EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG NIGERIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract : *Public speaking anxiety (PSA) is one of the most common psychological barriers faced by Postgraduate students in Nigeria. Public communication skills are quite urgent in the academic and professional world. However, students still experience anxiety when conveying ideas or research results in open forums. The results of the study showed that self-esteem affects the level of anxiety. This study examines the relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety among Postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. This study used a descriptive correlational survey design with a sample size of 96 students. Data were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique. The results showed that 56.3% of respondents experienced low levels of anxiety, 29.2% moderate, and 14.6% high. Meanwhile, the results of the correlation analysis showed a weak negative relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety (r = -0.109; p = 0.290). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that self-esteem is not the primary predictor of public speaking anxiety. Therefore, broader interventions such as public speaking training and counseling services are needed to help students with high levels of anxiety.*

Keywords : *Self-esteem; Public Speaking; Anxiety.*

Abstrak : *Kecemasan berbicara di depan umum (public speaking anxiety/PSA) merupakan salah satu hambatan psikologis paling umum yang dihadapi mahasiswa Pascasarjana di Nigeria. Keterampilan komunikasi publik merupakan suatu hal y ang cukup urgen dalam dunia akademik dan profesional. Namun, faktanya masih ditemukan mahasiswa yang mengalami kecemasan saat menyampaikan ide atau hasil penelitian di forum terbuka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa harga diri (self-esteem) berpengaruh terhadap tingkat kecemasan tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara self-esteem dan kecemasan berbicara di depan umum pada mahasiswa Pascasarjana di Universitas Al-Hikmah, Ilorin. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain survei deskriptif korelasional dengan jumlah sampel sebanyak 96 mahasiswa. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik korelasi Pearson Product-Moment. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 56,3% responden mengalami tingkat kecemasan rendah, 29,2% sedang, dan 14,6% tinggi. Sedangkan hasil analisis korelasi menunjukkan hubungan negatif yang lemah antara self-esteem dan kecemasan berbicara di depan umum (r = -0,109; p = 0,290). Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa self-esteem bukan prediktor utama kecemasan berbicara di depan umum. Oleh karena itu, maka diperlukan intervensi yang lebih luas seperti pelatihan public speaking dan layanan konseling untuk membantu mahasiswa dengan tingkat kecemasan yang tinggi.*

Kata Kunci : *Harga Diri; Berbicara di Depan Umum; Kecemasan.*

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is one of the important skills needed in education and the workplace, especially for postgraduate students. In an academic context, postgraduate students are expected to be able to convey research results orally, participate in scientific forums, and explain ideas convincingly to the public. However, the reality in the field shows that many students experience anxiety when making presentations, which then impacts their academic performance and self-confidence (Gamage et al., 2022; Wang & Li, 2024). The phenomenon of anxiety when speaking in public is known as public speaking anxiety (PSA) or glossophobia. PSA is characterised by various forms of fear, such as excessive nervousness, negative thoughts about audience judgment, and physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, digestive problems, and confusion when speaking (Tacheva, 2022; Gallego et al., 2021). In more severe conditions, PSA can cause individuals to avoid the opportunity to appear in public even though they have adequate knowledge and skills (Aimah & Nasih, 2024). This is a significant obstacle in the development of students' academic capacity.

Public speaking anxiety is characterised by the apprehension and concern individuals experience when delivering speeches (Sapiets et al., 2023). The severity of the symptoms varies from experiencing mild nervousness to experiencing panic attacks (Ibigbami et al., 2023; Nuryana et al., 2023). An individual may also experience anxiety when delivering a speech or preparing to address an audience (Tacheva, 2022). Individuals experiencing Public Speaking Anxiety frequently encounter various side effects in a speaking environment, including palpitations, sweating, gastrointestinal discomfort, diarrhea, muscle tension, and confusion. Students experiencing an abnormal level of public speaking anxiety may later exhibit avoidant behaviors (Gallego, et al., 2021). A significant number of students possess talent, yet they lack the confidence to demonstrate it or present it before an audience. They possess knowledge, yet when it comes to demonstrating their abilities, they often experience fear or anxiety, fearing that others may ridicule them for any mistakes made (Hasanah et al., 2023; Mudarris et al., 2022). Public speaking anxiety (PSA) is a common type of anxiety disorder, impacting around one in five individuals. Individuals experiencing elevated levels of social anxiety often perceive that others form unfavorable impressions of them. Approximately 80% of the population experiences some level of public speaking anxiety. A national survey conducted by Giabani (2019) indicated that PSA is a prevalent social fear encountered by individuals throughout their lives, affecting 21% of the sample population. A study conducted on Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) postgraduate students indicated significant anxiety levels experienced during presentations at international conferences (Wei, 2022).

The results of previous studies indicate that PSA is a form of social anxiety disorder that is common among students and professionals. Research conducted by Mieder (2019) found that around 21% of the population experiences public speaking anxiety. Similar findings also emerged as conducted by Wei (2022) on EFL Postgraduate students in China who showed high anxiety when presenting at international conferences. Likewise, the results of research by Oluyinka (2022) at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, also showed high anxiety in searching for academic information. This does not look at gender or age. Thus, PSA is a common challenge in various countries. This study attempts to examine it from a specific local and academic context that has not been widely explored, which in this case was conducted at Al-Hikmah University.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in Postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. Self-esteem is understood as an individual's assessment of their overall value and abilities (Stangor, 2015). In the context of public speaking, high self-esteem can play a role in strengthening self-confidence (Álvarez & Szücs, 2023; Okoye et al., 2020). While low self-esteem can increase the fear of negative judgment and increase anxiety levels. Thus, this study is directed to examine the extent to which students' self-esteem plays a role in reducing or increasing PSA in an academic context.

Stangor (2015) stated that self-esteem is an individual with a high level of self-esteem who tends to have a positive assessment of themselves, feels valuable, and is confident in facing social situations including when speaking in public. This self-confidence is an important capital in managing anxiety that may arise when appearing in front of an audience. Likewise, individuals with low levels of self-esteem are more susceptible to fear of negative judgment from others, resulting in excessive worry which is a characteristic of public speaking anxiety (PSA). Fear of making mistakes, appearing incompetent, or not being accepted by the audience is often the main trigger for PSA in individuals with low self-esteem. This study seeks to test the hypothesis that there is a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University. This hypothesis is in line with the findings of Hamzah and Alsaleem (2023) which state that self-esteem can function as a psychological buffer against speaking anxiety. However, different research findings were found by Faria and Vijaya (2019) which stated that there was no significant relationship between self-esteem and PSA for teachers. Meanwhile, Jangir and Govinda (2018) emphasized the importance of behavioral modification techniques in reducing PSA while increasing self-esteem. Therefore, this study has the potential to provide deeper theoretical and empirical contributions by examining the dynamics of the relationship between self-esteem and PSA in the scope of postgraduate students in Nigeria.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational research type. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in Postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. Survey design was used to obtain a comprehensive picture of the variables studied in a predetermined population. While the population of the study was all Postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University. The research sample consisted of one hundred Postgraduate students from two faculties selected purposively. Samples in each faculty were selected from two study programs by simple random and from each study program 25 students were taken randomly so that the total respondents involved were 100 people.

The data collection technique used a closed questionnaire that had been adopted from an instrument that had been tested for validity and reliability. The first instrument used was the Public Speaking Anxiety Scale (PSAS) developed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) to measure the level of public speaking anxiety. The second instrument is the Self-esteem Scale (SS) compiled by Bagley and Mallick (2001) to measure the level of self-esteem of students. The questionnaire consists of two parts, namely parts A and B, with each consisting of 6 items per part arranged in the form of a four-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to provide a level of agreement with the statements given, with a score range from 6 (lowest score) to 24 (highest score) on each scale. The data obtained from the results of the questionnaire distribution were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics are used to present the frequency distribution, percentage, and mean and standard deviation values of each variable. To test the hypothesis regarding the relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety, the Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis technique was used. This technique was chosen because it is appropriate for determining the level of strength and direction of the relationship between two numeric variables. Through this analysis technique, it is hoped that a deeper understanding will be obtained regarding the influence of self-esteem on the speaking anxiety of postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine the level of public speaking anxiety and the relationship between self-esteem and anxiety in postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed, but only 96 were filled out completely and were suitable for analysis.

1. Public Speaking Anxiety Level of Postgraduate Students

The results of this study indicate that most postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University have low levels of public speaking anxiety. Based on data from 96 respondents

analyzed, 54 students or around 56.3% showed low levels of anxiety with scores ranging from 6 to 12. This figure is quite significant and reflects that more than half of the postgraduate student population feels comfortable and confident in conveying their ideas or thoughts in public. This finding can be explained by various factors, such as previous presentation experience, adequate communication skills training, or support from a conducive academic environment. Students with low anxiety are likely to have personal strategies to manage the pressure of public speaking, such as breathing techniques, mental exercises, and good presentation time management. This is a positive indicator of postgraduate students' readiness to face the challenges of academic and professional communication.

Table 1: Public Speaking Anxiety

Level of public speaking anxiety among postgraduate student	Range of score	Frequency	Percentage %
Low level	6-12	54	56.3
Moderate level	13-18	28	29.2
High level	19-24	14	14.6

The results of the analysis as table 1, showed that 28 students or 29.2% of the total respondents showed a level of public speaking anxiety in the moderate category, with scores between 13 and 18. This group reflects students who still experience anxiety in public speaking situations, although it does not significantly interfere with their ability to convey ideas. Students with moderate levels of anxiety usually feel tense when starting a presentation, have difficulty maintaining eye contact, or speak with an unstable voice. However, anxiety in this category can still be overcome with the right approach, such as getting used to it through regular presentation practice, applying relaxation techniques, and coaching interpersonal communication skills. This group is a potential target for a supportive and progressive speaking skills development program. This finding also confirms that although the majority of students show low anxiety, there are also quite a few who still need support to be able to appear more confident in various formal communication situations.

On the other hand, as many as 14 students or 14.6% of the total respondents were recorded as having high levels of speaking anxiety, with scores ranging from 19 to 24. Although this proportion is relatively small compared to the previous two categories, the existence of this group is very important to note because high levels of anxiety can significantly hinder students' active participation in scientific forums, final project presentations, or class discussions. Students with high anxiety tend to experience

physical symptoms such as excessive sweating, heart palpitations, and muscle tension when asked to speak in front of a crowd. Not infrequently, they also choose to avoid speaking opportunities in order to avoid embarrassment or fear of failure. In the long term, this condition can have a negative impact on the academic and professional development of the students concerned. Therefore, psychological interventions such as counseling, social skills training, or cognitive behavioral therapy are highly recommended for this group.

Thus, the distribution of anxiety levels in this study shows that the majority of students are in a relatively stable condition and are able to manage speaking anxiety. However, the existence of groups with moderate and high levels of anxiety indicates the need to develop a more structured intervention program. Higher education institutions, in this case Al-Hikmah University, can play an important role by providing guidance and communication training services for postgraduate students. Activities such as presentation training, public speaking classes, and academic mentoring can have a positive impact on student confidence. This approach can also reduce the gap in communication skills between individuals and encourage students to actively participate in scientific and professional activities.

These findings also show variations in communication skills among postgraduate students, which are likely influenced by a number of personal and environmental factors. Factors such as previous speaking experience, support from peers and lecturers, and the characteristics of the study program can affect how a student deals with pressure in public situations. Students from study programs with high presentation intensity tend to be more accustomed to and able to adapt to formal communication situations compared to those who are rarely asked to speak in public. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to understand this context in developing strategies to improve student capacity.

The results of this study clearly provide an answer that most postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University have low levels of speaking anxiety. However, the existence of groups of students who are still in the medium and high anxiety categories indicates that this problem is still relevant to be addressed seriously. This study also indicates that targeted interventions can help reduce anxiety levels and improve students' communication performance. This conclusion is the basis for the development of emotional and academic support programs for students who have difficulty speaking in public.

Thus, it is important for universities to take an active role in preparing postgraduate students to not only excel in academics, but also have strong

communication skills as provisions for facing challenges in the world of work and professional life. This study provides a real picture of the importance of speaking skills training in higher education environments, especially for students who still feel anxious and lack confidence when appearing in front of an audience. Students' success in managing speaking anxiety will not only improve the quality of their presentations, but also encourage more active participation in academic and social activities.

2. Relationship between Self-Esteem and Public Speaking Anxiety

The results of the statistical test using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) were intended to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the level of self-esteem and public speaking anxiety. The results of the analysis showed a correlation coefficient (r) value of -0.109, which indicates that there is a negative relationship between the two variables. This means that the higher the self-esteem of a student, the lower the tendency to experience speaking anxiety. However, this correlation value is in the very weak category. Thus, although the direction of the relationship is in accordance with theoretical predictions, the very small strength of the relationship makes this result statistically weak to support a significant influence between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in the context of postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University.

The significance value (p-value) resulting from the analysis was 0.290, which is statistically greater than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This means that statistically, there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in the population of postgraduate students studied. Based on these results, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the two variables cannot be rejected. This finding indicates that self-esteem is not the only or main factor contributing to the level of public speaking anxiety in the context studied. Therefore, further exploration of other variables that may have a greater influence on the PSA phenomenon among postgraduate students is needed.

Table 2: Person's Product-Moment Analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	Df	N	R	P	Remark
P. Anxiety	13.10	4.18	94	96			
Self-esteem	21.59	3.43	94	96	-0.109	0.290	Not significant

The analysis of the Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) provided in Table 2reveals a negative relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety. The correlation coefficient (r) is -0.109, indicating a weak relationship. The p-value is 0.290, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05, confirming the presence of a

significant relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected, leading to the conclusion that there is no significant correlation between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety among postgraduate students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin.

The difference in results when compared to several previous studies that showed a significant relationship between self-esteem and speaking anxiety needs to be critically examined. Hamzah and Alsaleem's (2023) study, for example, found that self-esteem plays an important role in reducing anxiety when speaking in public. However, the results of this study indicate that local context, such as communication culture, educational structure, and social expectations in the Al-Hikmah University environment, can be factors that mediate or even eliminate the relationship between the two variables. Differences in methodology, instruments, and sample demographics can also be the cause of variability in results between studies. Therefore, it is important for further research to consider contextual dimensions in more depth.

Speaking anxiety is a complex and multifactorial psychological phenomenon. This means that the cause of this anxiety does not only come from self-esteem alone, but can also be influenced by other factors such as past experiences, personality, level of readiness, social pressure, and emotional support received by students. For example, students who have failed in previous presentations may experience higher anxiety, regardless of their level of self-esteem. Likewise, students who receive strong social support from friends and lecturers tend to have better resilience in dealing with public situations. Therefore, these results emphasize the need for a comprehensive and multivariate intervention approach in addressing PSA problems in academic environments.

The results of this study indicate that the relationship between self-esteem and speaking anxiety is not statistically significant. The negative direction of the relationship still provides a theoretical basis for further exploration. Researchers can still conclude that self-esteem has a role, albeit small, in shaping individual perceptions of public speaking situations. Therefore, interventions that focus on improving self-esteem remain relevant to implement, especially as part of a long-term psychological strategy in shaping student self-confidence. Programs such as self-motivation training, personal reflection, and strengthening academic identity can be part of a more comprehensive solution.

These findings provide important contributions to the literature on educational psychology and interpersonal communication among postgraduate students. Specifically, the results of this study indicate that although self-esteem is an important factor in social anxiety theories, its effect on public speaking anxiety is not always significant in all contexts. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine other

variables that may be more influential, such as self-efficacy, trait anxiety, social support, or coping strategies. The use of qualitative methods can also help explore students' perceptions and experiences in more depth in dealing with public speaking situations.

Thus, it can be concluded that although this study did not find a significant relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, these results still provide meaningful insights. The results of this study indicate the need for a broader and more comprehensive approach in dealing with PSA, which does not only focus on individual factors but also considers environmental factors and systemic support from educational institutions. This is very important to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to develop communication skills that are essential for their future academic and professional success.

The results of this study indicate that most postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University experience low levels of public speaking anxiety. Based on the results of the questionnaire filled out by 96 respondents, as many as 54 students (56.3%) admitted to having low levels of anxiety when speaking in public. Meanwhile, 28 students (29.2%) were in the moderate anxiety category, and only 14 students (14.6%) were included in the high anxiety category. This finding is quite interesting because it shows that the majority of students feel comfortable expressing ideas verbally in academic forums. This result is different from a study conducted by Oluyinka (2022) which reported that postgraduate students at the University of Ilorin experienced high levels of anxiety, especially in the context of information seeking. This difference could be influenced by the learning approach, academic culture, and the level of mental readiness of students at each institution. This shows that the institutional context and learning approach greatly influence students' perceptions and reactions to formal communication situations (AL-Qahtani & Ghoneim, 2013; Sugiono, 2022).

This study also examined the relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety. The results of the analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation showed a negative correlation with an r value of -0.109 and a p value of 0.290. This negative correlation indicates that the higher the self-esteem of students, the tendency to experience speaking anxiety tends to decrease. However, because the p value is greater than 0.05, the statistical relationship between the two variables is not significant. This means that self-esteem cannot be used as the main predictor of the level of public speaking anxiety in the context of postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University. This result is interesting because it

challenges the theoretical assumption that has long believed that self-esteem has a direct and strong relationship to social anxiety, including speaking anxiety.

The insignificant relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in this study is in line with the findings reported by Faria and Vijaya (2019), who also found that there was no significant relationship between self-esteem and speaking anxiety among teachers. In the study, the distress factor or psychological pressure actually had a greater influence on the level of speaking anxiety. This shows that the self-esteem variable, although important in psychological theory, does not always have a direct contribution in certain social situations, including in academic contexts. Therefore, an approach that only focuses on increasing self-esteem may not be effective enough to reduce speaking anxiety if it is not accompanied by management of other factors such as environmental pressure, previous experiences, and self-control abilities in stressful situations.

This finding also indicates that public speaking anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon and is not solely determined by internal factors such as self-esteem. Previous communication experiences, level of readiness, and social and academic support received by students can be contextual factors that have a greater influence. For example, students who have experienced failure or received negative assessments in previous presentations, even though they have high self-esteem, can still experience high anxiety when facing an audience. Similarly, students with moderate self-esteem who are in a supportive environment and receive good presentation training may perform more calmly and confidently. Therefore, in an effort to understand and overcome PSA, it is important to look at the multidimensional interaction between personal and environmental factors.

Based on the findings and descriptions as above, it can be concluded that the relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety is not deterministic. The theory states that there is a negative relationship between the two, the real context shows variations that are influenced by many other factors. Therefore, intervention strategies for students who experience PSA should involve a holistic approach, including speaking skills training, stress management, strengthening social support, and creating a psychologically safe academic environment. This study provides an important contribution to the discourse on the importance of understanding the local context and the complexity of psychological variables in higher education. In the future, further studies are needed that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to better understand the dynamics of speaking anxiety and the role of various factors in shaping it.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the majority of postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, experienced low levels of public speaking anxiety.

This indicates that most of them feel quite comfortable in conveying ideas orally in front of the public, both in academic and social contexts. However, there are also some students who still experience anxiety in the moderate to high category, which indicates that speaking anxiety remains an important issue that needs attention. This finding indicates that oral communication skills are not evenly distributed among postgraduate students and are influenced by a number of contextual factors such as experience, social support, and the intensity of communication training obtained during the study period. Therefore, providing appropriate training and a supportive academic environment are important to improve students' readiness to face the challenges of public speaking. In addition, the results of this study also show that there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and public speaking anxiety in postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University. Although there is a weak negative correlation between the two variables, the significance value obtained is higher than the statistical threshold set, so that self-esteem cannot be used as the main predictor of speaking anxiety levels. This finding is in line with other studies showing that speaking anxiety is a more complex psychological phenomenon and is influenced by many other variables beyond self-esteem. Therefore, although increasing self-esteem remains important in order to strengthen students' self-confidence, a holistic approach involving other psychological, social, and academic factors will be more effective in designing intervention programs to overcome public speaking anxiety. Further research is recommended to explore these variables in more depth in order to gain a more comprehensive and contextual understanding.

Referring to the results of the study, universities also need to encourage self-development activities such as mentoring, discussion communities, and leadership training as a form of non-academic support that can strengthen students' self-confidence. This recommendation is expected to be the basis for designing a more holistic intervention strategy to create a supportive learning environment that is free from excessive pressure when speaking in public.

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