

Narratives of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure in students' classroom presentations: A communication apprehension perspective by DeVito

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ABSTRACT

Classroom presentations in higher education not only function as a means of developing students' speaking skills but also frequently become evaluative situations that trigger speaking anxiety. This study focuses on students' narratives of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure in classroom presentations by employing DeVito's concept of communication apprehension. This study aimed to explain how students narrate their experiences of speaking anxiety and identify the main categories that shape those experiences. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a narrative analysis design. Data were collected through a Google Form containing open-ended questions distributed to all respondents and were then analyzed through the stages of data condensation, coding, categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that students' speaking anxiety is primarily shaped by fear of verbal/cognitive errors, fear of negative audience evaluation, performative/nonverbal symptoms, feelings of shame or lack of confidence, lack of experience and preparation, and previous negative experiences. The conclusion of this study confirms that communication apprehension in classroom presentations is not merely an individual feeling of nervousness but a communicative experience shaped by evaluative pressure and students' meaning-making of errors, audience responses, and the social risks of speaking.

Keywords: Communication apprehension, speaking anxiety, student narratives, classroom presentations, evaluative pressure

Article history

Submitted:
27 Januari 2026

Accepted:
15 March 2026

Published:
31 March 2026

Citation (APA Style):

Baharman, B., Djumingin, S., Suriadi, S., & Safitri, N. A. S. (2026). Narratives of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure in students' classroom presentations: A communication apprehension perspective by DeVito. *LITERA*, 25(1), 14-28. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v25i1.96165>

INTRODUCTION

Classroom presentations in higher education are commonly positioned as an academic routine and a means of developing students' speaking skills. However, for many students, presentations become evaluative situations that trigger speaking anxiety. Audience attention, gazes, and the consequences of assessment may give rise to somatic symptoms and cognitive disruptions that reduce speech fluency and coherence (Quvanch et al., 2024; Juwaidah et al., 2025; Riyadi et al., 2024, Veng et al., 2024). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this anxiety is intensified by fear of making mistakes, concerns about correction, and anticipation of social evaluation from lecturers and peers (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Amir et al., 2022; Chau et al., 2022). Such pressure is also related to institutional traditions that do not always provide gradual and safe opportunities for speaking practice, so that presentations are often perceived as tests that determine the recognition of competence (Rahman et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2024; Wu, 2024; Morsi et al., 2024). Findings across populations show that speaking anxiety is not merely a momentary response but is associated with psychological and demographic variables and affects performance quality as well as opportunities for academic and professional development (Cincano, 2025; Dewaele & Furnham, 2024; Siregar, 2022). From DeVito's perspective, this condition is understood as communication apprehension, namely, fear or anxiety inherent in communication events when speaking situations are perceived as carrying risks of error, evaluation, and social vulnerability.

Several studies have mapped speaking anxiety by identifying its factors and testing pedagogical-technological interventions. Online dynamic assessment has been reported to increase motivation and

help manage speaking anxiety through dialogic mediation (Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Piao et al., 2025; Huang & Liu, 2025; Alsaffar, 2021). In Indonesia, an automatic speech recognition-based learning website has shown improvements in vocabulary, reductions in foreign language speaking anxiety, and increased foreign language enjoyment (Bashori et al., 2021; Huang, 2024; Huang et al., 2025). AI-assisted speaking tasks, AI-integrated virtual reality applications, ChatGPT, Yoodli, mobile-based language learning, and VR-based acceptance and commitment therapy interventions have also been reported to reduce anxiety while improving performance or providing psychological support to learners (Ebadi et al., 2024; Gorinelli et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024; Karagöl et al., 2024; Puri et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2022). These findings indicate that speaking anxiety has been widely studied as a pedagogical problem that can be mapped, measured and intervened upon.

Nevertheless, these studies have generally focused on anxiety as a score, level, and intervention outcome. Consequently, previous research has not sufficiently explained how students narrate speaking anxiety as a communicative experience related to errors, audiences, shame, and self-performance in evaluative situations (Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021; Daymiel et al., 2022). Many studies have also not described in detail the dynamics of classroom evaluation, such as correction, question-and-answer sessions, feedback, and performance expectations, even though these aspects play a role in shaping how students interpret threats when speaking (Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Zulfikar, 2022). Limitations regarding duration, sample size, the dominance of self-report, and the lack of in-depth evaluation of oral performance have also been acknowledged in several studies (Bashori et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2024; Park et al., 2025). In the domain of AI, the tension between automated assistance and learner autonomy has been identified but not sufficiently explained in relation to the formation of self-efficacy, fear, and speakers' self-attribution under evaluative pressure (Ebadi et al., 2024; Jeong et al., 2025). Even when anxiety has been linked to academic presentation skills, the limitations of language context, institutions, and tools studied still make it difficult to explain how assessment culture turns classroom presentations into a social threat for students (Karagöl et al., 2024; Baritanya et al., 2025). In other words, the narrative dimension and subjective meaning-making of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure have received relatively limited attention.

This gap is even more important in light of recent findings showing that speaking anxiety cannot be adequately understood solely through subjective reports. Foreign language anxiety has neurophysiological indicators that predict behavioral and somatic aspects of speaking (Kelsen & Liang, 2024). Changes in brain network connectivity following working memory training combined with exposure also indicate the involvement of attentional systems and emotion regulation in the relationship between cognitive processes, performance, and evaluation situations (Caudle et al., 2024). In addition, the differences between subjective reports and physiological responses during speaking practice with VR avatars underscore the need for analyses that capture how threats are perceived and interpreted by speakers (Delangle et al., 2024). At the cognitive-affective level, the Unhelpful Thoughts and Beliefs about Stuttering Scale confirms the centrality of evaluative beliefs in verbal anxiety, yet still leaves open the question of how such beliefs operate in everyday classroom speaking experiences (Farpour et al., 2024). Findings on perfectionism as a moderator of change in speaking anxiety interventions further reinforce that self-standards and "flawless" demands operate as evaluative frameworks that intensify fear during performance (Kahlon et al., 2024). In the context of generative artificial intelligence, reductions in anxiety accompanied by improvements in pronunciation, motivation, and confidence in social interaction emphasize the importance of linking technical changes with the socio-institutional conditions that support or constrain them (Choi 2024). Taken together, these findings affirm that speaking anxiety needs to be understood not only as an individual symptom but also as an experience that is perceived, interpreted, and negotiated within evaluative contexts.

Based on this gap, the present study offers novelty by positioning narratives of speaking anxiety as an entry point for understanding how students experience communication apprehension under evaluative pressure during classroom presentations. DeVito's concept of communication apprehension (2016) was selected because it provides a theoretical foundation for reading speaking anxiety as fear of communication manifested in the anticipation of errors, fear of audience evaluation, shame, performative symptoms, and communicative experiences in evaluative situations. Within this framework, anxiety is understood not merely as a level of severity or an intervention outcome, but as an experience narrated and interpreted by the speaker. This approach allows for a closer reading of how students name mistakes, anticipate evaluation, and frame audiences as sources of threat during

presentations. Accordingly, the focus of this study shifts from the question of how high anxiety is to how anxiety is lived, narrated, and shaped within academic contexts.

Accordingly, the study entitled “Narratives of Speaking Anxiety Under Evaluative Pressure in Students’ Classroom Presentations: A Communication Apprehension Perspective by DeVito” aims to explain how students narrate their experiences of speaking anxiety in classroom presentations perceived as evaluative. More specifically, the study investigates how students narrate fear of verbal/cognitive errors, fear of negative audience evaluation, performative/nonverbal symptoms, feelings of shame or lack of confidence, lack of experience and preparation, and traces of previous negative experiences in public speaking. This study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between evaluative pressure and students’ speaking anxiety, while also providing a conceptual basis for designing presentation instruction, assessment, and feedback that maintains academic standards without normalizing anxiety as an unavoidable consequence.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a narrative analysis design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to explain how students narrate their speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure in classroom presentations. The theoretical framework used was DeVito’s (2016) concept of communication apprehension, which views speaking anxiety as fear or anxiety inherent in communication events.

The data consisted of written verbal responses collected using a Google Form. The instrument was designed in the form of open-ended questions and distributed to all target respondents so that all participants received the same set of questions. The main question asked respondents to explain the factors that made them feel anxious or lack confidence when speaking in front of many people, along with examples of situations they experienced. An open-ended format was chosen to allow respondents to express their experiences directly, reflectively, and contextually.

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, the researchers designed open-ended questions based on the study’s focus. Second, the Google Form was distributed to all the respondents. Third, all the responses received were compiled as the research corpus. The data were then read comprehensively, divided into units of meaning, and coded according to the categories of communication apprehension: (1) fear of verbal/cognitive errors, (2) fear of negative audience evaluation, (3) performative/nonverbal symptoms, (4) lack of experience/preparation/mastery, (5) fear of audience gaze or focused attention, (6) traces of previous negative experiences, (7) role/public situation context, and (8) shame/lack of confidence when performing.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data condensation, coding, categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña’s (2020) qualitative data analysis model. At the data condensation stage, the researchers selected, focused, simplified, and organized statements relevant to the research focus, namely, students’ narratives of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure in class presentations. Each unit of data was then coded and assigned to either a primary or secondary category according to its dominant meaning. The results of coding and categorization were subsequently presented systematically in the form of category distribution tables and representative narrative excerpts to facilitate the identification of patterns in the findings. The final stage involved relating these categories to DeVito’s concept of communication apprehension to explain how evaluative pressure is interpreted in students’ narratives, and this interpretation was continuously verified throughout the analysis process. The trustworthiness of the analysis was maintained through repeated reading, checks for coding consistency, and interpretations that were always grounded in the context of respondents’ narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis was conducted on 109 narrative data units concerning students’ experiences of speaking in public, particularly in the context of classroom presentations. All data were classified into eight categories of communication apprehension: (1) fear of verbal/cognitive errors, (2) fear of negative audience evaluation, (3) performative/nonverbal symptoms, (4) lack of experience/preparation/mastery, (5) fear of audience gaze/focused attention, (6) traces of previous negative experiences, (7) role/public

situation context, and (8) shame/lack of confidence while performing. The distribution of the primary communication apprehension categories is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of Primary Communication Apprehension Categories

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Fear of verbal/cognitive errors	30	25,75
2.	Fear of negative audience evaluation	23	21,10
3.	Performative/nonverbal symptoms	22	20,18
4.	Shame/lack of confidence while performing	18	16,51
5.	Role/public situation context	7	6,42
6.	Lack of experience/preparation/mastery	5	4,59
7.	Fear of audience gaze/focused attention	4	3,67
8.	Traces of previous negative experiences	0*	0,00

* Note: The category of “traces of previous negative experiences” did not appear as a primary category but was present as a secondary category in several data units.

As shown in Table 1, students’ speaking anxiety patterns were most strongly centered on fear of making verbal or cognitive errors, followed by fear of negative audience evaluation and the emergence of performative/nonverbal symptoms. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety in the data does not merely take the form of general nervousness but is primarily shaped by concerns about mistakes, social evaluation, and disrupted performance while speaking. Meanwhile, categories such as lack of experience, fear of audience gaze, and situational context function as reinforcing factors that clarify when and under which conditions anxiety becomes more intense. The findings are presented as follows.

Fear of Verbal/Cognitive Errors

The category of fear of verbal/cognitive errors occupies the most dominant position in the literature. This category refers to students’ narratives that position speaking anxiety as fear of possible slips of the tongue, incorrect content, forgetting the material, losing their flow, or being unable to explain ideas accurately. In this category, the core of anxiety lies in the threat of making mistakes during utterance production, both at the level of language and content.

Data (1)

“I’m afraid of making mistakes. When I present material, I feel afraid of doing something wrong; I’m not used to explaining things in front of many people, and I lack confidence.”

Data (2)

“I’m afraid that what I say might not be correct. For example, when I want to respond to someone else’s answer that I think is wrong, it could actually be that their answer is already correct, so I become afraid to say what I am thinking.”

Data (3)

“The main factor that makes me anxious and not confident when speaking in front of many people is being afraid of misspeaking and of being judged by others. Sometimes I think, ‘What if I get nervous and then say something wrong?’ or ‘What if my classmates laugh at me?’ Thoughts like these always make me nervous. For example, during a class presentation, I forgot the order of the material because I was too focused on my classmates’ gazes.”

These three data excerpts consistently show that speaking anxiety is primarily triggered by the threat of verbal/cognitive error. Data (1) emphasizes the most direct form of this category, namely, fear of making mistakes when presenting material in front of many people. This fear is reinforced by unfamiliarity with oral explanations and low confidence. Data (2) expands this category by showing that the perceived threat is not only misspeaking but also saying something incorrect in terms of content or substance. Students become anxious when expressing a response because they worry that what they think may turn out to be wrong. Meanwhile, Data (3) presents a more complex form: fear of

misspeaking is intertwined with anxiety about being judged by others, which then develops into forgetting the order of the material because the speaker's attention is divided by the audience's gaze. Thus, this category shows that communication apprehension is intensified by the threat of errors at the level of utterance and content when the speaker performs in front of an audience.

Fear of Negative Audience Evaluation

The second strongest category was fear of negative audience evaluation. This category refers to students' narratives that interpret speaking in public as a social situation laden with the risk of being laughed at, mocked, judged, belittled, or made the subject of discussion by others. In this category, the audience is not positioned merely as listeners but as parties who may provide negative evaluations of the speaker's performance.

Data (4)

"I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing. For example, during a class presentation, I once got tongue-tied, and many people laughed. I feel embarrassed when people laugh at me, so I am always afraid to speak in public."

Data (5)

"People's responses when I speak make me think that I am too naïve to appear, so I become less confident in public. For example, when I was giving a presentation and speaking, the audience whispered to one another, which made me think whether I was wrong or whether there was something strange about me."

Data (6)

"Seeing people's faces as if they were not convinced while I was speaking, especially when I was answering a question, where their expressions looked as if they were belittling my answer, and they were whispering and laughing, made the thoughts I already understood instantly disappear, and I spoke as if I were rambling, even though actually I understood it, because I was very afraid of making mistakes when speaking."

These three data excerpts consistently show that speaking anxiety is closely related to experiences of social evaluation. Data (4) presents fear arising from the experience of being laughed at after the speaker felt tongue-tied during a presentation: This excerpt shows that audience laughter is not understood as an ordinary response but as an embarrassing form of evaluation that leaves a lingering fear of speaking again. Data (5) shows that indirect audience responses, such as whispering, are still interpreted as negative evaluations. The speaker then reads such responses as signs that they are wrong or that something strange is happening. Meanwhile, Data (6) presents a more complex form: dismissive facial expressions, whispers, and laughter from the audience not only create fear, but also cause the speaker to lose focus, to the point of feeling that they are "talking nonsense," even though they actually understand the material being presented. Thus, this category shows that communication apprehension is intensified by social evaluation perceived as humiliating and threatening to the speaker's performance before an audience.

Performative/ Nonverbal Symptoms

The category of performative/nonverbal symptoms shows that anxiety in the data is not only present at the level of thought but also appears concretely in the body and in speech fluency. This category refers to students' narratives that display symptoms such as a trembling voice, cold hands, sweaty hands, tongue-tied speech, stammering, speaking too fast, going blank, and losing focus. In this category, anxiety is no longer merely felt but manifested in observable disruptions to oral performance.

Data (7)

"During a presentation in front of the class, I lacked confidence because when I was speaking and what I was reading was too long, my voice began to tremble and caused anxiety in my mind."

Data (8)

“What makes me anxious or not confident when speaking in front of many people is being afraid of making mistakes and being judged by others. For example, when I had to present in class, I often felt nervous because I was worried about saying something wrong or forgetting the material that I had studied. Before speaking, my hands usually felt cold and my voice trembled.”

Data (9)

“For example, when I had to present the results of group work in front of the whole class, my hands became sweaty and my voice trembled because I imagined that my classmates would laugh at me if I forgot the material.”

These three data excerpts consistently show that speaking anxiety manifests concretely in the body and oral performance. Data (7) presents trembling voice as a symptom that emerges when the speaker feels a lack of confidence during a classroom presentation. This excerpt indicates that performative changes in voice are directly related to ongoing anxiety. Data (8) show a combination of physical and verbal symptoms, namely cold hands and a trembling voice, which appear even before speaking begins and are triggered by worries about mistakes and others' judgments. Meanwhile, Data (9) shows that performative symptoms are influenced by imagined audience reactions. Sweaty hands and a trembling voice emerge not simply because the student is speaking in front of the class, but because the speaker imagines the possibility of being laughed at if they forget their material. Thus, this category shows that communication apprehension is intensified by the manifestation of physical and performative symptoms that disrupt speech fluency in speaking situations before an audience.

Shame and Low Confidence When Performing

The category of shame/lack of confidence when performing shows that speaking anxiety is also closely related to one's self-image. This category refers to students' narratives that position shame, lack of confidence, feelings of strangeness, and beliefs about one's own limitations as important parts of the experience of speaking in front of many people. In this category, anxiety is not only triggered by the possibility of making mistakes or audience reactions, but also by identity vulnerability when speakers must present themselves in public spaces.

Data (10)

“The main factor is that I feel embarrassed.”

Data (11)

“I am not confident in my ability.”

Data (12)

“I am afraid of people's gaze; I feel strange when everyone's eyes are focused on me. In addition, I am afraid to speak in front of many people. But among all of that, what I fear most is making mistakes.”

These three data excerpts consistently show that speaking anxiety is closely related to the affective dimension and speakers' self-image. Data (10) presents the most direct form of this category, namely, shame as the main factor triggering anxiety. Data (11) show that a lack of confidence in one's own ability becomes a strong source of fear when speaking in front of others. Meanwhile, Data (12) presents a more complex form: visual attention from the audience makes the speaker feel strange, afraid of becoming the center of attention, and ultimately even more afraid to speak. This excerpt also shows that shame and low confidence often overlap with the fear of making mistakes. Thus, this category shows that communication apprehension is intensified by the speaker's affective vulnerability and self-image when speaking before an audience.

Role/Public Situation Context

The role/public situation context category showed that speaking anxiety tends to arise more frequently when students are in formal or semi-formal situations that demand oral performance in front of others. Anxiety in this category is not triggered solely by the act of speaking itself, but also by the social role that must be performed, such as a presenter, MC, oral exam participant, moderator, or competition participant. Thus, speaking situations are perceived as arenas that demand self-control, verbal accuracy, and the ability to maintain performance under the scrutiny of the audience.

Data (13)

“When speaking in front of many people, one example of a situation I have experienced was when I was giving a presentation in front of the class.”

Data (14)

“I usually think too much about other people’s opinions when I speak in public, for example when I am being the MC at an event.”

Data (15)

“For example, during an oral examination, even though I had already understood the material I had studied, when my name was called, I started trembling and overthinking, and that was when I began to lose focus.”

These three data excerpts show that speaking anxiety does not emerge in a neutral space but intensifies when students occupy particular roles in public situations. Data (13) confirm that classroom presentations are the most common context in which anxiety occurs. Data (14) shows that the role of MC makes the speaker think even more about other people’s opinions, thereby intensifying the social pressure. Meanwhile, Data (15) indicates that oral examinations are highly intense evaluative contexts, since anxiety arises even when students have mastered the material. Thus, this category demonstrates that communication apprehension is amplified by role demands and the formality of speaking situations in the workplace.

Lack of Experience/Preparation/Mastery

The category of lack of experience/preparation/mastery shows that a sense of unpreparedness intensifies speaking anxiety. In this category, students narrate anxiety as resulting from insufficient practice, lack of familiarity with performing, inadequate mastery of the material, or feeling unprepared to face questions during the presentation. This indicates that the threat of speaking comes not only from the audience but also from the perception that one’s ability and readiness are insufficient for the communication situation.

Data (16)

“Third, lack of practice.”

Data (17)

“The factor is that I am not used to speaking in front of many people or in public.”

Data (18)

“The main factor that makes me anxious and not confident when speaking in front of many people is my lack of understanding of what I want to say in front of many people. For example, when I want to present in front of the class, I usually do not sufficiently master the material to be presented, and this is what triggers anxiety or lack of confidence when speaking in front of many people.”

These three data excerpts show that speaking anxiety is reinforced by feelings of being unprepared. Data (16) presents the most concise form of this category, namely, lack of practice as a source of anxiety. Data (17) emphasized that unfamiliarity with speaking in front of many people makes public situations feel threatening. Meanwhile, Data (18) shows that insufficient mastery of the material

can directly trigger anxiety and a lack of confidence. Thus, this category indicates that communication apprehension is also related to perceptions of limited experience, readiness, and mastery of content.

Fear of Audience Gaze/Focused Attention

The category of fear of audience gaze or focused attention shows that visual attention from the audience is perceived as a distinct form of pressure. In this category, gaze, concentrated attention, and awareness that one is the center of attention create discomfort that intensifies speaking anxiety. Such visual pressure makes students feel intimidated, strange, or threatened even before any actual mistake occurs.

Data (19)

“My classmates’ gazes looked intimidating.”

Data (20)

“I am afraid of people’s gaze; I feel strange when everyone’s eyes are focused on me. In addition, I am afraid to speak in front of many people. But among all of that, what I fear most is making mistakes.”

Data (21)

“What makes me anxious is when the audience’s gaze is focused on me, and that makes me very, very uncomfortable...”

These three data excerpts show that the audience’s gaze can be perceived as a threat in speaking situations. Data (19) confirms that classmates’ gazes are perceived as intimidating. Data (20) shows that everyone is focused attention on the speaker can generate a sense of strangeness as well as a fear of speaking. Data (21) reinforce this pattern by showing that audience gaze concentrated on the speaker creates intense discomfort and reduces confidence. Thus, this category indicates that communication apprehension is shaped by visual pressure from the audience, not only by the threat of verbal mistakes or direct evaluation.

Traces of Previous Negative Experiences

The category of traces of previous negative experiences did not appear as a primary category, but it remained analytically important. This category refers to students’ narratives that connect their present speaking anxiety with past embarrassing experiences, such as being laughed at, ignored, not listened to, or humiliated while performing. In this category, speaking anxiety is not always spontaneous but is formed through enduring social memory that continues to affect the courage to speak in the present.

Data (22)

“... When I was presenting in class in high school, I made a slip of the tongue, and everyone laughed at me. Even though they were joking, I felt humiliated, and since then my confidence has decreased.”

Data (23)

“Because I was once not paid attention to or listened to when I was explaining something to my friend.”

Data (24)

“Maybe because of the past, because there were several incidents that made me laughed at when speaking in public, but because I’m forgetful, I don’t remember the details anymore, it’s vague, but there is something that still makes me afraid...”

These three data excerpts show that past experiences serve as a background that reinforces present-day speaking anxiety. Data (22) clearly illustrate how the experience of making a slip of the tongue and being laughed at during school created a sense of humiliation that had a long-term impact on confidence. Data (23) show that being ignored or not listened to can also become a source of anxiety,

even if it does not take the form of direct ridicule. Meanwhile, Data (24) confirms that although the details of the negative experience are no longer fully remembered, its emotional trace persists and continues to shape fear when appearing in public. Thus, this category indicates that communication apprehension can be shaped by an enduring social memory that remains active in later communication situations.

Discussion

Based on the research findings presented above, this section interprets the findings concerning students' narratives of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure using DeVito's perspective on communication apprehension and relating them to relevant previous studies. The discussion is organized by aspect to align with the presentation of the results, so that each subsection addresses one specific focus of the findings and is supported by data excerpts to clarify the analytical context.

Fear of Verbal/Cognitive Errors

The research findings show that the most dominant aspect of students' communication apprehension is the fear of verbal/cognitive errors. From DeVito's perspective, speaking anxiety is a fear inherent to both actual and anticipated communication. This finding confirms that, for students, speaking in public is not merely understood as an activity of conveying a message, but as an event fraught with risk because utterances may be wrong, content may be inaccurate, and performance may be judged as failing.

This is evident in data such as "Afraid of being wrong" and "afraid that what is said is not correct." These two excerpts indicate that the main threat perceived by students lies not only in misspeaking but also in the possibility of conveying incorrect content or substance. In other data, students wrote, "what if I get nervous and then misspeak?" and "I forgot the order of the material because I was too focused on my friends' gaze." These excerpts show that fear of verbal/cognitive errors does not stand alone but is intertwined with worries about social evaluation. As a result, the speaker's attention becomes divided, the flow of thought is disrupted, and the oral performance becomes unstable. Thus, class presentations are understood as arenas of evaluative pressure that magnify small mistakes and threaten self-image.

This finding is in line with previous studies showing that speaking anxiety can be reduced through pedagogical and technological interventions, such as online dynamic assessment, learning sites based on automatic speech recognition, AI-assisted speaking tasks, and AI-integrated virtual reality applications (Bashori et al., 2021; Ebadi et al., 2024; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Huang et al., 2024). However, this study also corrects the tendency of previous studies to position anxiety mainly as a score or intervention outcome. Students' narrative data show that speaking anxiety needs to be seen as a matter of meaning-making: students name mistakes, anticipate shame, and imagine the social consequences of failing to speak. Therefore, reductions in anxiety cannot be explained sufficiently by the presence of tools or methods alone, because behind them lies a meaning-making process that shapes what "wrong," "failure," and "being humiliated" mean in the context of class presentations.

Fear of Negative Audience Evaluation

Another important aspect is the fear of negative audience evaluation. From DeVito's perspective, communication places individuals in a vulnerable position before others who are perceived as having the power to judge. This study shows that the audience is not positioned merely as listeners but as social judges who may laugh at, belittle, or condemn the speaker's performance.

This is clearly reflected in the data, such as "many people laughed because of that. I feel ashamed if people laugh at me," "the audience whispered to one another, making me think whether I was wrong or whether there was something strange about me," and "their faces looked as if they were belittling my answer, and they were whispering and laughing so that the thoughts I had already understood suddenly disappeared." These excerpts indicate that evaluation in speaking contexts does not always come through explicit criticism but also through social cues such as laughter, whispering, and facial expressions. Students read these responses as threats, then lose focus, and become even more afraid to continue speaking. Thus, speaking anxiety in this context is socially produced through interactions that position the audience as judges of the speaker's performance.

This finding may be compared with studies showing that AI-assisted academic presentation tools, such as ChatGPT and Yoodli, are associated with reduced public speaking anxiety and improved

academic speaking skills (Karagöl et al., 2024). Other studies have also shown that mobile device-based learning and VR-based ACT interventions contribute to reduced anxiety by lowering cognitive load and increasing psychological flexibility (Gorinelli et al., 2024; Puri et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the results of this study challenge the assumption that speaking anxiety automatically decreases when cognitive load is reduced or practice is increased. In the present data, the main source of threat lies in the audience, which is perceived as a social judge. Therefore, although tools or practice may improve technical preparedness, speaking anxiety may still persist as long as students continue to construe the audience as a source of negative evaluation. This finding is also consistent with the view that anxiety is influenced by how speaking situations are structured and normalized as evaluative events (Seuling et al., 2024) and that temporary feelings of safety are insufficient to erase fear if the threat framework itself remains unchanged.

Performative/Nonverbal Symptoms

This study shows that communication apprehension does not stop at the level of thought but is manifested concretely in the body and in speaking performance. From DeVito's perspective, physical symptoms and performance disturbances are integral parts of communication anxiety because fear of the communication event can directly appear as changes in the body and in utterance.

This can be seen in data such as "my voice started trembling," "before speaking, my hands usually felt cold and my voice trembled," and "my hands sweated and my voice trembled because I imagined my friends would laugh at me if I forgot the material." These three excerpts indicate that performative/nonverbal symptoms were present both before and during communication. Therefore, anxiety is not merely a subjective feeling but an embodied experience. Furthermore, the data show that speakers perceive bodily symptoms as signs of failure. When their voice trembles or their hands sweat, students do not interpret these as ordinary reactions, but as evidence that they are unable to control the speaking situation. This interpretation, in turn, intensifies their anxiety. Thus, the relationship between speaking anxiety and oral performance is cyclical, rather than linear.

This finding reinforces previous studies showing that AI-, VR-, and mobile device-based learning interventions can improve oral performance while also reducing anxiety (Ebadi et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024; Puri et al., 2024). However, this study enriches those studies by showing that disrupted oral performance does not arise only from anxiety but is also perceived by speakers as evidence of failure, thereby intensifying anxiety in the very moment of speaking. In other words, this study shifts the focus from physical symptoms alone to how the speaker interprets those symptoms within the communication event.

Shame and Low Self-Confidence When Performing

The findings also show that shame and low self-confidence are strong affective aspects that shape communication apprehension. From DeVito's perspective, communication anxiety is closely related to how individuals view themselves in a communicative situation. This study shows that even before any actual mistake occurs, students feel that they are not sufficiently worthy or capable of appearing in public.

This is evident in data such as "the main factor is that I feel ashamed," "I am not confident in my abilities," and "I feel strange when everyone's eyes are focused on me." These excerpts show that speaking anxiety is triggered not only by the possibility of making mistakes or audience responses, but also by the vulnerability of self-image. Students fear not only the speaking event itself but also the possibility of appearing incapable, unworthy, or embarrassing in front of others. Therefore, shame and low self-confidence function as the affective basis linking fear of mistakes, fear of negative audience evaluation, and disturbances in speaking performance together.

This finding helps explain why interventions that focus only on mastery of the material or presentation techniques may not be sufficient. Previous studies have largely emphasized the benefits of practice, technology, and mediatized learning environments in reducing speaking anxiety (Bashori et al., 2021; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Karagöl et al., 2024). However, the results of this study show that anxiety is also rooted in the affective dimension and self-image of speakers. Therefore, effective pedagogical strategies should not only build technical skills but also help students develop a sense of safety, reduce shame, and strengthen their self-confidence as speakers.

Role/Public Situations Context

The next aspect is that communication apprehension intensifies in particular role contexts and public situations. According to DeVito, the intensity of anxiety may increase when individuals enter communicative situations that are formal, exposed, and laden with performance demands. This study shows that anxiety does not emerge in neutral spaces but is amplified by the social context in which speaking takes place.

This is reflected in data such as “when I gave a presentation in front of the class,” “I think too much about other people’s opinions when I speak in public while being the MC of an event,” and “during an oral exam ... I started trembling and overthinking, and then I began losing focus.” These data indicate that class presentations, the role of the MC, and oral exams are not merely different contexts but situations that place students under specific social demands. In such situations, what is at stake is not only the content being delivered but also the success of performing a communicative role convincingly under the audience’s scrutiny. Thus, the speaking context functions as an amplifier of anxiety.

This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that more structured, flexible, and mediated learning environments can help reduce speaking anxiety (Bashori et al., 2021; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Puri et al., 2024). However, this study shows that what is at stake for students is not only mastery of the material but also the ability to perform a particular communicative role under observation. Therefore, reducing speaking anxiety cannot be achieved through content practice alone; it also requires role simulation, expectation management, and non-punitive feedback design.

Lack of Experience, Preparation, and Mastery

The next finding shows that lack of experience, preparation, and mastery also intensifies students’ communication apprehension. According to DeVito, the perception that one is not ready can heighten fear of the communication event, especially when the speaker feels that the demands of the situation exceed the resources available to them.

This is evident in data such as “lack of practice,” “I am not used to speaking in front of many people or in public,” and “I usually do not master the material I am going to present, and this is what triggers feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence.” These three excerpts indicate that speaking anxiety is intensified by a feeling of being unprepared. Students fear not only the audience or the risk of making mistakes but also the possibility that they do not have sufficient resources to face the communicative situation. Thus, the threat of speaking does not come solely from the outside but also from the internal perception that one’s ability and readiness are inadequate.

This finding is in line with previous studies showing that more supportive learning environments, sufficient practice, and technological support can help reduce students’ speaking anxiety (Bashori et al., 2021; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Huang et al., 2024). However, this study shows that readiness cannot be understood only as mastery of the material or the availability of tools. What also matters is the speaker’s subjective perception of whether they are sufficiently prepared to perform is also important. Therefore, effective pedagogical interventions must not only enhance technical competence but also build a more positive sense of readiness in students.

Fear of Audience Gaze/Focused Attention

Another important finding is that the audience’s gaze or focused attention may be perceived as a form of pressure. In this context, the audience’s visual attention makes the speaker feel exposed, intimidated or extremely uncomfortable. This finding extends DeVito’s reading by showing that communicative threats arise not only through utterances and verbal evaluations but also through the visual dimension of interaction.

This is evident in data such as “my friends’ eyes looked intimidating,” “I feel strange when everyone’s eyes are focused on me,” and “the audience’s gaze is focused on me, and that makes me very, very uncomfortable.” These excerpts show that the audience’s gaze is not merely an ordinary visual element but part of an implicit evaluative mechanism that the speaker reads as a threat. Even before any verbal error occurs, students feel pressured because they have become the center of attention. Thus, speaking anxiety in this context is also shaped by visual pressure operating directly during the communication event.

This finding complements earlier studies that have emphasized technology, practice, and emotion regulation. This study shows that micro-interactions in the classroom, including the direction of gaze

and the way the audience focuses attention on the speaker, also determine the level of anxiety experienced by students. Therefore, speaking instruction also needs to take into account listening ethics and a more supportive audience culture so that visual pressure does not continue to reproduce anxiety.

Traces of Previous Negative Experiences

Although it did not appear as a primary category, traces of previous negative experiences were analytically important. From DeVito's perspective, communication anxiety may be understood as fear shaped not only by the present situation but also by past communicative experiences that leave emotional residues. This study shows that communication apprehension can be historical in nature: speakers bring negative evaluative experiences from the past into their present speaking situations.

This is evident in data such as "I misspoke, and everyone laughed at me. Even though they were joking, I felt humiliated, and since then my self-confidence has decreased," "I was once ignored or not listened to," and "there were several incidents that made people laugh at me when I spoke in public." These excerpts show that past experiences do not end as momentary events but remain as social memories that continue to affect speakers' courage to speak. Even when the details of the experience have become blurred, the emotional residue remains active and shapes fear when the speaker finds themselves in a public situation again.

This finding extends previous studies that have relied on self-reports and short-term intervention outcomes. Bashori et al. (2021) and Huang et al. (2024), for instance, acknowledged limitations related to the duration, sample size, and more in-depth evaluation of oral performance. This study supports those observations by showing that, to understand speaking anxiety in class, researchers need to pay attention to the evaluative history students bring with them, not only to the current task conditions. In other words, speaking anxiety does not always arise from the presentation that is taking place but also from unresolved social memory. As long as meanings such as "speaking means risking humiliation" remain untouched, speaking anxiety may persist even when practice or technology has been provided to students.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Overall, the findings of this study show that communication apprehension in class presentations needs to be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by anticipation of verbal/cognitive errors, fear of negative audience evaluation, embodied performative/nonverbal symptoms, shame and low self-confidence, role demands and public situations, perceived lack of readiness, visual pressure from the audience, and memories of negative experiences. This reading is consistent with DeVito's framework of fear inherent in communicative events, while also extending it by emphasizing that speaking anxiety in the classroom is strongly mediated by the evaluation culture.

Compared with previous studies, this study does not reject the benefits of AI, dynamic assessment, mobile devices, VR, or therapeutic interventions in reducing speaking anxiety (Bashori et al., 2021; Ebadi et al., 2024; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2024; Gorinelli et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024; Karagöl et al., 2024; Puri et al., 2024). Rather, it reinforces those findings while correcting their limitations: speaking anxiety is not adequately understood as a measurable variable alone but must also be read as an experience that is narrated, interpreted, and negotiated within social relations. Therefore, effective pedagogical strategies should not merely increase speaking practice but also design a more supportive classroom climate, refine feedback mechanisms, reduce humiliating forms of error marking, and help students reconstruct the meaning of speaking as a learning process rather than a stage of judgment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that students' speaking anxiety in class presentations perceived as evaluative cannot be adequately understood as an individual symptom or merely as a measurable level of anxiety, but rather as a communicative experience shaped through the interpretation of the risk of error, the threat of social evaluation, performance vulnerability, and one's position in front of an audience. Thus, in line with the research objectives stated in the introduction, this study confirms that communication apprehension in the context of class presentations emerges as an experience that is lived, narrated, and negotiated within the culture of academic evaluation. This finding also demonstrates the compatibility between the research problem, analytical orientation, and results and discussion, as speaking anxiety is shown to be more appropriately understood through its narrative dimension and subjective meaning-

making rather than solely through scores, levels, or intervention effects.

Based on these findings, this study opens several avenues for future development. Future research may connect students' narratives with observations of actual oral performance, the dynamics of question-and-answer sessions, types of lecturer feedback, and patterns of audience interaction during presentations. In addition, similar analyses may be enriched by combining narrative data with physiological, cognitive, or observational data so that the relationship between perceived threat, bodily responses, and speech performance can be explained more comprehensively. Further development may also examine variations in communication apprehension across academic disciplines, classroom cultures, media of instruction, and presentation experience, thereby yielding a more contextualized understanding of how speaking anxiety is shaped in different academic environments.

In terms of application, the results of this study provide a conceptual basis for developing presentation pedagogy that maintains academic standards without normalizing anxiety as an inevitable outcome. The practical implication is the need for gradual habituation to speaking, more supportive feedback mechanisms, management of question-and-answer sessions in ways that do not humiliate students, and presentation training that focuses not only on content and technique but also on fostering a sense of safety, perceptions of readiness, and students' self-confidence. In future development, technology, AI, or VR simulations may still be utilized, but their effectiveness will be stronger if they are embedded within pedagogical designs that are sensitive to students' evaluative experiences and feedback. Thus, the main contribution of this study lies in affirming that addressing communication apprehension in the classroom must begin with an understanding of how anxiety is perceived, interpreted, and experienced by students themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by a Research Grant from Universitas Negeri Makassar. The authors sincerely thank the student participants for their willingness to share their experiences and narratives, which constitute the primary data of this study. The authors also express their gratitude to the colleagues and peer reviewers for their valuable feedback and academic insights, which helped strengthen the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Appreciation is further extended to all parties and institutional support that facilitated the completion of this research.

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