating the centrality of personal interaction and internal cognitive processes. Experiential learning involves six key elements: Prioritising the learning process over outcomes, using experiences as the foundation for continuous learning, resolving conflicts between opposing styles to adapt to the world, recognising the inseparability of learning from the relationship between a person and their environment and regarding learning as a knowledge-building process (Sholihah & Mahmudi, 2015). The approach aims to change learners' cognitive structures and attitudes, improve existing skills, and outline how these factors are interconnected and influence each other. Learners can select and comprehend their experiences as they directly address issues or questions by applying each life activity as a learning tool to generate knowledge.

Kolb's experiential learning model comprises four phases (Kurt, 2022): concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Students learn hands-on, reflect on their experiences, draw conclusions by considering their past knowledge and known concepts or discussing theories with peers, and evaluate new ideas and strategies based on previously acquired knowledge. Kolb's experiential learning theory explains that effective learning involves four interrelated phases (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022). Learners actively participate in practical or action-based learning processes in the concrete experience phase, such as public speaking, where engagement is

vital. This process is followed by the reflective observation phase where learners reflect on their experiences, identify gaps in understanding, and engage in group discussions by emphasising effective communication (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022).

In the abstract conceptualisation phase, learners interpret events, draw conclusions based on previous knowledge, known concepts, or peer discussions, and apply this understanding to their experiences (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022). The final stage involves active experimentation where the learners apply the knowledge acquired in the previous steps to new experiences, make predictions, analyse tasks, and form plans based on their acquired knowledge to demonstrate its relevance to their lives (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022). Experiential learning outlines active engagement and reflection to enhance skills and understanding with teachers acting as facilitators and providing guidance and support (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022). Learners apply their acquired knowledge to comprehend the content and the process of knowledge creation. Although experiential learning has multiple benefits, such as increased enthusiasm, a supportive learning environment, the development of creative thinking, self-awareness, and improved self-confidence (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022), the significant time commitment could be challenging. Nevertheless, experiential learning remains invaluable for encouraging effective learning and skill development.



Figure 2.1. A Four-Phase Cycle of Kolb's Experiential Learning (Kurt, 2022)

Application of Experiential Learning Theory In Public Speaking Training

Using ELT in public speaking training could create a conducive environment for students to practice, introspect, and enhance their communication abilities, thus reducing public speaking fear. Kolb (1984) provided a holistic paradigm for ELT that involves four interconnected stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation, each contributing to a complete and transformative learning process. Educators could

promote a comprehensive path towards enhanced communication competence and reduced communication apprehension by seamlessly incorporating these stages into public speaking instruction. The Concrete Experience stage of ELT involves students engaging in practical activities, such as role-playing, simulations, or presentations in a safe and caring environment. This method produces an environment that allows students to address their worries and gradually acclimate to public speaking dynamics (Kolb, 1984). This experience practice enables students to bridge the gap between academic understanding and actual application. Bodie (2010) mentioned that such hands-on involvement clarifies the anxiety linked to public speaking by producing a sense of familiarity and ease within the situation.

Students critically assess their performances as they enter the Reflective Observation phase by noting the strengths and opportunities for development (Kolb, 1984). This self-reflection method gives pupils a thorough grasp of their strengths and limitations. Peers' and teachers' feedback improves this introspective process and aids in identifying specific parts that require improvement (De Grez et al., 2009). Students could fine-tune their communication techniques and adopt a growth-oriented viewpoint by obtaining constructive feedback. This self-reflective observation encourages self-awareness and a positive attitude towards obstacles linked to communication anxiety. Students analyse feedback and comments in the Abstract Conceptualisation stage to develop unique techniques for developing their public speaking skills (Kolb, 1984). This stage promotes a more in-depth investigation of communication theories, such as nonverbal communication, audience analysis, and persuasion strategies. Leathers and Eaves (2015), Axsom et al. (1987), and Wahl and Morris (2017) mentioned that understanding theoretical underpinnings enables students to overcome communication anxieties. A deep awareness of the mechanics of positive communication provides the students with the tools needed to control anxiety and negotiate challenges effectively.

In the Active Experimentation phase, students utilise their newly developed knowledge and techniques during subsequent presentations or activities (Kolb, 1984). This dynamic interaction between theory and application promotes a recurrent refinement cycle. Ayres (1988) stated that students progressively gain confidence as they repeatedly practice their learned abilities and overcome their communication fears, which lays a solid foundation for long-term improvement. Therefore, including Experiential Learning Theory in public speaking training helps overcome communication anxiety during academic presentations. Educators should encourage a transformative learning experience by organising a seamless blend of experiential practice, reflection, theoretical assimilation, and practical application. Combining practical experience and academic comprehension offers students a scaffolded path to improving public speaking abilities and reducing anxiety. This solution prepares children for academic success and success in various areas where excellent communication is critical. This technique contributes significantly to the holistic development of pupils by producing confident and skilled communicators.

Applying ELT in public speaking training enables educators to create an environment where students can practice, reflect, and improve their communication skills, which ultimately reduces their anxiety. Students participate in practical activities during the concrete experience phase of ELT, namely role-playing, simulations, or presentations in a safe and supportive environment (Kolb, 1984). This practice enables them to confront their fears and develop familiarity with public speaking, which reduces anxiety (Bodie, 2010). In the reflective observation phase, students review and analyse their performance while identifying areas of strength and weakness (Kolb, 1984). The students receive feedback from peers and instructors,

which further improves their understanding and helps them identify specific aspects that require improvement (De Grez et al., 2009). Reflective observation encourages self-awareness and a growth-oriented attitude that enables students to perceive their communication apprehension as an issue to overcome.

Students integrate feedback and reflection in the abstract conceptualisation stage to develop new strategies or approaches to improve their public speaking skills (Kolb, 1984). This stage involves exploring theories concerning communication, including nonverbal communication, audience analysis, and persuasion techniques to understand better and overcome their apprehensions (Leathers & Eaves, 2015; Axsom et al., 1987; Wahl & Morris, 2017). The active experimentation phase involves students applying their newly acquired knowledge and strategies in further presentations or activities (Kolb, 1984). This iterative process enables them to evaluate and refine their techniques, hence gradually gaining confidence and reducing their fear of communication (Ayres, 1988). Summarily, applying experiential learning theory to public speaking training could address students' communication apprehension in academic presentations effectively. Engaging students in hands-on activities, encouraging reflection, and promoting new strategies allows educators to help students overcome their anxiety and develop critical communication skills for success in academia and beyond.

Experiential Learning and Toastmasters International Programme

Toastmasters has expanded into a worldwide organisation of clubs since its inception in 1924 where members could practice public speaking, receive constructive criticism, and progress as leaders with the assistance of their peers. In terms of education, the Toastmasters programme is highly congruent with the tenets of experiential learning.

Toastmasters applies ideas of experiential learning as follows:

- a. **Concrete Experience (Practice and Participation):** Toastmasters meetings provide a supportive environment where members can apply for new speaking roles without fear of criticism. Members take on responsibilities, such as delivering formal presentations, facilitating group discussions, judging fellow members' speeches, and presiding over formal sessions. Members gain real-world experience while improving their communication abilities through these hands-on events.
- b. **Reflective Observation (Feedback and Evaluation):** After each performance, members are given constructive criticism from their peers and more seasoned judges. During this crucial observation phase, team members can objectively assess their performance, outline their best qualities, and determine areas to improve. One of Toastmasters' fundamental tenets is providing members with feedback that helps them improve.
- c. **Abstract Conceptualisation (Learning Resources and Education):** Manuals, courses, and guidelines are some of the many educational tools from Toastmasters. Vocal diversity, body language, speech structure, and persuasive approaches are the communication and leadership themes that members might investigate. This theoretical grounding enables group members to comprehend better and place their experiences in context, which increases effective communication.
- d. **Active Experimentation (Iterative Practice):** Participating in Toastmasters meetings and trying out new speaking

positions is an excellent way for members to practice what they have learned. During this active experimentation phase, members can enhance their abilities, try new approaches, and gain self-assurance with consistent practice.

The Toastmasters programme comprises a structured educational curriculum that progresses through various levels and projects. Members begin with the Competent Communication manual, which includes 10 speech projects that address various public speaking aspects. As the members advance, they explore advanced manuals emphasising specific areas, such as storytelling, humour, and technical presentations. Each project presents a unique learning experience, which contributes to the holistic development of communication skills.

Conclusion

The current study systematically reviews the literature on communication fears and their relationship to academic presentations. Insightful discussions of presentation skills, public speaking methods, and theories of anxiety were included. The adverse effects of communication anxiety on students' academic performance were explained and the positive benefits of the Toastmasters programme, specifically for second language learners were compared. Nonetheless, the results highlighted the lack of research on the effects of communication anxiety among students in technical and vocational institutions, specifically polytechnic students. The study emphasised the public speaking training approach based on the Toastmasters Competent Communicator Manual, which aims to comprehend the prevalence of communication anxiety inside vocational schools and how it might be alleviated using this model. This modification stems from combining McCroskey's theory of communication jitters with Kolb's experiential learning theory. Combining these theories in a new way could improve the oral communication skills of Malaysian professional course students, which increases their preparation to compete in the global economy. Academic presentation, public speaking, and communication anxiety are complex relationships underlined in this research review. The study highlighted persuasive communication intricacies, exploring approaches beyond mere words to include nonverbal cues, audience involvement, and persuasion. Moreover, the numerous facets of communication anxiety were discussed by highlighting the ideas that explain its causes and symptoms. Undeniably, pupils' academic performance suffers when they are plagued with communication anxiety. Their academic performance and sense of self-worth could suffer due to the anxiety holding them back. The Toastmasters programme outlines a solution for those learning English as a second language. The programme creates a helpful atmosphere for gradually reducing communication anxiety by focusing on gradual skill development, hands-on learning, and valuable feedback. This all-encompassing strategy encourages a life-altering process where people gradually overcome their linguistic challenges and learn to communicate more confidently and effectively.

The sphere of technical and vocational schools where communication anxiety is relatively undiscovered remains an unfamiliar environment within the conversation. Students aiming for a polytechnic diploma are the primary target audience. The lack of studies in this area emphasises the significance of examining the prevalence of communication anxiety in vocational schools and the contributing factors. Therefore, the study mainly aims to comprehend the nuances of social anxiety in vocational settings through the Toastmasters programme, which is a new approach to public speaking instruction. This revision considers the core ideas of Kolb's experiential learning theory, which centres on the value of

hands-on experience, introspection, theoretical grounding, and repeated practice. The adaption is also described by McCroskey's idea of communication anxiety, which provides a framework for comprehending and managing people's natural reservations about talking to new people.

The planned alteration might be a game-changer for students at polytechnics in Malaysia. This approach aims to improve students' oral communication skills by providing a specialised platform that captures the essence of experience learning and addresses the triggers of communication fear. This situation helps students feel more comfortable speaking in public, which positively impacts their studies and gives them confidence and competence to be used in today's more international workplace. The complexity of academic presenting, public speaking, and fear of public speaking was explored, which highlights the transforming potential of the Toastmasters programme for second language learners and the counterintuitive effect of communication anxiety on academic success. The research gap within technical and vocational institutions guides the proposed research project. The approach could reform the way Malaysian students communicate by capitalising on the efficacy of experiential learning and considering the facets of communication anxiety. The project overarching goal is to assist people to become better communicators overcome their fears, and succeed globally.

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